

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Human beings cannot be separated from cultures. Culture exists because there is human civilization and history. Culture grows through the history of human civilization in a particular time and in a particular place over the time. In simple way, how people interact with others and create activity in their society is done continuously and become a custom that is called culture. Indonesia has long history in the context of culture. Indonesia has many cultures and it becomes a long story if we talk about the whole cultures in Indonesia. However, one of the unique cultures of Indonesia is Debus. Debus is an integral part of the culture of Banten (Echarri 2012). Debus is related to magic and has ritual procession during its performance. When Indonesians hear about debus, what they have in mind may be dangerous attraction, because it is always related with sharp things, glass, fire, and etc. It needs the strength or the power from the player, someone who has been trained professionally in doing this kind of attraction.

Debus has been performed since many years ago, and it cannot be separated from something traditional, because it is the local culture of Indonesia. However, when time changes, it is possible to bring debus in a higher level of a global world nowadays. Since the culture that had been practiced in many years has been extremely extinct, Indonesians need to find some ways to keep it alive. One of many ways to keep it alive is by teaching it to Indonesian young

generation and spreading it all around Indonesia or around the world if it is necessary. The way to spread it through the media is one of the simplest ways. Media has a power to control or provide information that is consumed by the people, whether the information is proper to be consumed or not. That is appropriate with what has been argued by MacGregor, "...when media industry comes to the production of news and current affairs...are enslaved by technology and the increased commodification of news, like the media as whole, due to corporate control of news organizations and convergence" (MacGregor quoted in Woodier 2008, p.30). Media has their own power to select and control what kind of news they want to deliver.

Talking about the global media, it cannot be separated from television. Television has been a kind of popular culture since many years ago. Beside its function to give information, it is also used for education and entertainment. No doubt that watching television becomes an activity to spend leisure time. Also, television is the proper media to spread debus around because it presents both visual image and audio. Compared to other medias, television can show the viewers a better presentation of debus because it stimulates our visualization.

However, like other media, television also has a power which also has hegemony and ideological meaning behind its programs. As Stuart Hall stated in John Storey's book, in television discourse, there are encoding and decoding process occurring; encode process occurs when the production is framed throughout by meanings and ideas, while decode process occurs when the audiences have their own way in looking that ideologies or how the audiences

read that meaning and ideas. “In other words, meanings and messages are not simply ‘transmitted’; they are always produced: first by the encoder from the ‘raw’ material of everyday life; second, by the audience in relation to its location in other discourses” (in Storey 1996, p.11).

In Indonesia, the rapid development of television industries makes the competition among television station higher. Every television station competes with each other to make a creative program, different and unique one compared to the others. The appearance of the television program with a variety of forms emerges as a result of the intense competition. Currently, almost all private televisions compete to create a reality show. The goal is to create a show that can be enjoyed by the viewers. Reality show is considered able to present the original reality of human life, as well as to entertain through imitative of reality on display. In reality show, performers are asked to act and react as normally as possible or behave naturally. There are many reality show programs in Indonesian television station, for examples are, *Pilih-Pilih Mantu* on ANTV, *Big Brother* on Trans TV, *Penghuni Terakhir* on ANTV, and any other. Now, reality shows has developed into a talent show.

Talent show tend to focus on a single skill in the performing arts combined with clarity in goals, the prizes of for winners are real-world (Redden 2008, p.7). In other word, talent show can be said as a show that presents an individual talent to get awards or to win a prize. The similarity between reality show and talent show is both of them are used for the entertainment purpose. However, in reality show, the performers are not required to show a particular talent to get a prize or

award; they only get paid because they have participated in that show. From talent show, Indonesian television station has served many forms, such as singing talent, dancing talent, humor talent, or even magic talent. In this study, the writer was interested in analyzing a talent show that presents magic. The writer chose this specific talent show because it is something new to Indonesian television station and well-responded by the audiences. The program is called “The Master”.

