

Introduction to MIAP

November 11, 2003

Orphans Assignment

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Fox Movietone Newsreel:

Javanese Dancers

Content description of *Javanese Dancers* footage:

Four dancers in semi-formal dress face the camera in a horizontal formation. Behind them sit eight gamelan players, also in semi-formal attire. The rebab player begins with a stroke of his bow, followed by the percussion of metallophones, drums and gongs. After the first note of the rebab, the women shift into a clockwise rotation, with one woman leading the other three. As they walk in a slow circle, their arms, elbows and wrists move in a fluid motion with their palms upturned to the sky then flipping down toward the ground; sometimes they hold their arms limply away from their body as they walk. The first woman sings intermittently and stays ahead of the others, determining the speed and direction of their circular formation. As leader, we notice her arm movements are subtly more dramatic as she shifts her weight from left foot to right foot. Sometimes she stops and puts out a foot for emphasis. Their movements are not synchronized – at times it seems like the first woman determines the consecutive movements of the others behind her. Each woman that follows the leading woman seems to have a slightly less dramatic posture until the last dancer in line is almost imperceptibly gesturing. Expressionless, it is hard to know if the women's blank stares are a result of their meditative, trance-like dance or they are just bored. Each take of the dancers and musicians abruptly starts and stops at the command of someone off camera, and many times the performers pause at attention and look in anticipation toward this voice. A contextual question in particular arises when viewing this footage. Is this authentic documentation of a village tradition or is this a performance made for an overseas, tourist audience?

***Javanese Dancers*: Research on Production History**

Researching information on the production history of *Javanese Dancers* has presented a number of challenges. The key challenge has been that potential sources of information for the Fox Movietone collection are licensed stock footage houses that are solely commercial enterprises. These facilities will not provide researchers the opportunity to review their collections library, which could have a wealth of relevant material. Through extensive internet searches and telephone inquiries we have yet to find any repositories that have holdings relative to this piece. However, there does seem to be a prospect. Per information provided by Dan Streible, a voicemail message and e-mail was sent to Cooper Graham, Staff Researcher at the Library of Congress. Mr. Graham sent a reply e-mail on Tuesday, November 4, 2003 stating that there is no catalog or finding aid created for their Fox Movietone collection, but there are many file cabinets in a warehouse that

he is beginning to determine how to use. Mr. Graham has proposed that a trip to the Library of Congress be planned where we will visit the warehouse and be shown how to review these paper sources. He went on to say in his e-mail, "Unfortunately, Fox News did not copyright its news programs before 1932, so there are no copyright descriptions to the finished newsreels in our general collections. But in the Fox collection, there are cameraman's dope sheets, which often have a lot of info on what was shot on any particular story. I have seen some from the file cabinets that seem to go back to the 1920's, so we will probably find something on your items of interest. There also seems to be description of the volume/issue on at least some of the finished newsreels for the twenties in the files. There is also a card file on various subjects covered by the newsreels. Whether we have the finished stories we do not yet know, but your research would be a big first step in finding out."

Mr. Graham's reply is extremely encouraging. These warehouse files will hopefully have pertinent information on the production of this piece and other Fox Movietone footage. Coordinating a trip to visit Mr. Graham at the Library of Congress is a priority.

Although the Library of Congress' Fox Movietone records may have conclusive proof to identify the footage, research on *Javanese Dancers* is definitely a "work in progress." It will require a substantial amount of time to locate additional sources that will provide further links in identifying the piece. Following is a comprehensive list of research measures undertaken thus far:

