

Nengsemaken in Surakarta Karaton Karawitan Performance

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ABSTRACT

The Surakarta Karaton Karawitan which has lived and developed for centuries in the Javanese culture and its distribution leaves many questions, especially those related to the aesthetic concept of the Surakarta Karaton Karawitan. The description of the Surakarta Karaton Karawitan musical concept as a reference for the Surakarta community has not been widely revealed. This article aims to reveal and describe one of the aesthetic concepts of the Surakarta Karaton Karawitan, namely the concept of *nengsemaken*. The paradigm of text and context is used to see the Surakarta Karaton Karawitan events as readable sentences or texts. Texts or sentences have tendency with certain meanings that show certain thoughts that ultimately produce meaning. The concept of interpretation of Clifford Geertz was used to read and interpret musical events in the Surakarta Karaton. From the study conducted, *nengsemaken* was interpreted as *tan sora swarané*, *rempek rampak kabèh mung jinawil*, and *sajanturing ringgit*.

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1. Introduction

The Surakarta Karaton was one of the successors of the Mataram Kingdom which broke out due to the agreement of Giyanti (1755), in which the agreement stated that Mataram was divided into two namely Surakarta and Yogyakarta. The agreement was signed on 13 February 1755 (Ricklefs 1995: 149). Javanese gamelan orchestra (known as *Karawitan*) as one of the important elements in the tradition of *karaton* life has existed since the reign of Paku Buwana I when the central government was still based in Kartasura. Since then *karawitan*, it has become an inseparable part of royal activity and life. This is indicated by the presence of *karawitan* in every ceremony of the *karaton* tradition.

The presence of *karawitan* in *karaton* traditional ceremonies both state and domestic ceremonies shows that *karawitan* is an inseparable part of *karaton* activities. This is because the art, as an inseparable part of state activities, is a tradition passed down since Mataram has not separated despite various serious problems faced by Mataram, including the events of the *nagari* clash (*palihan nagari*)¹ which resulted in Mataram breaking into two parts of Surakarta and Yogyakarta and then added the Mangkunegaran Temple where artistic traditions remained a part of royal activity (Fananie 1994: 220).

The Surakarta Karaton *Karawitan* has been recorded as producing musical works since the reign of Paku Buwana II. We can see the instructions about *karawitan* activities in the writings of Pradjapangrawit which reported that at that time 17 Javanese songs (*gendhing*) (Pradjapangrawit 1990: 85-86) had been created for either *klenengan*² or *karawitan* dance³. It is no exaggeration if the

¹ Another term to refer to the outbreak of Mataram into two, namely Surakarta and Yogyakarta

² *Klenengan* is the show of independent *karawitan* which is not related to other art forms.

³ *Karawitan* dance is a show of *karawitan* for traditional dance music.

Surakarta Palace is considered as a mecca in terms of the stage of *karawitan*. This is because *karaton karawitan* presents *karawitan* with the aesthetic and ethical concepts of the *karaton* tradition that were in effect hundreds of years ago. Therefore, it is natural that its existence is established, tradition, and even classic (Rustopo 1995: 3).

The aesthetics of the Surakarta Karaton *Karawitan* in its development became a reference for groups and musicians outside the palace walls. One of the aesthetic concepts of *karaton* music was expressed by Pradjapangrawit in *Serat Sujarah Utawi Riwayatipun Gamelan (Wedhapradangga)*. Pradjapangrawit described the progress of musical life at that time with the following expression:

“*Tetabuhan gangsa alus, thuthukanipun nengsemaken, gendhingipun kathah warni-warni; gendhing kina, gendhing baku karaton, gendhing prenes, gendhing gecul, utawi geculan dalah gendhing manca utawi pasisir inggih kacakup*” (Pradjapangrawit 1990:149).

(Gamelan is beaten softly, the sound produced is washed away, lots of *gendhing*⁴ is mastered, both ancient *gendhing*, *gendhing* karaton tradition, *gendhing prenes*⁵, *gendhing gecul*⁶, and *gendhing* from the coastal area.)

The *nengsemaken* which expressed by Pradjapangrawit has not been elaborated in detail. This article will describe the meaning of the word *nengsemaken* in the event or performance of the Surakarta Karaton *Karawitan*.

2. Method

This article was written based on the principles of qualitative research methodology, namely (i) describing and explaining; (ii) finding deep information; and (iii) exploring and interpreting. The musical activities of the Surakarta Palace are an art event that can be read as text. Placing art events as text means reading and interpreting events (Ahimsa 2000: 402). The socio-cultural phenomenon in this case is musical performance, which can be seen as a sentence or text that can be read. Socio-cultural phenomena as a text or sentence have tendency with certain meanings that indicate certain thoughts that ultimately produce meaning. Interpreting cultural phenomena in the form of compositions, perhaps the concept of interpretation from Clifford Geertz can be borrowed to interpret musical events in the Surakarta Palace. Geertz stated that to analyze culture is not an experimental science to find laws, but an interpretative science to find meanings (Geertz 1992: 5).

