



THE GAMKONORA DOCUMENTARY FILM: AN EXPERIENCE OF LANGUAGE REVITALISATION IN NORTH HALMAHERA

Imelda

Research Center for Societies and Cultures, Indonesian Institute of Sciences

✉ imeldamatahari223@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The documentary film is considered as a proper audio-visual medium for documenting traditions, but it has both advantages and challenges. Both issues explained in the paper based on the experience of making a cultural event documentary film of the Gamkonora people (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCewhQOaNOK>). This annual tradition held on the first day of every Eid al-Fitr by the Gamkonorans who live with other ethnic groups in West Halmahera Municipal, North Moluccas Province. This film is relatively effective in raising Gamkonoran identity awareness among the people, compared to language documentation in the form of a printed book or digital which requires a long process that spends much more energy. It is implied through comments on movies in social media and several films which produced spontaneously by young Gamkonorans through Youtube channels. In addition, discussions about the existence of the Gamkonora people are also present on social media such as Facebook, both in Ternate-Malay and Gamkonora languages. Besides the claims of documentary film effectiveness, it requires considerable preparation. Firstly, Gamkonora research team has done two years field researches and has done long discussion with movie crews before and after footages taking process. A researcher who took the role as a leader should have a storyline which is understandable by the film crews to guide them during footage takes. Another thing that should be done before is maintaining intensive communication with the four villages leaders of Gamkonoran (Gamkonora, Talaga, Tahafo, and Gamsungi villages), tua-tua adat, and key informants. Overall, among those complex processes, the most crucial aspect is deciding *Dodengo* as the tradition which touches every single Gamkonoran heart since it not only expressing their annual tradition, but also identity. It hoped that they realize how crucial their identity and they should do something to continue their existence. Thus, the documentary tradition of an ethnic group is a powerful medium to convey the message of their existence among the society that contains challenges, from the process before, during shooting, to the editing process to get the final result.

KEYWORD

Documentary Film;
Gamkonora;
Dodengo Tradition.

I. INTRODUCTION

A documentary film is an audio-visual medium which is considered as an adequate to document tradition. It is because movies provide real illustrations of an event that is not always accessible. Concerning raising awareness of identity and language among Gamkonora ethnic groups, the documentary film presents a series of events depicting what Gamkonora people always do on the 27 Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr. The most

crucial event in this series of traditions is *Dodengo* which is always performed by Gamkonora people after eid al-Fitr prayer. They believe that the feast is not complete without *Dodengo* it. The *Dodengo* was originally a war tradition that eventually became an annual martial arts show and an important marker of Gamkonoran identity.

This paper discusses a documentary film entitled Gamkonora. The film, published on Youtube in January 2014, is the result of Indonesian Institute of Science Ethnolinguistic Research Team on Gamkonora ethnic group living in West Halmahera Regency, North Maluku Province. Three main issues will be discussed in this paper i.e., (a) the advantages and (b) the challenges in the making of Gamkonora documentary film, and (c) how do Gamkonora people respond to the film?

II. METHODS

This is desk research that relies on secondary data of the researches that have been done and utilize supporting data from social media, such as Facebook and Youtube. This is a contemplation kind of study after the launch of Gamkonora documentary movie on Youtube on January 8, 2014.

After almost 6 years of release, the film titled Gamkonora has been accessed 1,005 times on the <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCewhQOaN0k> [1]. The film has five team members who helped the production process, including: (a) Imelda (language producer and researcher), (b) Ninuk Kleden (Anthropologist), (c) Fanny Henry Tondo (language researcher), (d) Rhino Ariefiansyah (Film Editor), and (e) Jeremiah, L.P. (Photography Director) [1].

Besides discussing the film, the article also discusses the audience response which can be seen in the comments section of Youtube and Facebook which is one of the social media to spread information about the film. The comments from Facebook are mainly from Gamkonora country life group who has posted this film on May 6, 2017, by a member with the initials ZM [2].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This subsection is divided into three parts. First, it briefly describes who the Gamkonora people are and how the surrounding community are. Second, this subsection elaborates on the summary of Gamkonora's film which became the object of this research. Third, it discusses about the advantages, challenges, and responses to Gamkonora's film.

Gamkonora among the Ethnic, Language, and Religious Diversity

The word *Gamkonora* is coming from Ternate language which is mean as 'the village in the middle' [3]. This is the name of a mountain, village and an ethnic group in North Halmahera. Gamkonora people are an ethnic group living in four villages named Gamkonora, Talaga, Tahafo, and Gamsungi, in Ibu Selatan Subdistrict, North Halmahera Regency, North Maluku Province [3].

In ibu subdistrict, Gamkonorans live with other ethnic groups, called Tiana, Waioli, and Sangir people who has different religions. While Gamkonora people convert to Islam, their neighbors are mostly Christians [3]. The map illustrates the location of Gamkonora and their neighbors live.



Picture 1. The map of Gamkonora¹

Gamkonora is one of the endangered languages in Indonesia [4]. Visser and Voorhoeve (1987) find that there are 1500 of Gamkonoran speakers in Ibu regency [4]. Besides, linguistically, Gamkonorans are multilingual speakers [3]. They speak Ternate, Papuan-Malay and Indonesian together with their local language. Interestingly, those languages have different functions. While Gamkonoran is used for interethnic communication, the Ternate language is an honorific language that mostly uses for extra ethnic communication and interethnic communication with the older generation. Additionally, the Malay language is used for a wider communication need in an informal context, such as the people in the market of the Ternate island. They also speak Indonesian for school and other formal contexts.

About the Gamkonora Film

The Gamkonora film is a work made after two years of initial research in Gamkonora community. The following will be briefly described the contents of Gamkonora film which is almost 30 minutes long. Please note that the information in this subsection is obtained from the Youtube page published by PMB-LIPI [1].