- Fox News, Inc. in New York has a Fox Movietone News department that licenses Fox Movietone newsreels footage. Peter Bregman is the archivist and sole contact for this office. Researchers are ineligible to obtain information on the collection.
- Contacted a researcher via telephone at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, MD and inquired as to whether they had a finished newsreel entitled, *Javanese Dancers* in their collection. A review of their Fox Movietone Newsreel Index showed that they do not have this particular Movietone piece in their collection. An e-mail was also sent via NARA's Inquire Form located on their website to obtain research information and have yet to receive a reply.
- In considering that the *Javanese Dancers* outtake is an international subject, we pursued the idea that the piece may have been filmed by a subsidiary of Fox Movietone News. Discovered that on June 9, 1929 Fox Movietone created a British component to their company entitled, British Movietone News. Although the original Fox Case Corporation Library Index Card for *Javanese Dancers* (from the University of South Carolina's catalog records) lists January 29, 1929 in the "date submitted" field (which precedes the date of the founding of British Movietone News), it is possible that this could be a potential source. British Movietone has a website (<http://www.movietone.com>) with a link to their collections database of licensed footage. Was unsuccessful in acquiring access to this database. The British Universities Film & Video Council (BUFVC) publishes an online database entitled,

British Universities Newsreel Database (BUND). A search on this database did not produce any materials connected to the piece. Additionally, learned that ABCNEWS VideoSource is the exclusive representative for the 1929-1979 British Movietone Newsreel collection in North America. Was also denied access to the VideoSource online database.

- Researched ScreenSound Australia/National Screen and Sound Archive's online National Collection of Screen and Sound database. Although they have some Fox Movietone newsreels in their collection, this research produced no results.

Javanese Dancers: Social & Historical Context, 1920's – 1930's Indonesia

Geography

Located in Southeast Asia between the Pacific and Indian oceans, Indonesia is comprised of 13,667 islands, of which 6,000 are inhabited. The archipelago covers both sides of the Equator, stretching 1888km from North to South and 5,110km from East to West. The Indonesian capital of Jakarta (formerly the city of Batavia- where this clip was supposedly shot) is located in the westernmost region of the island of Java.

Demographics

A census conducted in 1930 recorded 61 million people in Indonesia. This was quite a large increase from the estimated population of 35 million in 1900. The estimate of Indonesian population in 1800 was no more than 10 million people; a 1980 census recorded 147 million people.

The 1930 census also counted a total of 171 cities or towns, 102 of which were located on the islands of either Java or Madura. Throughout the 20th century, many people migrated to the cities, though even the rural populations experienced growth in numbers.

Commerce also grew in the early 20th century, with 1.87% of natives involved in trade in 1905. By 1930, the percentage had grown to 2.27%. While this might not appear to be a significant growth in commerce, it is quite a feat considering the traditional agrarian structure of society.

Indonesia is a collection of numerous cultures and traditions spread among the thousands of islands. The geographical composition of the nation caused a significant number of cultures and tribes to be isolated from each other, allowing for a number of tribes to hold on to their own unique customs into the 20th century.

Colonization

Indonesia has been under colonial rule for much of the past several centuries. The first to control the region were the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch at the end of the 18th century. Indonesia declared its independence from the Dutch in 1945, although the separation was not legal until 1949.

Political or Social Ideologies and Movements

The 1920's and 1930's were a time of increasing nationalism in Indonesia, culminating with the declaration of independence in February. The Republic of Indonesia adopted a coat of arms in 1945, with the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* or *Unity in Diversity*.

Pancasila, the Five Pillars of National Ideology are: 1. Belief in God; 2. Tolerance; 3. Humanity; 4. Democracy; 5. Social Justice.

Feminist movements began to develop and make strides in Indonesia in the 1920's and 1930's. Primarily comprised of Western educated Indonesian women, there was a strong emphasis on nationalism. Indonesian feminists who touted the "true woman" did not associate with the colonial Dutch women's movement and Western values and culture were considered to be immoral.

Tourism

In 1908 the Dutch government opened a bureau of tourism in Batavia, the capital city. The initial focus of the bureau was on the island of Java, with expansion to Bali in 1914, the same year as the first travel guide to Bali was published. KPM, the Dutch steamship line, began running weekly trips between Batavia and Bali in 1924. Until the 1960's, there were fewer than 100,000 visitors to Indonesia each year, but numbers steadily grew.

