



Religious and Cultural Locality Narratives in the Javanese Cultural Film: an Effort to Perpetuate Patriarchal Culture

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to find out how religion and cultural locality are presented as a tool to perpetuate patriarchal power through Javanese cultural films, such as *Ruah* (2016) and *Munggah Kaji* (2017). This research also sees the various factors behind the use of religious and cultural localities narrative to legitimize the work of patriarchal ideology in the two films. This study provides an overview of how dominant groups rebuild the romance of patriarchal power in Java amidst the incessant movement for gender equality. This research uses a qualitative approach and the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) method. The findings of this research are, first, religion seems to be part of Javanese culture which has values alignment in the context of subduing and disciplining. Religious values are embedded in subjects who still maintain local values which are displayed through verbal language and visual signs, such as clothes, character, and the daily activities of story characters. Second, the legitimization of patriarchy using religious and cultural locality narratives shows the desire to return women to the domestic sphere and to maintain patriarchal dominance in the society. It is related to the Javanese power system which often uses claims in the name of revelation and culture in order to perpetuate interests and power hegemony.

Keywords: cultural locality, patriarchy, religious narrative, gender relations

1. INTRODUCTION

In the patriarchal Javanese culture, the depiction of the ideal woman is often associated with her duties as a wife and mother in the family. This cultural construction contributes to the positioning of women as supporters of their husbands in family and marital life. As a result, family and marriage become arenas for unequal gender subject positioning, where men are positioned higher and dominant than women.

The strong depiction of patriarchal culture in Javanese families and marriages is not only found in the real life of Javanese society. Various shows depicting this practice are often found in the media, such as films. Even films that were actually produced with state funds also show this inequality, such as the film *Ruah* (2016) and *Munggah Kaji* (2017). These two films were produced using special funds (Danais) of Yogyakarta Special Region (DIY) government which were actually intended as a media campaign for Yogyakarta cultural locality.

As the funder, the Yogyakarta government through the Yogyakarta Culture Service outlined that the films produced by Danais are able to show the dynamics of typical DIY life and its positive values. Apart from that, the DIY government also hopes that these films will be able to reveal real things in society as well as show a noble culture (*adiluhung*) which is considered a characteristic of Yogyakarta (Damarjati, 2020).

The presence of the film "*Ruah* and *Munggah Kaji*" as a medium for depicting *adiluhung* culture is interesting to study, considering that the films precisely narrate the issue of gender inequality which is framed in the jargon of preserving local culture. It is illustrated through gender subjects who still uphold cultural locality as well as religious values.

2. OBJECTIVES

Based on the various explanations above, the purpose of this study is to find out how religion and cultural locality are represented as a tool to perpetuate patriarchal power through Javanese cultural films, such as *Ruah* (2016) and

Mungghah Kaji (2017). Furthermore, this research also sees the various factors behind the use of religious and cultural localities narrative to legitimize the work of patriarchal ideology in the two films.

3. THEORETICAL REVIEW

The social construction of gender relations in Indonesia cannot be separated from Javanese cultural traditions and the interpretation of religious teachings, especially Islam. Both of them are often narrated as justification for perpetuating patriarchal culture which contributes to the concept of womanhood in Indonesia. Ida (2001) stated that the construction of womanhood in Indonesia is generally formed from a blend of Javanese culture and Islamic norms. According to her, the patriarchal culture which positions men as superior to women was influenced by Javanese kings, both in Yogyakarta and Surakarta.

This inequality in gender relations is also reflected in various local cultures that develop in Javanese society, one of which is in the context of marriage. In Javanese culture, marriage places men in a higher and dominant position (Prabasmoro, 2006; Hellwig, 1994). Meanwhile, Kate Millet in Prabasmoro (2006) emphasized that marriage or family is the main instrument of patriarchy which regulates the attitudes and behavior of cultural members so that patriarchal ideology is maintained. According to Brenner (1998), this condition continues to occur today, even though industrialization and modernization have occurred on the island of Java. According to him, the various achievements of industrialization and modernization do not necessarily make a positive contribution to relations between men and women. Women are still placed in a lower position in the Javanese cultural hierarchy.

This positioning is not solely related to Javanese culture inherited by Javanese kings. Muhtador and Hamdani (2021) say that patriarchal culture has strong roots in the theological and sociological aspects. Religion is an inseparable part of the development of patriarchal culture, because religion is a certain part of the culture that is perpetuated by its adherents. Hellwig (1994) emphasized that Islam plays an important role in affirming patriarchal ideology, especially through the institution of marriage, regarding the privileges of polygamy and divorce.