3. Result and Discussion

The word *nengsemaken* in Pradjapangrawit's writing can be used as a basis for studying the aesthetic concepts of the *karaton karawitan*. *Nengsemaken* according to Bausastra and the Kawi Javanese Dictionary leads to pleasant meanings. Of course, it is necessary to look for things that make a musical performance can be called fun. Three *nengsemaken* indicators can be seen in the following Figure 1:

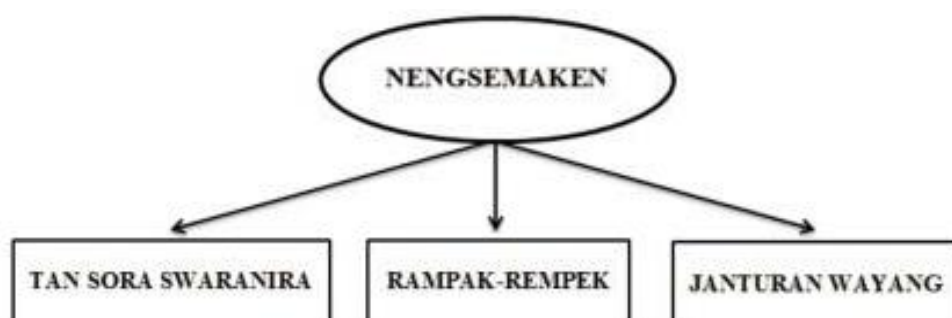


Fig. 1. The Scheme Three Indicators of Nengsemaken

⁴The term to refer to repertoire (= composition) in *karawitan*.

⁵One atmosphere of feeling in *karawitan* which describes the atmosphere of joy, pleasure, crispness.

⁶The atmosphere of deep feeling, *karawitan* which depicts a funny atmosphere, causes the audience to laugh

The three indicators of *nengsemaken* are *tan sora swaranira*, *rempek rampak kabèh mung jinawil*, *sajanturing ringgit*. *Tan sora swaranira* indicates the volume of percussion instrument not more than the size of the instrument dashthat is *ukur jawil*.⁷ The sound produced from the entire instrument that was beaten was nothing that stood out at all, until the volume of wasps produced a sound that *rempek rampak*. Prominence of the volume of wasps is only on certain instruments as well as when a puppeteer describes the atmosphere and setting of the scene. In the language of puppetry, it is called *janturan*. Therefore, it can be called *sajanturing ringgit*.

3.1. Tan soraswaranira

The aesthetics of the Surakarta Karaton *Karawitan* according to *Serat Sri Karongron* indicate the results of the not-so-loud volume of wasps, in the *Serat Sri Karongron* called *tan sora swarane*. This refers to the *alus* culture that lives and develops in the Surakarta Karaton. *Karawitan* is a mainstream element of the Surakarta Palace in forming a form of Javanese culture. Besides, *karawitan* that lives and develops in the *karaton* is a color that characterizes the specific values and aura of Javanese culture. Sounds produced from gamelan instruments play a major role in the formation of distinctive cultural atmosphere. Through various types of gamelan instruments and musical compositions, *karawitan* is able to represent Javanese authority and taste.

Javanese people generally idolize *alus*⁸ culture as often shown in *priyayi* life. *Priyayi* life is always associated with nobles and courtiers (*abdi dalem*) in the Surakarta Karaton. In the life of the *priyayi* society, there had been a number of very complex rules until the status of a *priyayi* was highly respected. Classical *Karawitan*, which is one of the products of Javanese culture, has a system and rules understood by *karawitan* society as *karawitan* laws. It also has *alus* characteristics. It can be said that *karawitan* is a reflection of Javanese culture that idolizes *alus* culture (Waridi 2006: 72).

Karawitan as a manifestation of *alus* culture thrives and develops in a *karaton* environment which is considered a source of *alus* culture. The Surakarta Karaton culture is classified in the *alus* culture is full of complex symbols. This is what is inherited by the nobles and the people of the Surakarta Palace. It can be said that *alus* culture which is full of complex symbols is a representation of the mind of the king and the nobles of the Surakarta Palace.

Umar Kayam describes the sentence in *krajan gedhe*⁹ as the king who sits enthroned becomes the center of the entire cosmos and creates fine artistic and cultural expressions (Kayam 1981: 26). Therefore, it is not surprising that *karawitan* which is a representation of *alus* culture lives and develops in *karaton* because *karaton karawitan* is a representation of the king's mind, which eventually results in *alus* culture.