The growing tourist industry presented challenges to the country. On the one hand it was a vital boost to the economy. However, there was concern that the authenticity of cultural traditions such as dance and religious ceremonies would be lost. In response to these concerns the Balinese authorities issued warnings against using religious symbols in strictly tourist attractions and made efforts to prevent the island's "cultural tourism" becoming a "touristic culture." Coinciding with these efforts, *kebyar*, a new musical style that allowed dance to be performed separate from theatrical or ceremonial context, was developed. Dance became an art form in its own right and a group of Balinese dancers performed at the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris.

Government officials were not the only people raising concerns about the influx of tourists into Indonesia. In 1930, Andre Roosevelt, who was influential in making the country a tourist destination in the 1920's, expressed his desire to designate Bali as either a national or international park to preserve its natural beauty.

Indonesia in Film

The presence of Indonesia in film helped to expose Western audiences to the natural beauty of the country. The first moving images of Bali were shot by Dutch filmmaker, W. Mullens in 1926. The following year the first fiction film set on the island was produced. In 1930, the film, *Goon-Goon*, was released to a great success in the United States. A term for love magic, meaning "in a trance," "goona-goona" became a popular phrase among New York high society in the 1930's. The New York Times review of the 1935 film, *Legong, Dance of the Virgins*, describes the film as "effective in its

description of the unstudied personal beauty of the natives and their ability to resist the raucous temptations of what we laughingly refer to as Western civilization.”

The depictions of Indonesia in film added to the perceived mystique of the culture in the West. European and American bohemians especially saw the culture as an alternative to Western values and as a deeper, more spiritual society. Primitivism figured heavily in the intellectual and art worlds of the 1930's, as seen in works of Picasso, the Surrealists, and the dances of Josephine Baker, among others.

Javanese Dancers: Cultural Context of the Javanese Musical Ensemble and Dance

The Movietone clip is made up of five shots: two extreme long shots of the dancers with the gamelan behind them (each shot counts as one take of the entire performance), one long shot of the dancers, one medium shot of the gamelan (with the bonang in the center), and one close up shot of the rebab player. Based on this filmic evidence, we can identify the instrumentation and make educated guesses as to the significance of the dance.

Gamelan is a general term for a Javanese musical ensemble of gongs, drums and metallophones and refers to both the instruments and the people who play them. A complete gamelan is made up of two sets of instruments, one in each of two scales, with the gongs providing structure, the drums accompanying this structure with simple rhythm, and the metallophones playing the central melody with the elaborations of the wooden xylophone (gambang), bamboo flute (suling), harpsichord (celempung), zither (siter) and two stringed fiddle (rebab). Sometimes the ensemble includes vocalists. A gamelan may consist of twenty-five instruments or more, especially in the royal court tradition. All the players face the same direction without a conductor in a communal form of music making. Indonesian traditional thinking considers a gamelan set as *pusakā*, an inherited object that is endowed with supernatural power. With humble respect, the musicians take off their shoes when playing the gamelan and are forbidden to step over any instrument to avoid offending the spirit within. The Javanese also show respect for the instruments by assigning the gamelan a honorific title, *Kyai*, or *The Venerable Sir*, and by providing an offering or burning incense before the gong.

In the Movietone clip of Javanese dancers, the gamelan is composed of a kendhang gendhing (drum), sarons of different sizes (metallophones), a bonang (pot gongs), hanging siyem and ageng (hanging gongs), and rebab (two-stringed fiddle). Another musician sits next to the bonang player, but because he is obscured by the bonang, his instrument is hidden. It is possible he is playing a smaller (higher toned) pot gong. It is interesting to note that the rebab is found in many Muslim countries and is generally considered a foreign instrument in Indonesian gamelan. Perhaps that is why, as novelty, the rebab player is the only performer in the Movietone clip who is framed in his own individual close up.