The choice of film as a medium for legitimizing patriarchy has its own advantages. Referring to Robert Conell's opinion in Clark (2004), media whether advertising, television, or film, are the best means for displaying the dominance of masculinity in the representation space. Meanwhile, Turner (1999: 47-49) explained that films are not just works of art. Film is a cultural product and social practice that functions as a medium for the production and reproduction of cultural meaning. Films are social texts that represent cultural interactions in the society where they are produced and consumed. As a social text, film is not interpreted as a form of artistic expression of its creator. According to Barthes (1977:46), the text itself is not a series of words that convey a meaning or message from the author. Text is a multidimensional space where various writings about various cultures mingle and collide with each other.

According to Turner (1999: 153-156), reading film as a representation and social practice, ultimately focuses on the relationship between film representation and ideology. In this context, Turner emphasizes a contextual approach that tends to analyze culture, politics, institutions, and the industry that plays a role behind film production, not just a textual perspective that focuses on the perspective of the cultural function presented in a film. Commolli and Narboni (in Kauvaros, 2008: 377) say that films are ideological products of the system because film production is always related to the ideology of its creator.

A number of studies have been conducted regarding gender-biased cultural practices and religious interpretations in the media realm. Herawati and Apriliani (2020) in their research explained that the local cultural system which is manifested in the caste system is a tool for defining gender identity, especially for women. The research results show that local Balinese culture, especially regarding the caste system, is formed and interpreted based on religion, custom, and patriarchal power. Meanwhile, Hellwig (1994) explained that the construction of unequal gender relations in families is triggered by an understanding of *kodrat* (woman's fate). Research conducted on Indonesian novels, some of which are based on Javanese philosophy, confirms women's attachment to the household sector and its boundaries, as well as the roles they must play.

Meanwhile, Wibowo (2019) in his research entitled "Representation of Women in the Film Siti", said that the character Siti in the film is depicted as a strong and independent female subject who is able to carry out many roles at the same time. However, this depiction does not represent female characters who are free from the grip of patriarchal culture. The female subject in the film Siti is placed as an entity that is not equal to men even though she is able to take over the role of men (husbands). In this film, woman is presented as empowered figure, but her existence is only limited to the translation of the roles she must play, both as mother and wife.

The various researches above present a picture of gender relations in commercial films and only look at how patriarchal culture is displayed through films. Meanwhile, this study will provide an overview of how cultural locality is articulated by playing religious narratives to support patriarchal power. This study also explains how the dominant

group tries to rebuild the romance of patriarchal power in Java amidst the development of industrialization and modernization. Specifically, the films that are the object of study in this research are films that were produced using special fund from the DIY government. Thus, this study can be a reference to see the standpoint of the state apparatus, especially in looking at the issue of gender equality.

4. METHODS

This research uses Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) method developed by Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak. Like other critical discourse analysis, DHA also tries to see the relationship between ideology and power. Ideology is considered as an important means to build and maintain power through discourse. The aim of DHA is to 'demystify' the hegemony of specific discourses by deciphering the ideologies that establish, perpetuate or fight dominance. Specifically, DHA critically analyses the language use of those in power who have the means and opportunities to improve conditions (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009).

The data in this study is in the form of film texts both in *Ruah* (2016) and *Munggah Kaji* (2017) film. The stages in this study include; first, data categorization by investigating the problems in the two films studied. After the data is collected, the next step is to categorize the data according to the issues that will be studied. Furthermore, the researcher connected the data obtained with issues regarding religious and cultural locality narratives which were the focus of this research. This is intended to see how religious and cultural localities narratives are constructed to strengthen patriarchal power. The second stage is data analysis that based on three principles of DHA analysis. First, determine specific content or topics related to religious and cultural locality narratives. Second, conduct a discursive strategy review. The third stage is to analyze the linguistic meanings presented in the depiction of religious and cultural locality narratives presented in the film.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Religion and Cultural Locality in the Patriarchal Culture Framework

As previously mentioned, the film *Ruah* (2016) and the film *Munggah Kaji* (2017) are films produced by the DIY government for a campaign to preserve local culture. In the regional regulation of DIY No. 4 of 2011, it is stated that Yogyakarta cultural values are Javanese cultural values that are specific in the spirit of realizing Javanese values in general. Apart from that, in Yogyakarta Regional Regulation No. 13 of 2017, the Yogyakarta government describes Yogyakarta culture as noble basic values resulting from creativity and taste that manifest in the initiative and work the people identity of Yogyakarta. Meanwhile 'cultural values' are explained as a series of criteria for good and bad values believed by a group of people which are manifested in the DIY cultural values.