The Master is a talent show program on RCTI that presents someone’s ability in doing magic, presenting the great magicians of Indonesia as judges like Deddy Corbuzier, Romy Rafael, and one guest judge. It gets enthusiasm from the people because this program is quite new in Indonesian television station. Besides presenting magic show, the character of the contestants attracts people much. Limbad is one of the examples. His character is strong, carrying an owl on his shoulder and seems like he can communicate with his owl. When performing magic, he does not speak at all, and his gazing eyes are very terrifying. In addition, different from other magicians, what Limbad performed is different with ordinary magic that relies on big tricks. He uses debus that relies on the invulnerability of the player.

Limbada performs debus, which like what have been mentioned above is the traditional art of Banten, Indonesia. In this modern era, it is rare that there is someone who cares about the traditional things. Some people have been hegemonized by global culture and forget their tradition. Fortunately, Limbad can be said to be the one who cares about traditional culture by performing debus in his show.

Barker stated that, “television impacts on the provision and constructive selective social knowledge, social imagination, which we perceive the world, reality of others, and imaginary reconstruct their lives and our lives through the world as a whole can be understood” (Barker 2000, p.271). For instance, television impact on the knowledge about debus itself. Because of television, people start to know what debus is and they become aware that Indonesia has traditional art that is categorized as unique or even amazing,. We cannot imagine if media like television does not present it, this traditional culture will no longer exist because of the global and modernity effects. People consume modern thing such as movies, internet, and etc. However, there is also the negative side of the media. Everything that is brought to media has something we call as commodification. In the case of television, commodification occurs because the television station has their interest in business or television industry.

Commodification itself is a process that is associated with capitalism in which the object, quality, and the signs are changed to be commodities, which aims to be sold in market (Barker 2000, p.517). Commodification is quite different with commodity; commodification is a commodity with a meaning on it in order to be prestigious compared with a common commodity. Commodity is simply something that is sold in order to make profit (Allan 2011, p.304). As an example, a product of face cleaner is sold is to clean our face. It turns to become a commodification when this product is given a particular meaning behind it, like “by consuming this product, our face is more bright”, and etc. People’s mind is

influenced by this product unconsciously, and people do not want to consume the other face cleaner products except this one.

Nowadays, in postmodern era exactly, everything can be exchanged into money through market. Commodities are bought and sold not only in markets, but also in the media. When debus is brought to television, the process of commodification occurs then. Before Limbad brought debus in front of television, debus itself is rarely exposed on television. Debus is only traditional art and it is hardly exposed to any extent. It is completely different when Limbad performs debus in the form of magic in one of the talent show programs. Since then, Limbad's debus becomes famous and it also impacts on debus itself. Television has a big impact toward the existence of debus, especially Limbad's debus.

“Commodification as a process means the way more and more objects and experiences in the human world are turned into products for profit” (Gotham, p.310). By performing debus on television, Limbad gets the effect of that commodification. Limbad now often performs on television and he often appears as model of advertisement product. Before Limbad performs his debus on magic talent show, debus itself has rarely been exposed through television. One of the possibilities is because the old debus is not interesting to be presented. It is limited to something traditional, starting from the costume, packaging, and etc. In order to compete with global era, debus must be packaged as interesting as possible. In globalization era like nowadays, it becomes important to reframe or reproduce debus from its look and transform it in different way to be the new one in order to get the attention of the people; this is what cultural globalization means. “From

this perspective, cultural globalization is a process that involves competition and negotiation as organizations and countries attempt to preserve, position, or project their cultures in global space” (Crane, p.4).

Global cultural flows may bring debus in global world. The way to make it true is the packaging of debus itself. Transformation becomes very important to this phenomenon then, in order to make something new toward traditional art like debus into modern debus. The transformation of debus into something new has been brought by Limbad. Limbad packs debus in his way with his strong character until finally debus has something special on people’s eyes. It is no more a traditional art which is old, but it becomes something big when performed by Limbad.