I.M. Harjito, who is on the faculty of the World Music Program at Wesleyan University and co-directs the New York Indonesian Consulate Gamelan, viewed this footage and

confirmed that the music originates from Cirebon, West Java. After an informal screening at the Indonesian Consulate, we continued to the home of Deena Burton, Ph.D. in Performance Studies from NYU, who recently edited and identified a silent film collection of dance footage from central Java for the New York Public Library (shot by Tasilio Adams) and has studied extensively in Indonesia. Marc Perlman, ethnomusicologist and Assistant Professor at Brown University, met us there. By amazing coincidence, we had gotten in touch with this group of people through an e-mail list facilitated by the American Gamelan Institute. Everyone who saw the clip commented on how the dancers and gamelan were unnaturally stiff and morose, how slightly dressed up they were and how strange that the dancers were outdoors in the bright sunlight instead of under the protection of a pendopo, or pagoda. Mr. Perlman noted that the gamelan is small, but larger than a simple village gamelan. Both he and Mr. Harjito observed that the abrupt beginnings and endings of the music were unusual.

When first researching Javanese dance, the informal movements, gestures and pattern of the dancers in the Movietone clip most resembled a variation of the *srimpi* dance, a choreography performed outside the courts for ceremonies or festivals. However, the eyes and ears of the New York Indonesian Consulate Gamelan group created a new perspective. According to Dr. Burton, within the artistic genre of Javanese classical dance, *tayuban*, the four women actually make up a female counterpart to the male tradition in a *runggèng* group. *Runggèng* is a term for the dance and female dancers who wander around villages with a small number of musicians, performing in public places at the side of the road or as an entertainment for male guests at *tayuban* parties (this type of dancing is associated with flirtation and eroticism when a male guest dances with the *runggèng*). Dr. Burton identified the clothing of the dancers as being somewhat unusual, combining formal beaded jackets of Central Javanese court tradition (similar to the state performances of the royal *bedoyo*) along with their own personal informal skirts and shawl thrown over their shoulders (possibly to protect the dancers from the heat).

Dr. Burton went on to show clips from Tasilio Adam's footage from central Java that she edited from the New York Public Library's collection. Shot in the late 20's, this footage is comprised of informal village dances and formal court dances, along with various civil and religious ceremonies. In a revealing clip, we saw a group of villagers dancing by the camera in a loose circle. Men and women, young and old, wearing simple clothes, shuffle along, moving their arms, elbows, and wrists in a fluid motion similar to the *runggèng* in the Movietone newsreel clip. Dr. Burton noted that this movement is as common a dance move to Javanese people as snapping your fingers or nodding your head is to Westerners. The loose informality of the Movietone clip is perhaps a simple gesture of form without any content. What was also compelling to see was the difference between the unmediated documentary approach of the Adam's footage compared to the fabricated theatrics of the Fox newsreel.

Javanese Dancers: Conclusion

With the contributions of the New York Indonesian Consulate Gamelan, the question of authenticity becomes an important one. Perhaps we know the time, place, and the approximate origin of the dance and music, but we still do not know the *why* behind the footage. Since there is an element of staging in this piece, we wonder who directed this footage (who is talking to the performers from behind the camera?) and who was the intended audience for this footage (who interpreted this film and provided the “content” for the form?). There is certainly a relationship between those being watched and those watching, and unfortunately we can only see one side of this interaction

In the context of history and the tourist industry, perhaps the footage was fabricated with enough authenticity for Western audiences to believe. Using “primitive” and “foreign” subjects, perhaps the filmmakers wanted to stimulate interest in a culture that is exotic, but accessible at the same time.

One key to answering the *who* and *why* questions may lie at the Library of Congress in their production logs. If we could know who is behind the camera, who financed the project and who exhibited the final Movietone edit, we could begin to build upon the relationship presented in front of the camera. We’re ready to make a trip to DC to see the unseen...

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"Balinese Traditional Music and Dance"
http://www.bali-travelnews.com/Batrav/Batrav36/cstory_2.htm

"Briggs Co, et al Lantern Slides"
http://www.geh.org/ar/strip55/htmlsrc/lants_sum00039.html

Indonesian Gamelan (including audio clips)
http://www.seasite.niu.edu/Indonesian/Budaya_Bangsa/Gamelan/Main_Page/main_page.htm

Information on British Movietone News history
<http://www.bufvc.ac.uk/database/newsreels/history/newsreels.html>

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