Gamkonora's film begins with a journey from Ternate to Halmahera island. Then, it followed by exposure of Mount Gamkonora from a mountain observer perspective. He tells about the variant name of the mountain associated with Gamkonora Village. Furthermore, the story continues with *Sangaji* Gamkonora, a cultural leader. Continuously, the scene illustrates the coming of Ishak Waliullah who brought Islam Gamkonora.

Continuously, the film returns to the setting of Gamkonora people's who are preparing the 27th night of Ramadan. It is believed that *laylat al qadr* or *malam ela-ela* is the best time of the year where angels are around and Allah forgive their sins. The day activities were quite busy because children, youth father and mothers are work together to prepare *malam ela-ela*. Teenagers and children prepare torch marches and put up torches along village roads and houses. Meanwhile, mothers prepare food called *handuri*. The food contains various forms of coconut wrapped rice, *halwa* cake and bananas to be

¹ The map was taken when the writer on field research in 2013.

handed over to religious teachers as the form of family prayers to their ancestors or parents who have died. Later that night, after Isha's prayer, the children walked together around the village carrying torches as a representation of the belief that the night was the time of the revelation of *nur Allahi* 'bright light of God'.



The film then continues with the school setting. In this section, a teacher explains how she teaches Indonesian and how her students use the Malay language daily. According to her, students use More Malay and Indonesian better than their mother tongue because their parents no longer use their ethnic language. Meanwhile, another actor explains that language behavior is the consequence of the conflicts in 1999 and 2000 when they had to leave the village and move to Ternate. There, they used more Malay language compared to Gamkonora to communicate

The series of fasting rituals in Ramadan is continued with Eid al-Fitr prayer. This scene begins with the arrival of village leaders and religious teachers to the mosque to lead the ritual. In addition to the Eid al-Fitr rituals, it was lucky because at that the time the Eid al-Fitr was on Sunday which was the same time of Sunday prayer for Christian Waioli ethnic groups who live close to Gamkonoran. Therefore, in the film the crew also took the Sunday Worship scene to show the diversity of the society in term of religion.



In the end, Gamkonora's film shows the preparation of *Dodengo* performances in the sago garden. The youths collect sago rods called *gaba-gaba* as a tool to hit. Originally, *Dodengo* was from the warrior tradition of Gamkonoran in Ternate Sultanate era. At the moment, *Dodengo* become a cultural performance since there was a change of power around Ternate Sultanate. In the afternoon, after Eid al-Adha prayer, Gamkonora people and all their neighbourhood gathered in Talaga Village to play and see the performance.

Advantages, Challenges, and Responses to Gamkonora Film

Traditional documentation films have both benefits and challenges. Some of the advantages that can be gained from audio-visual documentation is the audiences are possible to experiences the authentic event. Related to the tradition of a certain ethnic groups, audio-visual documentation in the form of a film

presents an event that has never been seen or imagined to be true. Thus, the traditions of unknown ethnic groups became widely socialized.

However, besides the advantages, documentaries also have challenges. Documentary filmmaking requires careful preparation, intensive communication with the film crew and the public, as well as a clear concept. Documentation creation requires previous studies to gather adequate information and prepare equipment that may be used in difficult terrain. For example, we need to prepare waterproof and unshakable bags for all equipments, especially camera. It is important because the area that we were passed are mostly damaged and it took about two hours to reach the site. Apart of that we also need to manage intensive communication with the crews (cameraman and film editor) and the villagers. We should have several meetings with all the crews and people before the shooting to put ideas together with the crew and to socialize to the villagers. Another important thing is choosing the best moment. On the Gamkonora film context, the 27th moment of Ramadan to Eid al-Fitr and *Dodengo* performance are the best time to take since they illustrate Gamkonoran's unique and specific tradition.

It seems that the film has a special place in the hearts of Gamkonora people. This could be seen from their positive response received after the film was published on Youtube channel. Besides thanking the crew for making the film [1], they also experience positive attitude on memorizing their homeland and *Dodengo* tradition [1]. In addition, there are also those who agree to preserve the tradition [2]. Besides the responses on the form of opinions, there were also similar films made after Gamkonora film was released. The films can be traced through Youtube with the keywords Gamkonora and *Dodengo*. Most of the movies are created after LIPI publish the movie in 2014.

IV. CONCLUSION

The paper illustrates how an audio-visual tradition produced. This activity was challenging to do, and it also provides benefits to society and appreciated responses. Especially for Gamkonoran, the visualization of their cultural traditions along Eid-ul-Fitr reminds them about their identity and pride because their customs are packaged attractively and are widely exposed.

REFERENCES

- [1] R. Ariefiansyah, Y. L. Prabowo, Imelda, N. Kleden Probonegoro and F. H. Tondo, "Simpadat PMB-LIPI," Pusat Penelitian Kemasyarakatan dan Kebudayaan, Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia, 8 Januari 2014. [Online]. Available: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCewhQOaNOk>. [Accessed 7 Desember 2020].
- [2] Z. Muharram, "Gamkonora Country Life," Facebook, 6 May 2017. [Online]. Available: <http://facebook.com/groups/1434402806783383>. [Accessed 7 December 2020].
- [3] N. Kleden-Probonegoro, Imelda and F. H. Tondo, *Etnografi kebahasaan dan kebudayaan: Memahami eksistensi bahasa Gamkonora*, Jakarta: LIPI Press, 2013.
- [4] D. M. Ebernhard and C. D. Fennig, "Ethnologue: Languages of the world," SIL International, 1 January 2020. [Online]. Available: www.ethnologue.com/language/gak. [Accessed 7 December 2020].