

THE EXISTENCE OF AMERICAN RAP MUSIC AND INDONESIAN HIP HOP AS POPULAR CULTURE: A REVIEW OF AMERICAN STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This study is intended to reveal the effects of American popular culture in our home, mainly Rap music and Hip Hop music by American studies along with synthesis of knowledge. This article also highlights on how to study artifact of popular culture well, to understand more about culture, to establish a clear concept of what contextual, connotation and deep meaning of lyrics in the songs, and to get better understanding of the strong as a whole as responses toward the existence of American cultural imperialism and American hegemony in Indonesia. Globalization of media is also discussed to know how the information technology advancement of the media influences the norms and values of the society. The media has become a struggle tool in demanding a change and improvement, as well as a tool for a series of interest.

Key words: *Music, popular culture, global media, cultural artifact, and American Studies*

A. INTRODUCTION

Culture consists of three manifestations as follows: cultural knowledge, cultural behavior, and cultural artifact. A product of culture begins with the existence of idea in the mind of humans then it is followed by any work to produce it. The final product is acquired after completing the process of the cultural work. Every society produces different cultural artifacts based on its historical and cultural background. The other factors are such as the spirit of era and the experiences from their countries. Those factors gives great influences the type of culture in any nation. Therefore, America is very different with Indonesia due to culture. As simply, culture is a way of life for any society totally. If we study culture, we had better study the society which produces it.

Music is defined as the expression or the reflection of the society and it can be found everywhere. Another definition is form of communication (Blacking, 1973:7-8). Music is also any product of culture called verbal culture. By borrowing the thought of Lubis, culture can be defined as process of delivering a message by meaningful symbols. In this process, symbols used by participants are distinguished into verbal symbol (mostly by using language orally/spoken); partly verbal, it means that is not heavily on oral but in writing language, meanwhile non-verbal culture is dedicated not to use language both oral and writing, but it focuses on physically or activities merely. American Rap music and Indonesian Hip Hop music are characterized as artifacts of popular culture. Talking about popular culture, it is rather difficult to define the term because we

also found some terminological disputes that popular culture refers to the beliefs and practices, and the objects through which they are organized, that are widely shared among a population. This includes folk beliefs, practices and objects rooted in local traditions, and mass beliefs.

But there are also some characteristics of popular culture such as: 1). Not serious concept or idealism; 2). Individual world mass produce to give pleasure; 3) Financial gain & popularity become the main goals; 4). Recorded and patterned patented (Williams, 2001). And maybe we know that all the meaning of the term of popular is well-liked by many people. Thus 'popular culture' is simply culture which is widely favored or well-liked by many people. I try explaining further about it. Popular culture is mass produced commercial culture for mass consumption. Its audience is a mass of non-discriminating consumers. Mass produce culture consisted of all elements of life which are generally, but not necessary, and disseminated by the mass media. Thus popular culture consists of cultural elements generally transmitted by the printed press, the electronic media, or by other form of mass communication. It is also temporal suited to the market taste or consumers' taste.

If one is asked the opinion about popular music it must be deals with the kind of music or about the singer. In dealing with the music, it is also noted that popular music is very liked by many people. What is called popular can not be separated by people since the word *popularis* derived from Latin means people (Siegelaub in Campbell, 1991:10). The meaning of popular is how the people appreciate the music. The way of appreciating is how the musicians send the meaning or the message of the lyrics to the audiences or the listeners and they can accept it as the work of art.

Music is also related closely to the culture where the society live, for instance in African American society, they regarded music as the spiritual song reflecting the slavery at that time. At present, music is associated with commercial things and mass media. It is identical as technology which everything could be explored through television, internet, radio, CD and any other kind of advertisement. It makes people consume the music easily and quickly. In this sense, the way of appreciating music has shifted from worshipping God in the previous time to commercialization sense nowadays. The economic side also plays an important role. The appreciation of popular music in the present day tends to show how many CD recording sold out or how many people attended on the performance. If the live performance or live music has many audiences, it means the singer will get the popularity faster and people will imitate anything the singer's behaves or styles (Robinson et.al, 1991:160).

