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Julianti Parani

*Performing Arts Faculty, Jakarta Institute of Arts (Institut Kesenian Jakarta, IKJ),  
juliantiparani@ymail.com*

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## NUSANTARA INTERACTION THE CASE OF *JOGET* AS A TRANS-CULTURAL ENTERTAINMENT

Julianti Parani

Performing Arts Faculty, Jakarta Institute of Arts (Institut Kesenian Jakarta, IKJ), juliantiparani@ymail.com

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### ABSTRACT

The focus of discussion in this paper is *joget* as a dance which embodies the concept of Nusantara (Indonesian archipelago), which has undergone much development from the past to the present. Beginning as an entertaining social dance in various Southeast Asian countries, *joget* became a customary form of entertainment in the whole context of Nusantara as a region. Surprisingly, it has also inspired new genres and types of traditional dances for centuries. Around 1920s to 1930s, it was the most popular form of dance in many halls of entertainment in Indonesia, Singapore, and the Malay Peninsula. *Joget* was the most common type of social dance. It has an indigenous origin, but gained popularity in urban setting at the time when ballroom and Latin-American dances were not yet popular.

### KEYWORDS:

Dance; intercultural Nusantara; Southeast Asia; Malay entertainment; connectivity

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

*Joget* dance came in practice mixed with Hispanic musical influence during the past century, followed with other musical flavors from other European countries. In the urban mestizo settings of colonial living, the entertaining world became a mixture between West and East, between European and Asian.

Modern entertainment, which gradually spread and speeded up after World War II, brought about vast development from the new media, resulting from the globalization trends of new economics and politics in the newly liberated countries, in particular to the Southeast-Asian countries. A historical shift in cultural development that arose from a roaring intercultural environment, this dance becomes a cultural component

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<sup>1</sup> The context of this article was initially a paper for the SEASREP / Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program 10th Anniversary, Chiang Mai – Thailand December 2005, rewritten for the Seminar Warisan Nusantara at Universiti Sabah Malaysia December 2011 and slightly revised for the *Paradigma Jurnal Kajian Budaya*.

of new nations as in Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and also in the certain region of Thailand, significantly becoming transitional to modernity and transformational to traditional revival.

With features encompassing the Malay world, *joget* adopts local values from the newly emerging nations, dissolving away the entertainment aspects by highlighting the more traditional values of these nations to move into the new millennium.

### **The Idea of Nusantara**

The term Nusantara has been used for many occasions from the business promotion, cultural activities to academic matters covering topics related to the people inhabiting the Indonesian or Malay Archipelago comprising of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, etc. Noted in the Nagarakretagama, the term which was originated from Old Javanese refers to the islands situated in the archipelago. It actually expresses the philosophy about the living space of Majapahit as an empire and was intended as an acknowledgement of the vassals in diplomatic relations and not so much as geographic expansion. A similar context of this philosophy was later on in the 19<sup>th</sup> century exposed by Western philosophers which then turned into a notoriously slippery idea known as Social Darwinism by a German geographer, Friederich Ratzel, also known as Social Darwinism, and later on, in particular, *alasan* was further used by the German as a theory to legitimized war of all against all (Dittmer 2010, 3).

A decade after Indonesian independence, Prime Minister Djuanda in 1957 declared a nationalistic geopolitical concept, known as *Wawasan Nusantara*. As a geopolitical concept of ideology implemented particularly on border issues, the context was minimized to give way in sharing cultural perspective in various developments of culture and the arts, free from any political boundaries implications. However, the restricted issues pertaining misinterpretation of geopolitics to cultural matters were later implemented to national identity claim throughout the Archipelago. Another context of the term Nusantara is that it was developed by Majapahit to expand its influence in its diplomatic relations in Southeast Asia to deter the empire of China (Rahardjo 2011, 107).