Karaton music as the mainstream of the *karaton* culture is a reference source for complicated and subtlemusical instruments (*ngrawit*). This is because the implementation of *karaton karawitan* is based on the concept of ethics and aesthetic *karaton* applicable for hundreds of years. Working on complicated *karawitan* (Javanese = *ngrawit*) is then maintained, carried out, and developed not only in the palace environment but also among the people. Most people generally assume that *karaton* culture is understood to have high values and meanings so that it is very feasible to be used as a reference. The laws of *karawitan* in the form of structure and form, *laras*, *pathet*, patterns of wasps that developed in Surakarta Palace until now remain a reference for the *karawitan* society in general.

3.2. Rampak-rempek

The second indicator is *rampak rempek* in performing *gendhing* through the main medium of *karawitan*. The main medium of *karawitan* is sound. The medium means that the raw material in the form of sound is used as a tool or means for expressing the experience of the soul or means of expression for the *pengrawit* (gamelan player) manifested in a *gendhing*¹⁰.

These sound elements are processed in such a way as to produce a series of sounds according to the wishes of the *pengrawit*. These elements are short sound, high-low sound, and color sound. Then the sound sequence will become a rhythmic sound. Rhythm is the most important musical element in

⁷Just beaten slowly like poking friends.

⁸*Alus*= cultured

⁹ Umar Kayam term to mention great tradition (*kraton*)

¹⁰ The term for music composition in the *karawitan* of Surakarta style tradition

karawitan. In the context of presenting *karawitan*, a *gending* performance will not sound well if it is not served with a good rhythm. *Gending* sounds are categorized as flawed if they are not rhythmic (Javanese = *ora irama*). Rhythm is the breath of *gending*, which makes alive (Supanggah 2002: 129).

The *Karawitan* of the Surakarta style tradition places rhythm as the most important element in a *gending* performance. In the performance of *gending* rhythm, it is led by *kendang* as *pamurba irama*, which is responsible for regulating the breath of *gending* while giving life to *gending*. In carrying out its duties, *kendang* works in conjunction with the fiddle (*rebab*) which acts as the *yatmaka pamurba* or soul leader, the spiritual spirit of *gending*. Fiddle is the soul of the *gending* or character of *gending*, while *kendang* is more inclined to the aspect of birth or body than *gending* which concerns the dynamics and sense of *gending* (Supanggah 2002: 130).

The above paragraph mentions the word *pamurba* which means leader. The *Karawitan* tradition of the Surakarta style recognizes two leaders who must work together to create a harmonious *gending* performance. There is a musical leadership character that is very typical of *karawitan* so that the character of leadership in *karawitan* is very different from other musical traditions, especially western music (orchestra). An orchestral concert is led by a conductor who uses visual codes with hand and stick movements.

The musician's attention will be directed at the conductor. In addition to reading the notation, a conductor has the right and obligation to bring the musician to play each instrument to a certain level according to his interpretation of the musical composition character played. In this case the conductor can be said to be the most responsible person orchestral performance so that a conductor has the right to sue every musician to play the instrument that is his responsibility as best as possible according to the conductor's instructions.

Kendang as a leader in *karawitan* or *pamurba irama* has a different role with conductors. In leading *karawitan* performance, *kendang* plays a role as a *pamong* or harmonizer. The difference between *kendang* and a conductor that can be captured visually is that a conductor leads an orchestra from the outside and does not play the instrument, while the leader of the *karawitan* performance or a *kendang* player (hereinafter called *pengendang*) leads the musical performance while playing *kendang*. With musical idioms in the *kendang* performance, *pengendang* leads a *karawitan* performance while playing in it.

In Javanese, it is known as *melu nglakoni* or *melu ngayahi*. *Pengendang* does not only give the signal as does the conductor. He must give an example of how hard the volume of wasps, how complicated the pattern of wasps, and how fast the tempo is developed. Gradation of the volume, complexity, and speed chosen by the *kendang* will be followed by other instruments. In this case, it is not justified between one instrument and the other covering each other (Javanese) or sinking the volume of wasps of his partner, especially *nyilep kendang*. *Karawitan* tradition does not recognize the protruding self in the performance. *Pengendang* must be able to lead his colleagues so that there is no volume chaos in *karawitan* performance.

Pengendang in determining the rhythm must see the ability and level of skill of other horizons. In addition, in leading the *gending* performance, *pengendang* is fully responsible during *gending* performance, the decision to stop, finish, or proceed to the other *gending* must see the other skill of the composer. The *karawitan* tradition does not allow *pengendang* to impose his will. If he is imposing his will, *karawitan* performance will sound out of harmony.

The harmony of the *gending* performance is full of responsibility until the *gending* performance will arrive at the level of *rampak* and *rempek*. The two aesthetic terms of *karawitan* are basic demands or minimum standards that must be fulfilled in *karawitan* performance. *Rampak* is an aesthetic demand that is closely related to togetherness in playing together which is related to the element of speed or time. Whereas *rempek* involves a sense of togetherness in playing together that is related to elements of volume, space, or dynamics (Supanggah 2002: 124).

