

## Watching *Preman Pensiun*: Ethnography Study on Retired Bodyguards as *Preman Pensiun* Soap Opera Viewer

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### Abstract

*Preman Pensiun* which is directed by Aris Nugraha is a popular TV sitcom (soap opera) on top rating in one Indonesian TV channel. This series is about daily life of retired bodyguards and their family in one of biggest city in Indonesia with all high-lifestyle, Bandung. This series also shows portrait of the marginality through main characters, such as bodyguards who are displayed so playful with strong locality discourse. The purpose of this study is to see the practice of watching television through ethnographic method. This is an important issue seen in the context of great change in Indonesian media especially television after political transition in Indonesia since 1998, because it has created the number of people living below the poverty line and also various television programs have increased quickly in this time period, for example situation comedy. Based on my research, the practice of watching television is categorized as multiple activity in one time and the existence of television in various rooms such as in family room and bedroom shows that television has been integrated and cannot be separated from everyday life.

Keynote : Marginality; *Preman Pensiun*; Reception Studies; Soap Opera ; Television

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### 1. Introduction

*Preman Pensiun (Retired Bodyguard or PP)* is one of soap operas or situation comedy by Aris Nugraha which attracts Indonesian people. Since the first session of PP which was aired on January 12, 2015, second session on May 25, 2015, and third session on December 14, 2015, this soap opera had received good and the highest rating. This rating is also influenced by its time slot around afternoon in prime time.

This high rating may be an indication that soap opera still become the favorite show of Indonesian society. Soap opera is a unique phenomenon in Indonesian television and developed in 1980s at TVRI (Sujarwa, 2010:10). Since 1980, soap opera then has grown with the emergence of big five television station, one of which is RCTI. According to Inside Indonesia quoted by Sujarwa (2010 : 10), at that time (1980) television stations had to

produce local programs and soap opera became a local featured program that dominated prime time in almost of all Indonesia television stations.

Furthermore, the popularity of soap opera especially PP doesn't stop until rating level, but this soap opera has gotten three nominations in Festival Film Bandung (FFB) held on September 12, 2015. In this event, PP won two categories : Sinetron Serial Terpuji (Best Soap Opera) and Pemeran Pria Sinetron Serial Terpuji (Best Soap Opera Actor). This popularity cannot be detached from Aris Nugraha as a screenwriter and director who shows us another side of Bandung city by showing the lives of marginal people, such as bodyguard or thugs, pickpockets, traders, drivers, domestic assistant, and parking attendants.

In other words, PP is trying to lift up the lives of marginal people in Bandung with making bodyguard as the main character. Marginality problem is mediated through complex audiovisual

media, especially television. This soap opera is trying to show other side of bodyguard who is usually stereotyped negatively by part of Indonesian people with the presence of Kang Bahar and Kang Mus as a boss. The story line of domestic life which depicts Kang Komar and Kang Bahar's family also adds a uniqueness of this soap opera. This soap opera not only depicts about domestic or private life between main characters and their family, but also defines the meaning of bodyguard who is described by living in three areas ; roads, markets, and bus stations.

With all of its uniqueness, this soap opera that describes daily lives of bodyguards is getting a positive response from society, both from people who live in Bandung and people outside Bandung city. According to Aris Nugraha, AC Nielsen survey shows that 48,3% of people watch PP in Bandung. Besides, reported from Bintang tabloid, some of bodyguards are praised to Aris Nugraha as a director and screenwriter. Because of that, this public acceptance on PP is interesting to study further.

Thus, based on positive appreciation from the audience, especially from among the bodyguards itself, this paper will lift up reception studies involved retired bodyguards especially their private and public life which are showed in soap opera for the first time in television and how retired bodyguards respond this soap opera. The bodyguards that will be focused in this paper are retired bodyguard who have switched their former professions as bodyguard to other professions or job.

## 2. Method

This paper is using qualitative method that focuses on issues of meaning and depth of knowledge production (Meyer, 2008: 85). The primary data are obtained through participant observation and interview with informants. Meanwhile, secondary data are obtained from the speech of informants that obtained from print or online media such as magazines, newspapers, tabloids etc. Data are collected and analyzed using qualitative method, specifically ethnography method in order to can be honest (being truer) on the reality or the lived realities of other people (Saukko, 2003: 72). In addition, Antonio C.La Pastina (2005:139) stated

that ethnography, especially audience ethnography includes fieldwork, data collection and analysis.