### **Trans-Cultural Entertainment**

In observing a phenomenon that appears in various cultural environments in the Archipelago, one can explore the connection that allowed the rise of the sharing of popular culture among countries in Southeast Asia. This cultural connectivity relates to the ambience of Malay culture in the archipelago and to the complexity of cultural interactions in the emergence of modernity. Whether it is merely a matter of the development or merely a modern entertainment to politics, economics, trade, maritime, and social encounter, it has nourished the various consequences of trans-cultural interactions

Generally, *joget* is a name for an entertaining dance of couples found in many areas in Indonesia, also in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Brunei Darussalam. As a dance, the *joget* is based on a typical light rhythm that makes the feet move in steps and brings about the whole body in motion. In some cultural environment there comes in a kind of fixed patterns adapted the local culture derived from traditional concepts of movement in performing arts. However, in a contemporary and modern environment electrified by exciting mass-mediated pop music, then it becomes a free-styled fun dance and mostly depends on the sensitivity of the dancers to rhythm or on the creativity of the dancers to improvise the movement. It might arrive at a combination of local Asian to Western and Latin American melodic rhythm, in forming across cultural expression without boundaries. Then the scenery becomes the typical features seen in dancing halls

and clubs in the many urban settings as the popularity of the dance probably speed up after the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century anywhere in the world. Some slight drawbacks might give the impression that this popular entertaining has somehow corrupted traditional dances in Southeast Asia; however, these dances have somehow persistently been preserved with creative development and are maintained in the cultural environments of the regions.

Noted to realize that the original naming of dances conveys symbols, which by itself is a cultural issue. They were determined by people in an environment of a typical culture that might be related to other cultures through history in politics, economics and social context (Sedyawati 1981, 26). Whether it is traditional or contemporary, the related cultural environment has very much to do with the use of the name, notwithstanding that in recent time, terms have appeared to be more related to recent issues as cultural-pluralism, multiculturalism, and globalization in depicting this intercultural phenomenon.

Generally acknowledged that *joget* dance is related to Malay culture, derived from the traditional forms of *tandak* and *ronggeng*. The name of *ronggeng* to this type of dance as a name has appeared in various other places beyond Malay cultural practices, preferred as an older naming then *joget*.

'Hikayat Hang Tuah' mentioned *ronggeng* as an entertaining dance that was practiced in the kingdom of Majapahit during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Then Raffles in his 'History of Java' pictured a *ronggeng* dancer (see picture 1). It might be the case that *ronggeng* is a general naming for this kind of functional type of dance before *joget* and in particular before the *dangdut* came to appeal to a more modern context.



Picture 1. A *Ronggeng* or Dancing Girl (Source: litografi 1817- T. S. Raffles, *History of Java*, reprint 1978).

Naturally, the modern *joget* is done with *dangdut* music, a media-generated, acculturated modern music appearing since the 1960s as a fusion between Malay ensemble *Orkes Melayu*, Indian film music and Western Pop (Lockard 1998, 94). But it would not seem strange that *joget* can be done with other kinds of music ranging from *dondang sayang* to rock.

Among the Javanese, the term *jogedan* is a general naming for the popular dance of a later version than *ronggeng* of light, entertaining type of traditional folk dancing. This might be connected to *joget* as a typical way of gamelan playing in the interlocking figuration of *kotekan* (small staccato beating), a popular entertainment among young Javanese people of the past (Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Kebudayaan Daerah (Indonesia) 1985, 134).

There are other names for traditional dances of entertaining by nature in Java as *ibing*, *tayub* and *igel* or *igal*, but *joget* is a more popular term. The spelling of *joget* in local naming can change ending the word to the letter *d*, *g*, or others.

The *joget* in Bali is known as *Joged Bumbung* (see picture 2) a traditional social dance for weddings and others to attract crowds. Then the *Joged Pingitan*, a solo dance of magic on the story of Calon Arang whereby the *joget* male partners are not allowed to dance vulgarly or flirt with the solo dancer (*pingitan* means forbidden), and *Joged Tua*, a new dance created in 1958 by a musical type named *Gamelan Grantang*.

The Balinese *joged* dated back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and was named formerly as *Gandrung*, originally danced by males, and after the World War II became an entertaining dance for couples called *Joged Bumbung* as they used bamboo tubes as instruments to become one of the popular entertainments among local people or for tourist attraction (Dibia 2004, 86–87). However, there appeared other *joget* dances descended from the Balinese princes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as *Joged Gudegan*, *Joged Gandangan*, *Joged Tongkohan* (Bandem 1995, 89).



Picture 2. *Joget Bumbung* (Source: Bandem and Boer 1995).