In general, debus that is performed by Limbad is almost the same with debus in common, but there is something more in Limbad’s debus that makes it different with the traditional one: it has been modified in such a way for the whole package in order to be more interesting to seduce the viewer. Debus has been commodified based on capitalist television industry. Both debus and Limbad’s debus are rooted from the same debus culture. For this context, let us call debus culture itself as grounded culture first.

Grounded culture is culture that is created and used in a certain social context. It includes meaning, moral boundaries, norms, values, beliefs, and so forth (Allan 2011, p.306). Debus, as a grounded culture, carries meaning. Debus at first is related to the strength of religious of Islam inside in which the performers must have faith and belief in the teaching of Islam. There are also

conditions that must be applied in doing debus. Debus was used as the martial art to fight against the Dutch settlers many years ago (Kusuma 2012).

Commodified Culture is the culture that is produced according to capitalist and mass media considerations and is intended to seduce the viewer to buy product (Allan 2011, p.306). Since debus is a grounded culture and experiences commodification in the form of Limbad's debus, we may say Limbad's debus as commodified culture. Debus, as a grounded culture, always presents physical strength that usually does not make any sense. In debus, the invulnerability and the physical strength of the player is the key. In addition, debus has its own characteristics, starting from the performance, props, costume, attributes, and etc. Most of the props and attributes are considered traditional, for example like Golok, Gendang, Kecrek, and Terbang which are used in debus attraction.

While Limbad's debus is commodified culture, Limbad appears in his own way, with his strong personality and performs debus by using a modern thing in his performances. Limbad's debus is quite different with the old one. He performs not only in forms of eating glasses, walking through pieces of glasses, peeling coconut shell off, sticking sharp knife through body, and etc like the traditional debus, but also in forms of being hanged up with wires stick on his body, flowing the electric power through his body with his own hands, and etc. He shows the modernity of debus in his performances. However, both debus and Limbad's debus present the physical strength which does not make any sense, but the difference is debus is categorized as traditional and Limbad's debus is categorized as more modern.

What the writer wants to explore in this study is the significant difference between debus and Limbad's debus. Moreover, the writer also wants to examine the factors or causes that make differences between debus and Limbad's debus although both of them are rooted at the same debus culture.

1.2. Statement of the Problems

From the description above, the issues examined in this study are:

1. What are the differences between Limbad's debus as commodified culture and debus as grounded culture?
2. Why is Limbad's debus as commodified culture different from debus as grounded culture?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

Regarding to the statement of the problems, the aims of the analysis of this study are:

1. To explain the differences between Limbad's debus as commodified culture and debus as grounded culture.
2. To give explanation about what causes that make Limbad's debus as commodified culture different from debus as grounded culture.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study of this paper is to give brief information about the significance difference between debus as grounded culture and

Limbad's debus as commodified culture. The writer comes from the English Department of Airlangga University, particularly Faculty of Humanity and expects that this paper can add the knowledge about the factors that make Limbad's debus quite different with the original debus. The writer is interested in choosing this topic because debus is one the traditional arts which is a part of a culture. Debus has to be saved for the next generations. It is important that people, especially Indonesian people know about it. This study was expected to give deeper knowledge for the academic students, especially for those who take cultural studies in English Department.

1.5. Definition of the Key Terms

1. Culture is the meanings which people create, and which create people, as members of societies (Hannerz 1996, p.3).

2. Commodified Culture is culture that is produced according to capitalist and mass media considerations and is intended to seduce the viewer to buy product (Allan 2011, p.306).

3. Debus is an art through which the performer demonstrates powers of invulnerability with such feats as not being cut by blades, drinking acid, penetrating a hard coconut with various objects, frying eggs on their head and many other things (Maryono quoted in Echarri 2012).

4. Globalization is a matter of increasing long-distance interconnectedness, at least across national boundaries, preferably between continents as well (Hannerz 1996, p.17).

5. Grounded Culture is culture that is created and used in a certain social context. It includes meaning, moral boundaries, norms, values, beliefs, and so forth (Allan 2011, p.306).

6. Sign is the representation of any subjective or objective material and its relation to reality (Baudrillard quoted in Allan 2011, p.307).