*Audience ethnography need to be repositioned as a fieldwork-based, longterm practice of data collection and analysis. This practice allows the researchers to attain a greater level of understanding of the community studied while maintaining self reflexivity and respect toward those one is attempting to understand within the everyday life of the community.*

## 3. Result and discussion

*Preman Pensiun* soap opera session 1-3 was aired every Monday until Sunday afternoon, 15:30 pm on RCTI. FTV *Preman Pensiun: The Champion* was aired on Wednesday, August 26, 2015, and PP 3 was aired on December 14, 2015 every Monday to Saturday, 16:30 pm. The change of broadcast hours from PP 1-3 will be important for the informants because it will affect the intensity of watching PP. In this research, I interviewed two informants named Agus and Manto. Agus (42) lives at the edge of Code River, Bintaran, Yogyakarta with his family. He has a wife and three children and worked as a bus escort previously. After working as an escort so long since 1991, Agus decided to leave that job and searched a new job as parking attendant. He explained that he was very tired and bored if he had to work in bus station. When he worked as a bus escort, he had to back home at midnight even morning in the next day. He suggested that his job was very abnormal because he had to leave home in the afternoon and back home in midnight or morning. Whereas, the second one of my informant named Manto. Manto (60) was a retired bodyguard in Yogyakarta since 1978-1983. Now, he lives in Taman Sari, Yogyakarta with his wife named Machiatun (41) and his three children. When he still worked as bodyguard, he had a crew up to 500 person in around Malioboro, Solo road, and Magelang. He repented his job as bodyguard and found a new job as a tourist guide. Both of them watched *Preman Pensiun* with different intensity.



Figure 1. Agus

Agus said that he watched PP 3 intensively because it took slot at 16.30 pm, while for PP 1 and 2, Agus did not watch as much as PP 3. Agus admitted that he did not have a fixed schedule to watch television, but he took a time to watch PP in the afternoon.

*“if I want to watch, just watch it. Hmm, I watch television alone or accompanied by my youngest son. Hmm..My wife is working now, yes.. in the afternoon. She works to make a cake before Eid. She makes a cake twice a year, before Christ and Eid Fitri.”*

For Agus, watching soap opera on television, especially PP is a personal activity. In this case, watching soap opera is related with the layout of the house itself. Agus' house is a very simple house with two floors at the edge of Code River. He has two televisions placed on the first floor and the second floor with different size per each. Television on the first floor is bigger than television on the second floor because television on the first floor is used as main television for Agus' family. Agus and family always watch television together on the first floor, especially Dangdut competition D'Academy which was aired on Indosiar. However, Agus preferred watching PP on second floor because television was placed in his private room (bedroom). Agus said that he felt

more relaxed if he watched television in his bedroom because he could to be alone and lied down on his bedroom after working. Sometimes, his youngest son accompanied him to watch PP. After working hard, watching PP, became an option for Agus as entertainment and relief from fatigue.

Watching television that is very personal and private in Agus case is different with Hall argument in Morley's. Hall argues that watching television is social and collective (1986: vi). And in this case, Agus chose to watch television alone or individually, and isolated in his room, because he got “me time” after working without doing any activity.

Meanwhile, when I visited Manto in his house in Taman Sari area, Manto is accompanied by his youngest children named Ikhsan. At that time, Manto and Ikhsan were watching television together. Then, when he saw me, Manto came close to me in front of his house. I was greeted by him in a small room where looked to be a small shop that was formerly used to sell a variety of snacks and drinks by Manto's wife. On the back of the room, there was a kitchen and bathroom, occasionally Ikhsan came out from family room to the bathroom to take a bath when I was talking with Manto.



Figure 2. Manto and Ikhsan

Manto only had one television placed in the family room. The medium-sized television that was more often used by Ikhsan to watch his favorite cartoon namely *Sponge Bob Square Pants* that was aired on Global TV. However, Ikhsan also accompanied me and Manto when we were watching PP through notebook. At that time, we were watching the final episode of PP 3 and throughout the soap opera I turned, Ikhsan asked, "where is the bodyguard, Mbak?"

Manto admitted that his habits to watch television existed because he always accompanied his youngest child to watch television.

*"Yes, sometimes...if I am accompanying my child. He likes watching cartoon and I just follow my child to watch anything he wants. We watch in living room. Hmm, ya I hope I can be useful to people around me. I am trying to be the true man, ya....to be useful person. I rarely watch television, yes around Isya (19.30 pm)"*

Although Manto is accompanied by his youngest child when watching soap operas, but Ikhsan was not watching PP seriously. When Ikhsan got bored, he would take a drawing book and try to drawing or coloring. Sometimes, Ikhsan preferred to play with his friend rather than watch television with his father.

The same thing happened when I came there, Ikhsan accompanied us both while drawing and occasionally playing with his friends in the yard. As Agus, Manto was also watching PP alone. That was because his wife went to work and two of his children had to go to school. As was mentioned earlier that PP was aired in the

afternoon, thus it affected some of Manto's family members had not arrived yet. Manto not only watched PP, but also *On The Spot* on Trans 7 which was aired around 18:30 pm. At that time, the whole family were at home, thus *On The Spot* could be seen together at home.