The traditional performing arts in Bali to some extent came to new developments in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The traditional theatres were influenced by the new musical and Western kind of singing which have given rise to a new form such as the Arja and proves to become Balinese most popular theatrical genre in particular when in the 1920s women replaced male performers in the principle roles, singing and dancing, using language that is more popular to contemporary Balinese (Bandem 1995, 81).

In South Sulawesi, there is a *joget* derived type called the *Pajogeg* dance, which has many variations consisting of court dances, transvestite dances, and entertaining folk dances outside the palace at wedding

parties etc. Another traditional *joget* is also known in Lombok, which is of a similar type as the *Joged Bumbung* in Bali. Also, in East Kalimantan – Bulungan there is a traditional dance done by girls in the *Erau Dayak* harvest ceremony at the *kraton*, known as *Joget Damarang*; and *Joget Paman* (Sedyawati et al. 1995, 261 – 262).

In Trengganu – Malaysia a *Joget Gamelan* was known, which originated as a Pahang Gamelan used to be played in Trengganu with dancing girls and the dance was considered derived from the Penyengat court of the Raja Muda of Riau – Lingga Sultanate in the 19th century as the court houses were connected during that time. Later, it degenerated and ceased to exist after the Japanese occupation. Before this happened prior to the World War II the Sultan house of Trengganu who were interested in reviving this dance, which had lost references of its heritage, then invited Javanese musicians and dancers referred as the *Joget Java* and further on developed and preserved as the *Joget Gamelan* Trengganu (see picture 3) (Sheppard 1967, 149–152). *Hikayat Abdullah* mentioned that in Singapore during the English Governor ceremony to award the Temmengung of Johor's celebration in 1846 there were *budak joget* in Malay fashion and in style of Kelantan (Munshi 1969, 301).



Picture 3. *Joget Gamelan* Trengganu (Source: Sheppard 1967).

In Southern Thailand, *joget* and *rong ngeng* (as named in Thai, see picture 4) are known as traditional or newly created dances, done in groups or couples of entertaining by nature. Further on in Brunei Darussalam during the 1950s the development of music and dance for entertainment was marked by the virtual confrontation between Hindustani-inspired music introduced through Malay films and Singaporean songs (Santos and ASEAN Committee 1995, 19). In this way *joget* might also have become a popular entertainment in this country.



Picture 4. Rong Ngeng (Source: Tinggal 1998).

### Historical Frame

The *joget* as entertainment might found its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century whereby the people of Southeast Asia (including Indonesian) were entangled in remarkable changes and clearly welcomed new developments to carve out new identities (Owen 2005, 222–223).

There were similar historical experiences shared among the Southeast Asian countries that tied them together. First, they shared the climate, geography, livelihood, tradition, religions, and historical development. Then the emergence of modernity to independent-hood has also been seen as relational features of history. Regional security in Southeast Asia during World War II as a united zone of war was connected by the allied forces, notwithstanding the fact that the countries have already been very much interconnected since prehistoric times. In this process, much has been lost as well as gained. Intimacy, familial obligation, piety, and cultural identity have been challenged by foreign values and modern ideas. The benefits of modernity are seductive to people the world over, and yet the price paid for development may be far higher than either individuals or societies realize (Owen 2002, 4).

Ports and cities came into existence where various people traded and made a living. Some of them were built on old or ancient ports; others were newly established. Natives came to live also in these places to mix with foreigners creating a heterogeneous intercultural living environment when economic development became favorable. Migrated people might bring along with them their own entertainments whenever possible to amuse themselves in the foreign environments, whether they were European or Asian. The natives would also contribute with their own type of entertainment. In a peaceful commercialized environment, these mixing people gathered together to share their amusements.

Sailing ships from Europe took along musicians for entertainment during the long and tiring journey. These musicians kept entertaining the people when they had to stay for longer period in the new place such as the stories from voyages in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (Milton 1999, 79–80).

One of the significant initial European influences that affected the practice of *joget* was likely to come from the Portuguese due to their early presence as colonizers in various ports and cities in Southeast Asia, in particular at Malacca. *Kronchong* music and the Portuguese *charamba* a circle dance for couples are believed to be the inspiration of the development of the Malay *joget* dance (Santos and ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information 1995, 68). Another source noted that according to several researchers, this kind of Portuguese influence to Malay music tradition mostly came from the capital of Lisbon, the northern region of Portugal such as Minho and Douro, and from the Atlantic islands the Madeira and Azores (Sinar 1990, 66).