As films funded by the Yogyakarta government, the messages conveyed in the films *Ruah* and *Munggah Kaji* are related to Yogyakarta's strong culture. In *Munggah Kaji*, this is shown through the main character, Wening as a figure who is loyal to maintaining local values, such as social collectivity, patience and politeness. As a figure who is loyal to caring for local values, she is also narrated as a woman who is obedient to the teachings of her religion, Islam.

It is visualized through various verbal and visual languages, such as prayer, *wudhu* (the ritual washing performed by Muslims before prayer), and having a habit of giving alms even though her economy is considered less capable. She is also described as an active figure in various social and religious activities held by the community in her village. Judging from her daily attire, Wening also always wears a hijab every time she leaves the house, a tradition based on Islamic teachings. In particular, the film *Munggah Kaji* depicts Wening as a figure who is respectful and loyal to serving her husband. This is reflected in Wening's dialogue with her husband, regarding her plan to help a friend who was sick and failed to go on pilgrimage to Mecca.

"Mbah kulo sios ajeng minggah kaji (Sir, I'm going to go on Hajj) (05:23)Mbah kulo bade minggah kaji kok njenengan mendel mawon. Salah kulo nopo? (I want to go on Hajj, why are you silent? What did I do wrong?) (14:06)Kulo ajeng tangled angsal nopo mboten? Nggih nek mboten lilo, kulo mboten sido mangkat (I want to ask, is it okay or not? If not, I will not go)(21:09).

Through this dialogue, the filmmaker seems to want to highlight the narrative of a wife's obedience to her husband as part of the religious teachings that a person believes in. In the book *al-Fiqh al-Manhaji*, it is explained that a woman will be considered *nusyuz* (disobedience to husband), if she leaves the house and travels without her husband's permission (Sahroji, 2018). This teaching leads to the idea that a wife can only carry out certain actions if

she has her husband's permission. Wening's adherence to cultural norms and religious teachings contributed to her indecisive attitude in negotiations. The dialogue above shows that Wening did not bargain with her husband. Even as a wife who is considered obedient in cultural and religious terms, Wening ultimately leaves all decisions to her husband, even though she really wants it, as seen in the following picture:



Wening is negotiating with her husband to allow her to go on the Hajj.
Source: [Film *Munggah Kaji*, 05:23 dan 21:09, 2017]

This portrayal is in line with research conducted by Handayani and Novianto (2004:134) in a village in Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta. The results of the study explain that Javanese women will use subtle ways to demand and ask for something. This subtle way is expressed by using Javanese *kromo* (high register) to still show respect to her husband. On the other hand, the husband will still use *ngoko* language (low register). This also reflects the unequal relationship between gender subjects. Historically, the creation and use of speech levels in Javanese cannot be separated from certain ideologies. The use of speech levels represents power relations by creating social distance (Moedjanto, 1987). This reality is also found in the film *Munggah Kaji* (2017) which is reflected in various dialogues between Wening and her husband.

Through various visualizations and religious narratives in the two films, Islam seems localized, as if embedded and integrated with local Javanese values. In fact, Islam is not a religion that was born and grew from Javanese culture. Its presence even marginalized local beliefs such as '*Kejawen*' in some cases. *Kejawen* is a pattern or view of Javanese life based on morality or ethics and religion which is reflected in human relations with God, human relations with other humans, and human relations with nature (Pranoto, 2007). Wahyono (2003) in his research on *Kejawen* and Islam conducted in Ngaglik District, Sleman, Yogyakarta, stated that the relationship between *Kejawen* and Islam is conflictual as two essentially different entities. In the film *Munggah Kaji* (2017), Islam seems to be part of Javanese culture which has alignment values. However, if examined more deeply, the values that are harmonized are actually the values of subduing or disciplining women. It can be seen from how this film positions the women subject as someone who dares to negotiate, but these negotiations are still carried out politely in the corridor of a wife's obedience to her husband. A tradition and character that is stereotyped among Javanese women in general that is still maintained and upheld to this day.

In the film *Munggah Kaji*, the narrative of religious and cultural locality is shown through the obedience of women (wives) to men (husbands). This depiction is different from the narrative constructed in the movie *Ruah*. In the film *Ruah* the alignment of religious and cultural values is embedded in the male subject. By using religious and cultural justifications, male subjects are positioned as more powerful and even have privileges compared to women, a depiction of patriarchal power that is often found in social reality in general.