Rampak and *rempek* are not just together in volume and speed. In the concept of *rampak* and *rempek* there are dynamics presented by each instrument. In western music the dynamics are determined by the personal conductor, so that the success rate of the performance is more determined by the conductor. The dynamics of musical tradition are made by each composer (*pengrawit*) through playing instruments as his responsibility. The role of *pengendang* is the

moderator of musical discussions carried out by his colleagues through his musical codes, rhythm games, selection of beat patterns, and kendang volume. Supanggah stated that *pengendang* could one day be a musician as well as a playmaker, even as a field general, but he still had to be able to be a moderator, *pamomong* (caregivers and role models) by playing (*ngayahi, nglakoni*) while paying attention to the skills, abilities, and skills of the *pengrawit*. *Kendang* must also be responsible for the impact and collision of the wasps by looking at the context of the place, function, and time at the performance (Supanggah 2002: 132).

3.3. Janturan ringgit (puppet)

The third indicator of the aesthetic concept of the Surakarta Karaton *karawitan* refers to a part of the *Pakeliran*¹¹ *Wayang Purwa* performance. *Pakeliran wayang purwa* Surakarta Style tradition recognizes several parts of the scene to support *pakeliran* performance, including scenes or sections to describe the setting or atmosphere of the scene. The small parts in a *pakeliran* performance are joined to realize a dramatic structure in complete *pakeliran*.

In other words, in the *pakeliran* performance there is a dramatic structure in a performance of *pakeliran*. The dramatic structure of the drama *pakeliran* overnight is a sequence of scenes from the beginning (*bedhol kayon*) to the end (*tanceb kayon*) which contains the core story in each scene and is presented in three parts, namely *pathet nem*, *pathet sanga*, and *pathet manyura*. In each *pathet* there are dramatic elements in the form of *catur*, *jaturan*, *pocapan*, *sabet*, and *karawitan pakeliran* which include *sulukan* and *gendhing* (Sarwanto 2008: 173).

One part of the dramatic structure of *pakeliran* is *janturan*. This section contains a description of the scene, both the atmosphere of the scene and the setting of the scene. The definition of complete distribution is expressed by Sarwanto, who states that spells are mastermind discourses in the form of descriptions of ongoing scene situations. This distribution usually describes the setting, location, atmosphere, greatness and services of figures and interpretations accompanied by illustrations of *gendhing sirepan* (Sarwanto 2008: 181).

The definition of *janturan* is revealed by Sarwanto calls *gendhing sirepan*. The presentation of *sirep gending* does not involve all *ricikan*¹² in one gamelan instrument. The *ricikan* involved in performing *sirepan gending* is *ricikan rebab*, *kendang ageng* or *kendang sabet*, *gender barung*, *slenthem*¹³, *gong*, *kenong*, and *kethuk*. The involvement of several *ricikan* in the *gendhing sirepan* shows that in the performance of *sirepan gending* does not require a loud volume of wasps, but the essence of *gendhing* still appears with the emergence of *ricikan garap ngajeng* group, namely fiddle and *gender barung*, structural *ricikan* groups namely *kethuk*, *kenong*, *kendang*, and *ricikan balungan*¹⁴ groups represented by *slenthem*. In general, *sirepan gending* that is presented already represents a complete form of performance because three groups of *ricikan* namely *ricikan garap*, structural *ricikan*, and *ricikan balungan* are present in the performance of *gendhing sirepan*.

A complete musical performance which is marked by the presence of all the sounds in one gamelan instrument will arrive at the level of *nges* or *karasa ngespun* if the sound produced from *ricikan* which presents *gendhing sirepan* is heard or not by the sound produced by another noise. *Nges* relates to harmony, which is a musical sense that combines elements of *karawitan*, including the technique of wasp, the pattern of percussion, rhythm and *laya*, *laras*, *pathet*, convention, and dynamics.

4. Conclusion

The aesthetic concept of Surakarta Karaton *Karawitan* is deemed to be interpreted by fulfilling three criteria, namely *tan sora swarané*, *rempek rampak*, and *sajanturing ringgit* in the Surakarta Karaton *Karawitan* performance. *Tan sora swarané* refers to the volume of wasps produced; *rampak rempek* refers to the results of the wasp of each instrument in a gamelan ensemble that does not highlight the sound of one instrument; but all instruments are clearly heard. *Sajanturing ringgit* refers to the calmness of the atmosphere resulted from the wasp of each instrument.

¹¹ One of the Javanese traditional theater performance, usually called by *pedalangan*

¹² The synonym of instrument

¹³ Some people argue that the presence of *slenthem* in the singing process is facultative.

¹⁴ Instrument that plays the main melody of the song

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