The Portuguese descendants, Luso-Malays or Malaysian Portuguese of the Portuguese settlements in Malacca still perform dances composed by settlements from 1967 to 1974. One particular dance, the *branyo*, predates all of the dances currently performed in the Portuguese settlements and provides the only plausible link to the past. This, too, is a hybridized dance form found only in Malacca. *Joget* is believed to have developed from the synthesis of the *tandak* and the *branyo* (Nor 2003, 46).

It was described that in making a living all around the Archipelago, the Portuguese left behind a great number of Mestizos descendant. This was due to the fact that in those early times Portuguese women (also another European women) almost never came to the colonies, so the Portuguese married women from the Archipelago. When they left their country for the Far East, the Portuguese took along their musical instruments like the guitar, the violin, the flute, and the *pandeiro* of tambourine. In longing for their homeland, they played the *saudadas* and their *fados* which in the early times was sung in Portuguese and much later when the Malay *pantuns* took over from Portuguese *cantigas*, the word *kronchong* was used. The word *Kronchong* alluded to the ringing of the bells from the children's ankles or the bells of the horses and the melodic stringing of the guitar (Gross 1972, 104,120).

Parallel to the situation in the Malay Peninsula and the Archipelago during the 16<sup>th</sup> century; the Portuguese also came to trade in other places in the Southeast Asia region. They came to Siam while their neighboring people of Hispanic culture, the Spanish, came and colonized the Philippines. In the Southern Philippines, the *joget* entertainment did not come out.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Southeast Asian cities, such as Penang, Singapore, Surabaya, Batavia (Dutch Jakarta) there developed a new entertainment which is a hybrid between Malay musical opera and the Paris popular theatre from Bombay. The form of entertainment was to be known as the *bangsawan* and *komedi stamboel* (Cohen 2001, 313–351).

It was usually *joget* dance that came out through variety shows in plays and the booming popularity of the *bangsawan*, in particular, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As this was a commercial theatre, it had to take into account and catered the multiracial compositions of the audience in the cities that filled amusement parks and dancing halls/ theatres of these cities (Tan 1997, 14, 35).

After World War II, *joget* slowly withered due to the rising new mass media-cultured entertainment. The influence of a wide variety of other entertaining dance from the West as, Latin, Ball-room, Jazz, Rock, Disco, Aerobic and MTV has turned *joget* to become transitional mainly to new pop dancing for popular entertainment. It should be noted that a transformational trend in *joget* dancing could come out through new choreographed artistic works a source of inspiration. A transitional process as a popular entertainment to a transformational genre of the artistic type as a performing art.



### Transitional to Transformational

*Joget* achieved rising popularity through the *bangsawan* entertainment in the regions before World War II, while creativity in performing arts came into existence. On 9 April 1938 Sauti, a teacher from Perbaungan – North Sumatra performed his new created choreography of 12 types of Malay dance movements called *Serampang Duabelas*. The dance was initially inspired by the fast tempo of *Tari Lagu Dua* folk dance, which was supposed to be derived from the Portuguese tempo *tranquillo*, popular music with a folk song rhythm known as *Dua Singapura*, *Serampang Laut*, *Tanjung Katung*, *Pancang Jermal*, *Pucuk Pisang*. The dance was performed in an evening celebration of the *Muziek en Toneel Vereeniging ANDALAS* / Music and Theatre Association ANDALAS, chaired by Madong Lubis at Grand Hotel Medan. Sauti danced the *Serampang Duabelas* with Orang Kaya Adam with each of their female partners is accompanied by the musicians from Miss Alang Opera. Sauti did the dance again for the second time just before the War at the Sultan palace of Serdang in 1941. The third performance was after the War in 1952 in Medan (Sinar 1990, 64–66)

During his rule, President Soekarno, the first President of Indonesia, launched his policy of 'Guided Democracy' in forming a national identity. To mark the event, the *Serampang Duabelas* dance was launched as the national dance to take over the booming popularity of Bill Hailey's Rock and Roll, which Soekarno considered being ill fitted with his efforts to establish the national identity of the new country. With this political back-up, from 1959 to 1965 throughout Soekarno's rule, *Serampang Duabelas* was disseminated throughout Indonesia and became an important showcase for cultural mission abroad particularly to the neighboring countries of Indonesia.