Halim as the main character in the film *Ruah* is depicted as a respected figure in his village who is still loyal to caring for local culture, especially regarding social collectivity. He is a caring person who enjoys helping other people, and is active in social activities in his village. Apart from that, he is also described as a figure who adheres to the teachings of Islam, the religion he adheres to. As in the film *Munggah Kaji*, in the film *Ruah*, a person's devotion to religion is also narrated through verbal and visual language, such as muslim clothing, places of worship, and the sound of the mosque's call to prayer. Halim is also often shown in scenes of prayer, *wudhu*, and worship in mosques.

In the film *Ruah*, patriarchal power is narrated through Halim's desire to practice polygamy (a marriage system that allows a man to marry several women). The filmmaker use religious and cultural narratives to justify that polygamy is considered a form of social worship to help women. Apart from that, the film also constructs a narrative that men (husbands) have the right to practice polygamy because they have provided *nafkah* (living expenses) for women (wives) well. The *Ruah* film's partiality towards this issue is also shown in the scene of a religious lecture over the radio which Halim deliberately listens to his wife. In the lecture, it was stated that the positions of men and women are different because men are the ones who provide the *nafkah*, whereas women are just the recipients of her husband. Not only that, through the lecture it was stated that God created male subjects with more needs than women. Therefore, the issue of polygamy does not need to be debated.



Halim is persuading his wife to agree to his polygamy plan
Source: [Film *Ruah*, 06:06 dan 06:43, 2016]

The positioning of Halim as a male subject who has the privilege of polygamy is a form of hybridization between the interpretation of religious teachings and dominant practices based on local culture. In the Al-Quran, Annisa verse 3, it is stated that men are allowed to have polygamy as long as they are able to act fairly (Mustofa, 2017). This verse is often interpreted textually as the permissibility of polygamy for men. On the other hand, the association of polygamy with cultural issues cannot be separated from the long history of cultural traditions, especially Javanese culture. A research conducted by Wibowo (2013) explains that in Javanese culture polygamy is legalized as a form of achieving social status in society. Polygamy in Javanese culture shows high social status in society, because the more wives you have indicates the higher your social status.

Apart from being related to social status, the narrative that the husband has provided *nafkah* for his wife as a justification for being able to practice polygamy, it is also a form of positioning the female subject as a housewife in patriarchal ideology. Maria Mies in Suryakusuma (1996: 101) states that a housewife is a social definition emphasizing that the husband is the breadwinner regardless of his contribution to the family, while the wife is a subject who depends on her husband's income for her life.

The various findings mentioned above show that the films *Ruah* and *Munggah Kaji* are tools for perpetuating patriarchal culture which are packaged in cultural preservation campaigns. The framing of religious narratives and cultural localities, both those embedded in male and female subjects, is represented from the perspective of patriarchal power.

5.2 Resurrecting the Glory of Javanese Patriarchy

The presence of Javanese cultural films produced using Yogyakarta's special funds has become an important medium for preserving local culture. It becomes problematic when these films actually show discriminatory and dominative actions against certain genders, in this case, women. The Yogyakarta government, which in its regional regulations defines culture as noble basic values, logically does not construct discriminatory narratives in the representation space.

It suggests the partiality of the state apparatus as well as the desire to revive the romance of patriarchal power in Java. Judging from various historical and cultural narratives, patriarchy is an inseparable part of the life of traditional

Javanese society. The positioning of women as *'konco wingking'* (a wife who is placed behind the husband to support his activities) has been ingrained since the glory days of the Javanese kingdom, especially Yogyakarta and Surakarta. This positioning is a form of limiting women in public areas. In social relations, a woman's position is even determined by her husband's position and popularity in society. Apart from that, women's loyalty to men (husbands) is considered as a glorious symbol of Javanese women (Kurnia, 2021; Pirus & Nurahmawati, 2020).

Meanwhile, Ida (2001) explained that Indonesian women are defined as women in the context of the royal family who act as housewives and are loyal and submissive to their husbands, including polygamy. Historically, kings in Java had more than one wife and even concubines (the wife of a monarch, but they are not the main wife). Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX, who served as Sultan of the Yogyakarta Palace for the period 1940-1985, had five wives. Meanwhile, King Kasunan Surakarta Sri Susuhunan Pakubuwono XII, who ruled from 1945-2004, had six wives.

The concept of women as *konco wingking* has been shaken by the presence of industrialization and modernization, and various gender equality movements. Kuntjara (1997) sheds light on the role of women's activists and organizational movements in supporting the challenge and objection of Javanese women to the traditional and old-fashioned culture. The growing number of educated Javanese women triggers the beginning of awareness towards greater gender equality. Thus, many women's organizational movements are genuinely concerned with addressing gender issues in the existing Javanese cultural system. Pirus and Nurahmawati (2020) said, this condition encourages a new paradigm for Javanese women from the concept of *konco wingking* to becoming *dadi wong* (being a successful person).

