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THE ROLE OF GRAFFITI AND MURAL AS ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC SPHERE FOR SOCIETY

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Abstract

Nowadays, people are deliberately voicing their opinions regarding current issues that happen in Indonesia, which we often see on printed media or even electronic media. However, as the time goes by, people tend to distrust a dominant public sphere, which is media, especially since Presidential Election in 2014. Most media in Indonesia took sides to each parties and it causes a lack of objectivity in order to present news and information. Media conglomeration is also one of the causes of declining people's trust. It encourages street artists to voicing people's aspirations. Graffiti and murals become an alternative public sphere to criticize government's performances and to speak up about their opinions. An ordinary wall which is usually used to be a roadblock is transformed into an interesting and artistic creation to be seen and to be followed more. Graffiti and mural also have important roles for urban society in the middle of unfavorable politics situation lately for citizens and at the same time haven't reached the real civil supremacy and democracy.

Keywords

Graffiti, Mural, Public Sphere, Role, Media, Politic

1. Background

As we all know in this super modern era, people are freely to voice and also to speak up about their opinions, moreover regarding government's performances. People who don't satisfy with public service will easily write it on social media. One of the applications that are already operated is Qlue, as a part of Jakarta Smart City Project proclaimed by the Governor of DKI Jakarta Basuki Tjahaja Panama. Through the application, people can report the existence of, either infrastructure or even social and political issues. Another example of how easily-transformed information on social media is the emergence of viral incident video of how police officer treated some tourists badly.

Seeing this phenomenon, mass media certainly could be an alternative public sphere. It could also become a front gate for society to be freely expressing themselves towards issues that happen across the country. However, mass media is not the only alternative public sphere. Graffiti and mural could be another choice for citizens, especially street artists to express their feelings and thoughts. These street artists are making alternative public sphere as their favorite expression medium by showing diverse messages, not only "pop" but also social critics pitched symbol frequently appears in their works.

Graffiti and mural work often to be seen adorn in big cities, such as Bandung, Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and also Surabaya. The presence of the paintings on the wall also brings out pros and cons from citizens. Some of them are saying that by the paintings, people can convey their messages towards social and political problems. Besides that, people also assume that by decorating walls could make a city more beautiful. Unfortunately, there are some people who still think graffiti and mural as a form of vandalism towards either goods of others or facility with which it becomes public interest. Yet, graffiti and mural works never last long on the wall. In Jakarta, for example, it does have a political space and a complicated crisscrossed power with city government or other street artists. Frequently, works that have been made are discarded on the next day by government officers.

Arts can't be separated with social life reality in society. According to John Dewey in his book *Budaya dan Kebebasan* (1998: 104), he explains that paintings on the street walls are real proofs that artists will always express themselves even though they lost their mediums because of modernization.

Setting out the background, the research's goal is to examine what is the role of graffiti and mural as an alternative public sphere for society then why people such as street artists tend to choose graffiti and mural as a form of expressing themselves other than mass media? Other than that, what is the relation between with graffiti and murals and politics?

2. Explanation

Politics situation which is very lame lately is interpreted by citizens as a conflict that usually has a negative impact between government and also society. According to Michael Lipsky in his book entitled *Protest as a Political Resource*, he says that protest is defined as a political strategy that is used by powerless group to influence public opinion and to increase the bargaining abilities to a higher authority. As a result, they want to be involved in making decisions. By that, the use of protest is a political weapon which serves to respond to the situation¹

In practice, people tend to choose public sphere as a medium to state physically or symbolically the aspirations that they are going to say. Public sphere is also to emphasize that every individuals has the same rights to express the ideas and opinions without pressure from any sides in its place. Every group of people have different ways to use public sphere, start from mass media to non mass media, such as graffiti and also mural.

Street walls could be a place or alternative medium for street artists to convey whatever they feel or think Quoted from *Insatunesia* website, that there are at least four functions of graffiti, which are secret language for certain, groups, dissatisfaction tool towards social situation, rebel tool, and also fear expression tool towards social and politics behavior.

The use of mural and graffiti as a unique public sphere of resistance started even since the struggle for Indonesia's independence as an effective propaganda tool against the invaders. Besides that, people who drew graffiti's and murals had an important role in those periods. Then, it continues on the end of New Order regime where graffiti's and murals role were quite high as a media to criticize government by scratching and crossing out the wall and other things. Both works have important roles for society in the middle of not so favorable politics situation. The art of presence from the works is a substantial media communication to deliver people's messages and aspirations, looking for supports, both local and international, and to take control of the authorities, as well as the agent of change to create a justice for citizens.