Picture 5. *Serampang Duabelas* –Mak Inang (Source: Sinar 1990).

*Serampang Duabelas* dance teachers from Indonesia as Tengku Yohanit and Liaw Tjun Yen/ Suryanti were invited to Singapore to teach this dance during the 1960s. And the dance became instrumental to Nongchik Ghani, Indonesian-born Malay-Singaporean who founded the Sriwana, which was initially meant to promote Kronchong music, but in 1955 the group intended to move up to tackle Malay dance among

Singaporeans. Afterwards, *Serampang Duabelas* was brought by a Malay dance teacher, Ali Sungip, from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur as he worked in that city from 1961 to 1967. Another exponent from Malaysia, Abdullah Mohaimi who initially learned Malay dance in Selangor and was also a member of the Singapore Sriwana, then brought *Serampang Duabelas* to Johor (Sembang Tari, Taman Warisan, Singapura, 2004).

In Singapore, various Malay dance organization considered *Serampang Duabelas* as classical, and this dance has become the significant icon for Malay dance development in Singapore. However, new versions of *Serampang Duabelas*, variants of the original Sauti version, have developed. Due to the creativity of the artist itself in Indonesia, there also existed many versions of *Serampang Duabelas*, especially when it ceased to become a significant icon of the 'national dance' during the New Order period of Suharto and its aftermath. Creative dances have been developed beyond *Serampang Duabelas*, of which many were based on *joget*. However, another type of Malay dance category has come out and become popular, which was the *Zapin* that brought about also new ideas of creativity. Also in Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei, creativity in dance has looked for another source of inspirations, as such references coming from their own environment.

The significant understanding of *Serampang Duabelas* like *joget* dance which has gained the sharing of wealth in the feeling of '*sama tapi tak serupa*' or 'similar but not the same' as choreographers and dance teachers have been influencing their styles into the creative process of various adaptation of the *Serampang Duabelas* dance for achieving artistic excellence in their own way (Parani 2004).

## Contemporary Trend

This paper concludes that although *joget* dance came into existence by the influence of Portuguese culture, specifically, through its typical music, the dance has its roots in *ronggeng* and *tandak* dance from traditional Malay culture spread in various cultural regions. Therefore, *joget* has become transformational as it adapted to the new transitional type of dance of Southeast Asia. On one side, *joget* became transitional in the process of its development into an urban social dance entertainment and reached its popularity after it had fused with pop dance and became a Westernized social dance for entertainment. On the other side, it also aroused an artistic development that is closer to the traditional identity of the region. This was proved by the rise of *Serampang Duabelas* followed with the creation of other Malay dances that are contemporary by nature.

In the urban setting of Singapore, it has aroused the interest to the traditional aspiration that came out from the entertaining dancers of the *joget* types, as the so called A Go Go - jazz aspired type. This aspiration came in a cultural need to revitalize traditional dance as a cultural icon of Malays after *Independence*. This is the case of the celebrated cultural icon of Singapore, Som Said with the Sriwarisan group. A creative movement follows recently that brings forward a contemporary dance with Malay flavour aspired by the younger generation of Malay Singaporeans. A development in dance creativity also has happened in many other areas in Indonesia.

Among the traditional culture such as Bali, it has given influence on the new social dances, such as *Joged Bumbung*. *Joget* could be influenced, to some extent, by the booming popularity of the *bangsawan* type of entertainment and the new mass media-cultured dance entertainment, such as TV and U-Tube, the popular urban entertaining resulting from global intercultural interactions.

Various transformation among trans-culture entertainment has developed from the *joget* type of dancing to a diversity of new creative works in contemporary trends among the Nusantara people. This paper based on practical observation with a preliminary reseach implies that an urban setting with the necessary cultural understanding can motivate the need of the people for a rooted local identity to become a cultural strength to shield against the possible polluted influence of foreign culture.

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