This change seems to be a threat to the dominant party which wants to perpetuate patriarchal power in Java. Therefore, subtle ways are needed to revive the role and position of women like the glory days of the previous Javanese Kings, one of which is by hiding behind the jargon of cultural preservation. The presence of Yogyakarta cultural films which carry the theme of cultural locality has become an alternative way. This is evident from the content of the film which positions women as inferior and subservient to men, while men are positioned as powerful figures. This positioning is constructed through religious narratives and cultural locality. As a teaching that contains norms, religion easily penetrated by political interests, both in the interpretation and methodology (Muhtador dan Hamdani, 2021). As a result, Javanese cultural films produced with special funds from Yogyakarta are no longer just a campaign space for cultural preservation. Films are part of soft power for the state apparatus as well as a space for perpetuating Javanese patriarchy.

This analysis may be refuted if it is associated with the discourse of female leadership that is being echoed by the Yogyakarta palace. The King of the Yogyakarta Palace, Sultan Hamengku Buwono X, who is also the Governor of Yogyakarta, issued an edict on May 5, 2015 containing a change in the name of Gusti Kanjeng Ratu (GKR) Pembayun, to Gusti Kanjeng Ratu Mangkubumi Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono Langgeng ing Mataram. This change was interpreted to mean that Pembayun had been established as the crown princess (Yanuar, 2015). At first glance, the decision is a form of the Yogyakarta Palace and the DIY Government alignment towards gender equality.

However, this assumption becomes paradoxical if the change in leadership model is linked to other Sultan's statements in various media. In Kompas Daily on May 6, 2015, Sultan Hamengku Buwono X mentioned that the king must be his descendant (Nugroho, 2021: 87). Another statement by Sultan HB X reported by BBC.com stated that the coronation of GKR Pembayun as Crown Prince was merely to carry out God's command through his ancestors. The Sultan emphasized, "*Pokoknya, saya menetapkan gelar baru GKR Pembayun. Lakone mengko piye, aku yo ra ngerti. Kalau saya melangkah lebih dari itu, maka itu adalah kepentingan saya,*" (Anyway, I established the new title of GKR Pembayun. What will happen next, I don't know. If I go beyond that, then it is in my interest) (BBC.com, 2015).

The Sultan's various statements above do not indicate his alignment with the discourse of gender equality - if not feminism - as the basis for his desire to make his daughter as a King. This statement indicates that the discourse on the succession of female leaders in Yogyakarta seems to be based more on the issue of perpetuation of power. It is considering that the Sultan does not have a son, which is an absolute requirement for the King of the Yogyakarta Palace as stipulated in Article 1 of Law No. 13/2012 concerning the Privileges of the Special Region of Yogyakarta.

Therefore, it can be underlined that the emergence of the narrative of women's leadership in the Yogyakarta Palace is not necessarily a paradox of the message that wants to be constructed through Javanese cultural films produced with Yogyakarta's privilege funds. Ruah and Munggah Kaji became tools to uphold patriarchal ideology wrapped in religious and cultural locality narratives. These two films not only fail to position women as empowered subjects. The films also show the Yogyakarta government's position of partiality to patriarchal ideology constructed through cultural preservation propaganda.

6. CONCLUSION

From the various explanations above, it can be concluded that the films *Ruah* and *Munggah Kaji* become tools of power to perpetuate patriarchal culture. Based on the results of the analysis, there are two important points that can be drawn as conclusions. First, the framing of religious and cultural localities narratives embedded to gender subjects are represented in a patriarchal perspective. Religion seems to be part of Javanese culture that has harmonious values in the context of subduing and disciplining.

Second, the emergence of awareness of gender equality seems to be a threat to dominant parties who want to perpetuate patriarchal power in Java. Therefore, a subtle way is needed to restore the role and position of women to the glory days of previous Javanese kings, one of which is by taking refuge behind the jargon of cultural preservation. The presence of Yogyakarta cultural films that carry the theme of cultural locality is one alternative way. This can be seen from the content of films that position women as inferior and subservient to men, while men are positioned as the ruling party.

7. COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

This article is free from any conflict of interest regarding the data collection, analysis, and the publication process itself. Either replicate or modify the previous sentence for this part.

8. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

The first author is the corresponding author, while the second and third authors contribute to compiling the research design, building the conceptual framework, analyzing the data, interpreting the data, and concluding the findings.

9. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my thanks to the supervisor lecturers in the Media and Cultural Studies program at the Graduate School of Universitas Gadjah Mada who have guided me throughout the research and writing process of this article.

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