The existence of television in various rooms such as in the kitchen, family room, and the bedroom like Agus and Manto shows that television has been integrated and cannot be separated from everyday life. With the presence of the television in different rooms, television is sometimes used as a background (backdrop) in everyday life and become daily conversation (Gorton, 2009: 32).

This condition could be seen when I visited Agus and his neighbor in Bintaran Kidul, Yogyakarta. In Angkringan which is normally used by people there to get together, I invited Agus who was wearing a T-shirt and short for a quick chat. At that time, not only the two of us, but also other neighbor wanted to discuss many issues related to PP. The longer, Angkringan was increasingly crowded with people who came in, sometimes few people back and forth at the edge of the river. They asked me all kinds of things that appeared in PP because they were obsessed with this soap opera. Even, one of Agus' neighbor went to Bandung and accidentally bought a snack which had similar type in PP. Thus, Agus who became a fan of PP also became a reference for people around him to ask about.

Meanwhile, since suffered chronic kidney disease, Manto had no work and already started to reduce his activity. He spent more time with *Zikir* (remembering Allah SWT with dua). That was because he was not able to do some activities that

relatively heavy. If he was too tired, he could pass out at any time. Therefore, he reduced his activity, including watching television in the late afternoon or evening. Manto also hoped that he could give some benefits for others.

It can be said that Manto had limited hours watching television which could cause him to skip several television shows, but Agus had different habits. Due to Agus is categorized as PP fans, he would take the time to watch this soap opera. However, Agus admitted that he often watched PP 2 and 3 than PP 1, but he still had a comparison between PP 1 to 3.

*“The first session of **Preman Pensiun** is very interesting, when the main character is Didi Petet. But, now Didi Petet died, because of illness huh? I have known Didi Petet since he acted as Emon in **Catatan Si Boy**,” Said Agus*

Although he used to watch PP 2 and 3, but PP 1 was more interesting for him. The breezes that came in from Code River made us feel relaxed at that time. Agus who was wearing t-shirts and shorts talked about PP 1 and all intrigue in it. Occasionally, he smoked his cigarette and greeted some his neighbors who were passing by. Agus is classified as easygoing person because besides took a place in his house, we also talked in *Angkringan* and at the edge of Code River. At that time, he also explained that the reason why he watched PP was not caused by Didi petet only, although Agus followed the career journey of Didi Petet as an actor. However, not only the positive things that he expressed related to PP, but also a decrease in the quality of PP 1 to 3.

*“I think the plot is very monotonous plot. No climax in its storyline. The place is limited in three places, such as market, bus station, and roads. In that story line, Epi Kusnandar clashes with his men, ya? The men who rides motorcycle. Lately, **Preman Pensiun** becomes less attractive. This condition is very different when Didi Petet becomes the main character. Seriously, I am bored” He continued*

Initially, the location which was selected in PP by Aris Nugraha as screenwriter was looked very attractive for Agus. However, over time, he felt bored because of the locations itself that took in three places with a story line that was not different between one another. When we were talking about PP, Agus was trying to remember the last episode of PP 3,

*“Hmm, if I do not work, I usually watch television, but I do not watch full*

*episode. I am bored, sometimes I switch to other program, yes huh? I watch other program. Switch to one program to other program, like **Pesbukers**. I am bored if I have to watch some advertisements. Well, if I want to watch **Preman Pensiun** again, I switch the program again. But if I switch to another program, I forget to switch the channel to PP,” he said*

From what was presented by Agus, I saw there was a sense of boredom in terms of the content of soap opera which was in the market, bus station, and roads. Agus also felt bored because of the number of ads served by PP. That condition made Agus switched to another channel. When he felt bored, Agus would make a glass of tea or coffee, take some snacks, and turn his attention to his youngest son. This condition was also seen when I went to Agus' house to watch together the last episode of PP in my laptop.

At the beginning when watching PP to recall the episode that ever watched by Agus, he watched seriously that soap opera. Occasionally, he chuckled to himself, so that condition unintentionally invited people who were hanging around to watch PP together through a laptop. While I was watching, Agus went to the kitchen to make a cup of tea or coffee, take some snacks, and talk to the child around. He was occasionally interrupted by some neighbors who talked other things except PP or interrupted by people who passed across at *Angkringan*. Overall, Agus would give many responses related to his favorite character (Kang Komar) or bus station, according to the situation that was close to his daily life.