This article focuses on popular music with the phenomena in Hip Hop culture which is included Rap music. In this research, I take a descriptive qualitative method by gathering the data qualitatively and presenting them descriptively. As Lindlof says that fundamentally, qualitative researchers seek to preserve the form and content of human behavior and to analyze its qualities,

rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformation (1995:21). Besides, I use synthesis of knowledge theory in American Studies taking interdisciplinary approach with historical, social and cultural method. History attempts to trace back the origin of Rap music. Hip Hop culture is created and emerged as the subculture in American mainstream culture. To show their aesthetic expression, they use the music as the medium of communication (Hope & Moss, 1998:23). Meanwhile I use social method to know deeply about the influences of Rap as the part of Hip Hop culture toward the youth in the terms of clothes, styles and languages. Culture including behavior as the reflection of society expresses any kind of literary work such as fiction, music, paintings and so forth (Meredith, 1978:77).

Rap music has developed in America as well as in Indonesia. Both of the countries has their own historical backgrounds. Rap in America was originated by West African and flourished in certain region in New York, while in Indonesia, Rap music is as the impact of popular culture where technology plays important role in distributing the music development through TV and other mass media. Rap music emerged in the 1960s and in the mid of 1970s in New York City particularly in Bronx, Detroit, Brooklyn and Harlem. It is a part of Hip Hop culture. Some people still get confused of differentiating between Hip Hop and Rap, in addition Todd defines Hip Hop as the subculture among contemporary Black youth and Rap as one method of delivering messages to the hip hop society (2002:169). The era is known as the progressive era since there is a marked change in the cultural state of the world and it responds to new cultural movements characterized by the development of dominant cultural materialism. Youth culture has also undergo transformation that reflect tendencies to protest against the homogenization of state bureaucratic capitalism, against creeping mediocrity, mass culture, unisex society (Friedman, 1994:74-80).

Rap music is familiar with the cultural identities by looking at the lyrics as reflected through their accents, vocabularies, and discourse patterns. The speakers identify themselves and are identified as member of that speech and discourse (Kramsch, 1998:65). The rappers who are mostly Blacks have their own accents and the vocabularies in the lyrics, some of them are vulgar, misogynistic but there are also some lyrics about peace and love among people in the world. Most of the lyrics describe about the experiences as the second class of people in the society and it cannot be separated from the experience of slavery, for examples, bearings, insults, sexual abuses, and forced self-abasement (Scott, 1990:112). Rap as the part of the youth culture and the violence identity, makes any disturbance or as the trouble maker, and as the group of rebellion. Nevertheless, the rebellion makes a trend and survive with the way they deal with (Swastika, 2003:5).

Rap and Hip Hop's audiences are almost the young people hence it is very interesting to see how the youth deal with on it. In America, the most important change in the society during the sixties along with the Hip Hop culture emerged and seemed to be the emergence of youth as a distinct political and cultural force. In cultural issue, the young people showed their youth-generated styles of dress, grooming, speech, and music (Lipsitz, 1994:206). The people who live mainly in Bronx, Harlem, Detroit, and Brooklyn as the center of Hip Hop culture becoming more opened to express their identities. The main reason for the youth audiences adoring Hip Hop is the youth culture itself. The youth culture that is so many things should be considered biologically, culturally, regionally and respectively (Barker, 200:320). Biological aspect concerns about the age as the youth parameter, the way of living culturally whether or not has similarities and differences in Indonesia and America.

In addition, Hebdige as quoted by Barker stated that youth usually express their movements in gesture, symbol, and metaphor (200:344). It is a declaration of independence and of alien intent. In Rap music, the rapper presents the certain gesture as the expression of rebellion and freedom as the youth reflected through the lyrics. Talking about style, Sobel defines it as the manner in which an individual performs an act (1981:21). Performance of the artist also gives contribution in shaping the art since they use their bodies by themselves as the material of their art as a result. It becomes something living, moving, and changing (Firth, 1996:205). Performance as the labor is a necessary part of the popular aesthetic. Therefore the research purposes to know what is American Rap music and why has Rap traveled to Indonesia and what is it in Rap music that speaks to Indonesian youth as the impact of Hip Hop culture both as popular culture and youth culture.