For example is Taring Paid who was actively involved in resisting towards suppression in social politics life which portrayed in artworks. The passion for social and change will always be a breath of life in every development period of street art in Indonesia. Bussed, Ward, and Yee once wrote an article about citizen's social life phenomenon in Charles Baudelaire's essay, *The Painter of Modern Life* whose daily issues become an inspiration for impressionist painters to portray modern subjects. ²



Figure 2.1: Taring Paid

Another example is Ryan Riyadh, an artist who is known for his murals which have a fiction character called "Popoh". Quoted from BBC website, he says that he is trying to tell history by using wall as the media. He doesn't care too much about what people think about his artworks. Furthermore, he usually brings explicitly politics messages in every works.



Figure 2.2: The Pooch's Mural on Wall



Figure 2.3: *The Pooch's Mural on Wall 2*

2.1 Graffiti and Murals in Big Towns

The development of graffiti art and murals not only becomes a sensation in Jakarta, but also starts to spread over big cities, such as Bandung and also Yogyakarta. In Yogyakarta, we will see various paintings from street artists all over the wall of public sphere. Local government has also made murals and graffiti as a decoration to the city. Other than that, citizens of Yoga are very welcome due to the presence of murals as an art expression that is presented not only by street artists, but also from various groups of people, young-old, and men-women. The function that is shown by a graffiti community in Yogyakarta is also known as Yoga Art Crime (YORC) as a form of communication towards citizens and government, form of group existence, and a respond against social and politics life.

As well as the city of Paris Van Java Bandung, whose character is full of people tended to be more open-minded and critical, there are a wide variety of social issues that mostly concerning policies. Local government's decision also becomes a factor of social problems emergence. The presence of graffiti and murals have important role as a media to criticize various policies that perceived not represent daily issues for citizens. Based on research examined by Aris Dairyman, graffiti and murals are social representation in Bandung City.

Generally, people communicate using printed media or electronic media. However, street artists are not like the others. By artworks, such graffiti and mural, they can explicate what they feel and think.

Graffiti and mural are an opposition manifesto. The Presidential Election in 2014 could be an example of how most media in Indonesia were taking sides with parties. During that time,

each media presented news and information that focus only for the sake of their party's interest. Therefore, media is no longer objective in presenting or even evaluating. This causes a serious declining trust of citizens towards dominant public sphere which presented in mass media. Based on research examined by Edelman Trust Barometer in 2015, it shows a global decline in trust over the last year, and the number of countries with trusted institutions has fallen to an all-time low among the informed public. Among the general population, the trust deficit is even more pronounced, with nearly two-thirds of countries falling into the distruster category. Sixty eight percent of Indonesia now distrusts media. This is a slight decrease than 2014 which was 69%.

An ordinary wall which is usually used to be a roadblock is transformed into an interesting and artistic creation to be seen. It is also as the easiest way to convey messages. Street walls are not only an empty space for street artists, but also a place for them to interact with each other. Some artists speak up about their opinions regarding message contents that usually criticize politics and social. Ryan "The Popoh" Riyadh explains that politics and social criticism are the closest reality from him.³ Refit Mascot, another artist considers that the messages on the wall are a product of creative ideas and also to increase people's interest to read.⁴ Another one, Danbury says that politics messages which he portrays are based on his own life experience where he felt injustice. Nowadays, many street artists are keeping going to continue their works as one of the efforts to create a real democracy and civil supremacy.



Figure 2.4: *Satire Message on the Wall*



Figure 2.5: *Graffiti on the Wall*

3. Conclusion

As we all know in this super modern era, people are freely to voice and also to speak up about their opinions, moreover regarding government's performances. People who don't satisfy with public service will easily write it on social media. People's belief in dominant public sphere, like mass media, both printed and electronic is starting to decrease every year. It is proven by the survey of Edelman in 2015. As an opposition manifesto, citizens create an alternative public sphere, like graffiti and murals. Graffiti and murals are used for alternative Medias for street artists to convey their protests towards things, either country's stability, social condition, and others. By drawing paintings in their own public sphere, their messages will be easier to be conducted. Arts can't be separated with social life reality in society. According to John Dewey in his book *Budaya dan Kebebasan* (1998: 104), he explains that paintings on the street walls are real proofs that artists will always express themselves even though they lost their mediums because of modernization.

Graffiti and mural also have important roles, like a creative media to criticize government, as a communication media to deliver people's aspiration, to find support, both locally and internationally, and to take control of the authorities, as well as the agent of change to create a justice for citizens. Other than that, graffiti and mural could also be said as a social representation. Indonesia is started to use graffiti and murals even since the struggle for Indonesia's independence as an effective propaganda tool against the invaders and also at the end of New Order regime.

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