The same thing happened to Manto, as Agus did. Manto was very focused and he tried to remember the story line of PP. However, not long after that, he left me and his youngest son to make a cup of tea, clean the room, greet the neighbors who came to the house, or chat with his youngest son and his wife. Even, when I tried to remind Manto about the story line of PP, Manto watched while feeding his youngest son. In addition, he also watched while taking care Ikhsan who wanted to take a bath, then put clothes on Ikhsan, combed his son's hair and accompanied to draw. Condition above showed that television viewing is not a one-dimensional activity, but plural activity (Morley, 1988: 28; Lull, 1998: 17 cited by Budiman, 2002: 8)

Alasuutari in his book entitled *Rethinking the Media Audience* (1999: 100) associated the practice of watching television with alcohol that is very different with radio as a stimulant or coffee. He argued that radio which he called stimulant or

coffee is an individual way to stay awake and active, so it can be used to increase their activity levels. However, watching television is considered effectively as relaxation (relaxant) because it can prevent somebody from doing something else. When watching television, people just want to rest without doing anything. However, in my research, practice of watching television can be considered as a coffee or alcohol. The practice of watching television in Agus and Manto cannot be interpreted as single activity which is dominated by the relaxation of fatigue only, but also a plural activity that combines several events at one time. Both of my informants have the same conditions, for example a working wife and a child who needs to be taken care of. Thus, the practice of watching television at the same time can be defined as one moment that they have to take care of his youngest child when their wife is working.

It was similar to what was argued by Michel de Certeau in his book entitled *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984: xii) that

*the analysis of the images broadcast by television (representation) and of the time spent watching television (behavior) should be complemented by a study of what the cultural consumer "makes" or "does" during this time and with these images.*

In this case, based on my informants' experiences, it is an interesting thing to be discussed with an ethnographic research. Through ethnographic research, I can analyze not only the content of this soap opera or the amount of time used by informants for watching television, but also what informants do while watching television. I think it is very important for further discussion.

The activities like making a cup of tea, taking a snack, or taking care of youngest son are a negotiation conducted by informants to overcome the boredom in capturing images displayed in television. As well as making the practice of watching television is not as single event, but plural event because informants can do other things.

Moreover, in the process of watching television, both Agus and Manto would give some comments on the episodes that they had been seen before. For example, when Agus was watching television, Agus gave comment related to the men who controlled bus station named Gobang.

*"His name is UU, Gobang's men, ya? Now, he is called foreman, then if we are already leaving, the conductor will give a tip. Well, I just escort, perhaps in PP, this job is similar to foreman."*

Although PP has clearly described the condition in bus station from searching of passengers to sharing profit, but I see that Agus is rather difficult to identify himself and compare his job as bus escort (*pengawal Bus*) with profession which is displayed in PP. This condition happens because difference condition between Yogyakarta and Bandung. In Bandung, bus station is dominated by public transportation called *Angkot (angkutan kota)* which is smaller than bus in size aspect. Because of using *angkot* than bus, the condition of finding passengers will be very thick than finding passengers for bus. Besides, in Yogyakarta, the presence of public transportation especially bus and *angkot* is very rare, but we can still find other public transportation like taxi, pedicab and horse-drawn buggy.

By choosing Yogyakarta as a research location, I have to give more attention to cultural aspect because there are found cultural differences between Yogyakarta and Bandung. There are some things that indicate the uniqueness of Bandung city, such as food and place, which perhaps some of Yogyakarta citizens have never known or heard about that. This is one of conditions that I have encountered on my informants, for example Agus will ask me when he doesn't know something displayed on PP, such as local snack named *Kicimpring*. At that time, Agus asked me, "what is *kicimpring*? oh from cassava ya. It seems similar with local snack in Yogya too. So, Kang Mus makes home industry, right?". The condition when we chat about that was very relaxed, and sometimes Agus and his neighbors spoke in Sunda language to communicate with me, although using limited vocabulary of Sundanese language. Besides Agus, his neighbors were also trying to comment PP by expressing their opinions. Thus, there is a process to compare everything shown in PP with informants' daily lives. Occasionally, Agus also asked about the condition of Bandung as shown in PP.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on my research, the practice of watching television is categorized as multiple activity in one time, rather than only watching television as Budiman said that television viewing is not a one-dimensional activity, but plural activity (Morley, 1988: 28; Lull, 1998: 17 cited by Budiman, 2002: 8). Nevertheless, both of my informants have different reason about doing multiple activity while watching television. For instance, Agus chose to watch television alone or individually, and isolated

in his room, because he got “me time” after working without doing any activity. Thus, in this case, watching television is very personal and private. Although, sometimes, he took a snack or coffee just to avoid advertisement in television. In other side, Manto was doing any activities when he was watching television, such as talking to his

child, accompanying his child to drawing or coloring. Moreover, the existence of television in various rooms such as in the family room and the bedroom like .Agus and .Manto shows that television has been integrated and cannot be separated from everyday life

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