B. DISCUSSION

B.1. Language as Element of Popular Culture and Global Media

Language is used in our daily activity and it cannot be separated from the social interaction. It is as a means of communication. When one wants to speak or tell something to someone else, he or she should use language as media or tool to communicate it. Language itself is one of general element from culture. Therefore language and culture are interrelated. Meanwhile, music presented by the singer(s) also use language that it contains beautiful words or diction as well any social protest in the song. By using the language, music also plays its roles in forming the social condition or opinion. It can picture any society in a particular time or place. Music is not static but dynamic in line with the changing of era. As simple, Song is like novel that is as an imitation or reflection of society where the songs are created. Rap music is familiar with vulgar

words in its lyrics so people can remind them easily, even the language is well-liked by many people.

The penetrating of American Rap music was around 1990s. Iwa K was one of outstanding Indonesian singer of Rap music at the time. Globalization of media is the significant factor in shaping Rap music in Indonesia. Even, other Indonesian singers with their distinctive styles are exist nowadays like ToFu. Why is it in great demand, even it is not so popular compared by American rappers. At least, it embraces past, present and future like McDowell's approach of the reconciliation of tense in American Studies. By borrowing the writing of Irwan Abdullah and Ririt Yuniar (2010), since 1990s the Indonesian society has faced the unprecedented flow of information through media globalization. The advancement of multimedia technology such as sophisticated featured mobile phone, web, animation, television, and video has been central in our society. Those new form of media has allowed every citizen to access information form any corner of the world. Media provide a window to look on information that is not limited by space and time, it makes something distance become close, and it has also allow us to access information instantly.

The critical review of the existence of American popular culture in our home like Rap music is focused on how the Rap music influences the norms and values of the society, mainly on how it transforms the American cultural values of Blacks (dominance) into a multicultural one. As a country with rich cultures, Indonesia has serious challenges in creating the multicultural society. Since the reformation era around 1998, the media has greater and significant role in transforming the society into the one that opened to differences. American Rap and Indonesian Hip Hop are as proof that the world has developed into one big area where the result of this global evolvement is amazingly great that no a single culture is immune toward the influence of other cultures. Even though, Indonesian Hip Hop has adopted American Rap but it still hold Indonesian cultural traits like togetherness and politeness. It means that adoption of foreign culture is still based on our cultural background. Language in Indonesian Hip Hop is simply understood that it is just to entertain and gain some profits. Most of them are not protest songs and they tends to the popularity merely.

B.2. The Rap Music as the Part of Hip Hop Culture and American Culture as a Whole

Music has an important role in our daily activities, it can give us the pleasure when we get tired or it contains us to enjoy our lives. By listening to the music one not only listen the lyrics but also get the message form the content of the song. Commonly, the song has the deep meaning which is explicitly or implicitly. The content of the song relates with the language used in the lyrics. The composer may create something beyond of the song and surely it is connected with the language containing any meaning. Very often the song is about human experiences or the social

condition since the music as a part of the social condition. As Lyn Spillman in *Cultural Sociology* says "Music has long been considered an important part of social life. Furthermore, music as an important cultural and communicative medium (2002:108)".

Music can be classified into some categories such as Jazz, Rock, Classis, Pop and Rap. Rap is any kind of music that usually is sung just like knocks. American Rap and Hip Hop are inter-correlated. Studying American Rap music without knowing Hip Hop culture is nonsense. Studying any artifact of culture had better understand well the society which produced the culture. The students can travel across the world to open the windows in giving the meaning of any cultural product like music accurately. Hip Hop culture was also comprises of graffiti, break dancing and the attitude and the dress of the people who subscribed the mores and traditions of this culture (<http://www.yale.edu.yuhi/curriculum/units/1993/4.html>). The idea is supported by the statement as follow:

"Hip Hop, "the music behind the lyrics, which are rapped, is a form of sonic bricolage with roots in "toasting", a style of making music by speaking over records." (Nachbar, 1992:355).

It is true if one says that the root of the Rap came from the African, mainly Jamaica and the toasting first flourished in the United States, mainly in New York City brought by a Jamaican DJ named Cool Dj Herc in the mid 1960s. Rap spread quickly through New York's poor Black neighborhood in the mid and late 1970s. Jams were held in local playgrounds, parks, and community centers in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Harlem. Those areas are usually associated with the poor society and identically with drugs, crime, and unemployment men. Since the root of the rap music originated from such areas is no wondering if the lyrics expressed about the social protest. In this case, the role of language is very important. The oppressed people can express their feelings through the lyrics they created as the rappers also deal with it. As reflected in Public Enemy's single "*Fight the Power*" and it was the biggest college hit of 1989:

*'Cause I'm Black and I'm proud
I'm ready and hyped, plus I'm aped
Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps
Sample a look back, you look and find
Nothing but rednecks for 400 years if you check.*

From the lyrics above, it is any kind of social commentary which Blacks always are regarded as the second people after the Whites. Based on the lyrics, Blacks use their languages to voice the rights and to get the equality. Maybe it is one way to deliver their messages toward the government in order to concern about the real situation like discrimination. And It also contains some deep meanings of American values like individualism. Referring to American individualism, there are six issues considered as a representative of individualism in America. They are : (1).

Individual Freedom. In America, each individual has freedom to take a part in his life. He is free to decide what to do now and in the future. American government or constitution guarantees its people without interference. They are free to speak, to get material wealth, and to profess a religion. (2). Self-Reliance. Americans believe that individuals must learn to rely on themselves or risk losing freedom. This means achieving both financial and emotional independence from their parent as early as possible, usually by the age 18 or 21. It means that Americans believed they should take care of themselves, solve their own problems, and “stand on their own feet.” Americans believe they must be self-reliant in order to keep their freedom. In order to be in the mainstream of American life—to have power and / or respect—individuals must be seen as self-reliant.

The next values dealing with American individualism are (3). Equality of Opportunity. Everyone has the same chance to get a certain status. It is important to understand what Americans mean when they say they believe in equality of opportunity. They do mean that each individual should have an equal chance for success. Americans see much of life as a race for success. For the equality means that everyone should have a chance to enter the race and win. In other words, equality of opportunity may be thought of as ethical rule. (4). Competition. It may take the form of rivalry between individuals within a group, of competitive effort of social groups to gain their objectives, of racial rivalries, or of a contest of culture and institutions for pre-eminence. Competitive effort may be expended to achieve sheer existence and survival, or it may be devoted to a struggle for prestige. Competition is seen as an open and fair race where success goes to the swiftest person regardless of his or her social background. Competitive success is commonly seen as the American alternative to social rank, the more successful a person is the higher his social status is. And competition is seen by most Americans as encouraging hard work. Race is the solution:

If much of life is seen as a race, then a person must run the race in order to succeed: a person must compete with others. If everyone has an equal chance to succeed in the United States, then it is every person's duty to try. Americans match their energy and intelligence against that of their neighbors in a competitive contest for success. People who like to compete and more successful than others are honored by being called “winners,” On the other had, those who do not like to compete and are not successful when they try are often dishonored by being called “losers.” This is especially true for American men, and it is becoming more and more true for women (Kearny et. al. 23)

Other values are as follows: (5). Material Wealth. Material wealth becomes a value to American people. The phrase “going from rags to riches” becomes a slogan for the great American dream. The main reason is that material wealth is the most widely accepted measure of social status in the United States. Because Americans reject the European system of hereditary aristocracy and titles of nobility, they have to find a substitute for judging social status. The quality

and quantity of an individual's material possessions become the accepted measure of success and social status. This was a standard of American success, material wealth. Scholars like David Potter, an American historian, believe that abundant material wealth of the United States has been a major factor in development of the American character. (6). Hard Work Hard work is a price of material wealth. American people claim that material wealth can be obtained through hard work only. To get it, they try to expand from one place to another place. In early twentieth, American people expanded to the Northland. The North American continent was rich natural resources when the first settlers arrived, but all these resources were underdeveloped. Only hard work could these resources be converted into material possessions and comfortable standard of living. Hard work has been both necessary and rewarding for the most Americans throughout their history. Because of this, they have come to see material possessions as the natural reward for their hard work. Most Americans believe that if a person works hard, it is possible to have a good standard of living. It is possible to say that hard work is also an ethic in American life. Kearney says that hard work was coming from Protestant tradition. "Protestant tradition probably played an important part in creating a good climate for the industrial growth of the United States, which depended on hard work and willingness to save and invest money. The belief in hard work and self-discipline in pursuit of material gain and other goals is often referred to as "the Protestant ethic"

The Rap is also called as toasting music since it began when the DJ (Disk Jockey) would toast the music and they played it with the simple slogans to encourage the dancers and the listeners. Some of them are such as "Work it, Work it" and "Move it up". Finally the toasting becomes popular. In addition, there are four areas, which American Rap music has in common. First, the type of music relied on pre-recorded sounds. Second, the type of music relied on a strong beat by which they either rapped or toasted. Third, the style of the rapper or toaster spoke their lines in time with the rhythm taken from the records. Fourth, the content of the raps and toasts were similar in nature. For example, as there were boast raps and insult raps and party raps. (<http://www.yale.edu.yuhi/curriculum/units/1993/4.html>).

B.3. The Contribution of Rap Music in Developing Popular Culture

Rap music is truly an American minority artist creation of which people need to be proud since it gives pleasure or entertainment for the music lovers not only fans in the United States but also people in the world. Every kind of music has a message in its content or lyric. Rap music is one of the popular culture because it is so easy to get. It means that it is everywhere to be gotten—it surrounds us. Music as one of the television programs has a gain to inform and entertain the audiences or the music lovers. The popular music program that one can be found is in MTV channel. It presents in all day and mostly it is live music program. It indicates that one or something

becomes popular, it deals with mass production through mass media like TV, radio, newspaper or magazine. Herewith the characteristics of popular culture along with the discussion of Rap music:

1. Consists of artifacts (objects and people) and events (activities surrounding the objects and people). This point is focus on the artifact, the rap music as an art form should be regarded as the one of the Hip Hop culture which still exists in the United States and spreads out in Indonesia, Malaysia, even China and so forth. In the United States the outstanding rappers are not only dominated by Blacks, but also Whites nowadays. It is a new phenomenon that White rappers have also emerged in the world of Rap music. Although Rap is still proportionally more popular among Blacks, its primary audience is White and lives in the suburbs. In dealing with the activity, which the Rap music associated with, are crime, drugs and slum yards. Since the Rap music is originated from Blacks so the lyrics in Rap contain about social protest and vulgar things.
2. Reflects audience beliefs and values (it satisfies us –“We know what you want it..”). The songs that are presented by the rappers both Blacks and Whites contain a struggle of life or peace. The message presented by the rappers having positive perception that Rap music is not identical with crime or drug. But the lyric is still debatable, mainly for the lyrics. The audiences or the music lovers will give different perspective toward the Rap lyrics that sometimes contain positive and negative message. Their different backgrounds will give great influences into their perspectives toward Rap’s message. For example, some listeners maybe dislike with the lyrics containing about the illegal drug use, murder of family members, cop killing and explicit sex and bondage. Of course, it gives bad impacts toward teenagers.
3. Is commercial (It is produced with the goal of making money). Popular culture is a mass production means that it may consume by everyone in every place. Mass media plays the important role in supporting the rap through television program, MTV for instance. In 1988 with “Yo! MTV Raps” became the first national broadcast forum for Rap music. The style of the rappers brings the impact of the commercial things. The style of the hair, dress or he way of speaking. Here is one example, MC Serch of 3rd Bass, a White rapper, with his short-cropped hair and thick-rimmed Buddy Holly Glasses, with Adidas sneakers (Nachbar, 1992:364). The fashion takes account of this to make any brand of shoes or clothes more famed. Nowadays the rappers usually wear the loose shirt and trouser, like MC Hammer or Eminem, the white rapper who is now being famous.
4. Is often imitate of itself (it hopes that what has worked before will work again). The rappers, Blacks as well as Whites, who already want to be a good rapper in the United States but also in the other country. The success that they got is any long struggle of life by working hard in

bringing about their dreams. The rapper who is well known in recent years is Eminem (the White rapper) or Missy Eliot (the female Black rapper). In Indonesia, for examples, we recognize Iwa K, Tofu and so forth. In recent time, Yogya Hip Hop Foundation is very familiar by its touring in America. The lifestyle by imitating other culture, at least, we are supposed to be target of consumerism of popular culture like Rap music. It is any cultural imperialism. Shortly it is the practice of promoting the culture of one nation in another. Cultural influence can be seen by the receiving culture as either a threat or enrichment of its cultural identity. But the specific element of culture no changing in cultural activities, traits complex, traits, and item is language itself.

5. Surrounds us—it forms the fabric of our everyday lives. Music like the short story or novel is any reflection of what happened in a society and it reflects through the lyric. The human experience is expressed through the music by using the mass media as a tool to communicate a sequence of events.

Actually in studying popular culture does not easy as what people think. It is not trivial thing to be discussed or to be studied even though it is so very easy to be gotten since it surrounds us and exists in our daily activities.

C. CONCLUSION

Music is an artifact of popular culture in verbal culture. Pop cultural artifact can be studied well with the following steps: (1). Description. Give the meaningful definition of the artifact; (2). Appreciation. Reveal any critic and analysis toward the artifact of culture; (3). As cultural documentation. How is the consumers' will; (4). Aesthetic Dimension. What are the responses from consumers; (5). So What. What is the meaning of culture to society. Talking about music, the existence of language is undeniably true as cultural activity for a means of communication. By using the language, one can give and receive the message behind the language in the song. Lyrics of song express any deep meaning describing the condition of society or spirit of era. It is like a novel as an imitation of any society. To get better understanding music, the synthesis of knowledge in American studies is used by combining some approaches with social, cultural and historical method. Three disciplines are interrelated producing any idea in shaping music as primary data.

The existence of American popular culture like Rap music in our home gives positive and negative impacts toward Indonesian culture. Shortly, we can get positive aspects by competitive values, for an example. The negative sides like cultural imperialism must be concerned about. Moreover, cultural hegemony of America over the world always exists. It is the concept that a diverse culture can be ruled or dominated by one group or class (domination). It is like a big

business for America. It is very impossible to sell its product for domestic consumers. America needs any place to market its products in order to gain big profit. We must be proud of our culture and we do not want to be any alien in our home. We are like fish in aquarium, the foreigners can see our activities from outside but we can not see them. Selective of other culture is one way to keep our culture alive.

In global era, technology transformation in the media has allowed the media plays a fundamental role and has tremendous power in influencing society. The media has brought a message and introduce the knowledge, values, and new practices that previously had never known and applied. We can see the existence of Hip Hop and Rap music in Indonesia recently like YOGYA Hip Hop Foundation. The media has facilitated the presence of all things that had been neglected, oppressed, and disadvantaged. Lower-class voice, marginalized people, even ideas that had been considered against the power has been brought to the surface by the media that allows the birth of public discourse in general. Blacks voice for getting equality among American society are reflected in Rap and Hip Hop music, for an example. Not an exaggeration to say that “he who can master information, then he will rule the world”. This statement showed the media position which increasingly important from time to time.

D. REFERENCES

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