



Shifting Sacredness and Spatiality of Laku Ritual In Traditional Javanese SPA Treatment for Women (Case Study: Apasra SPA, Hotel Tugu, Malang)

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Abstract. This study explores the evolution of Javanese beauty ideals, traditionally rooted in the concept of harmony between body, mind, and spirit. To achieve this ideal, Javanese princesses once performed exclusive "*laku*" rituals within the sacred *Keputren* of the Kraton. These rituals, rich in spiritual meaning, involved strict procedures and meticulous attention to detail. However, over time, *Laku* has been adapted into more accessible spa treatments, reflecting a broader trend of glocalization – the integration of global elements into local contexts. This shift has transformed *Laku* from a sacred practice to a commercialized form of self-care, available to all women. Applying Saussure's architectural semiotics, this research analyzes how these evolving beauty ideals and spatial contexts impact modern Javanese women, focusing on Apsara Spa. Findings reveal a multifaceted shift in the meaning and function of *Laku*. The strict procedures and deep spiritual meaning of the original rituals have given way to a more flexible approach, emphasizing relaxation and personalized treatments. Furthermore, the spatial context has been transformed: the sacred and exclusive *Keputren* has been replaced by the commercially accessible spa, democratizing access while inevitably altering the symbolic meaning of the treatments. Finally, the very concept of *Laku* has broadened beyond physical beauty to encompass a more holistic notion of self-care, incorporating elements of mental wellness and personal pampering. This evolution highlights the dynamic nature of cultural heritage, demonstrating how traditions adapt to changing contexts. While commercialization has altered the original intent, this adaptation also presents opportunities to preserve and revitalize Javanese cultural heritage.

Keywords: *architectural semiotics, ritual, Javanese traditional spa, interior design*

1. Introduction

Laku is a series of rituals and spiritual practices performed by Javanese palace princesses to achieve inner balance, moral maturity, and spiritual purity. The word *laku*

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comes from the word *ilmu iku kalalone kanthi laku* which means that knowledge can only be achieved through practice. *Laku* is the process of gaining knowledge about self-esteem that can enhance the *rasa* (intellect) of the princesses so that they are able to understand themselves and be able to carry out their responsibilities as Javanese Princess¹. The *rasa* aspect is existing as a manifestation of the spiritual intelligence of the princesses in understanding their environment.

The *laku* ritual is divided into three major activities, they are *laku prihatin*, *ngadi saliro* and *ngadi busono*. The *laku prihatin* ritual known as *ngundhup mlathi* consists of several forms of activities including *mutih*, *adus bengi*, and *туру sepihan*². *Ngadi saliro* are body care practices and rituals that are performed to maintain cleanliness, health, and physical beauty. Some *ngadi saliro* practices include flower baths, drinking herbal medicine, scrubs, massages, and physical activities such as dancing or exercising. In creating inner and outer beauty, princesses are required to dress and carry themselves appropriately, known as the *ngadi busono* concept. *Laku prihatin*, *ngadi saliro* and *ngadi busono* are representations of the individual maturation of a Javanese princess from all aspects including *raga* (physical), *cipta* (mind), *jiwa* (spirit), and *rasa* (senses).

The existence of the *laku* tradition takes place exclusively and sacredly in the *Keputren*, which is only reserved for the King's daughters. Each element of the *laku* has a deep symbolic meaning and is performed as part of a life cycle of Javanese women. This tradition shapes the Javanese cultural view of women's beauty standards both inside and outside the palace.

In recent decades, the spa industry has experienced rapid growth. Indonesia is ranked 14th out of 20 countries (218 countries in the world) with the largest spa market in the world, with a total revenue increase of 25.4% per year in the period 2020-2022³. The presence of Indonesian spas is dominated by the traditional Javanese culture of body care, prioritizing natural and cultural elements with Javanese backgrounds and decorations supported using traditional ingredients and mixtures⁴. These modern spas with Javanese culture seek to create an image of luxury, authenticity and naturalness in line with the transformation of the treatment rituals rooted in the lives of the Royal Princesses. The implementation of the concept of *laku* becomes profane, more inclusive and tends to emphasize luxury. This contradicts the main purpose of the *Laku* ritual which teaches care as a representation of the maturation of Javanese princesses. Without realizing it, this changes the paradigm of thinking differently regarding the concept of female beauty in Javanese culture.

Architecture and ritual have a very strong interaction in building sacred experiences⁵. Space is not only a place where rituals take place but also has a deep symbolic meaning and contributes to shaping spiritual experiences. The adaptation of ritual practice in the context of modern spas that promote Javanese treatment traditions, such as Apsara Spa, has caused a shift in sacred meaning and spatiality. To examine this phenomenon, an architectural semiotics approach is used through Saussure's theory of signs. Saussure's theory divides signs into signifier and signified. The signifier in this research is the physical elements of the interior, and ritual objects during the *Laku* ritual process, while the signified is the meaning contained therein.

The principle of Saussure's theory above is better known as the dyadic concept or dichotomy, meaning that a sign consists of two parts, namely the signifier and signified, the relationship between the two cannot be separated. A signifier is meaningless without a sign, and vice versa. It is further explained that the signifier is the material aspect of language, explicitly what is said or heard and what is written or read. Meanwhile, the signifier is the mental aspect of language, called mental images, thoughts or concepts. So, it can be said that the signifier is the mental aspect of language⁶.

The utilization of Saussure's sign theory is not limited to language, it can also be used to read and interpret the physical and non-physical elements of place as part of architectural works. In the era of post-modern architecture, semiotics has been widely applied to read architectural works as symbols. Semiotics in architecture has a close relationship between geographical conditions, history, local culture, as well as the social community that surrounds it when users use color, shape, content/volume and even building surfaces. Each element has connotation and denotation meanings at the same time. Regarding to their scope, signs in architectural semiotics are divided in stages starting from the scope of the environment, the scope of the building site, the scope of the outer building, and the scope of the inner building⁷. Sign systems for the inner building scope include space patterns, physical form, dimensions, proportions, materials, colors, scents, sounds, distances, positions, circulation patterns, and activities⁸. For example, windows on the facade of a house have a denotation meaning as access to light and air, connotatively, the presence of windows can explain the splendor of the building in proportion or shape.

Regarding the background above, the formulation of the problem in this study is what implications occur from the shift in the meaning of sacredness and spatiality of the *Laku* ritual on the concept of Javanese women's beauty. The urgency of this research is to provide insight into how the commercialization of spiritual practices can affect cultural meanings and values to shape individual identity.

This research uses qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected from several sources. We collected literature data and in-depth interviews data with an *abdi dalem* in the Yogyakarta Palace's *Keputren*, especially related to the implementation of the *laku* ritual in the Javanese palace environment. We also collected various data from participatory observation, literature, and in-depth interviews with the therapist and 10 women visitors at the Apsara Spa. Data analysis was conducted using Saussure's sign theory framework. The stages of analysis are divided into three main stages, they are:

1. Stage 1 semiotic analysis of the *Laku* ritual in Javanese palace culture (See Fig. 1)
2. Stage 2 semiotic analysis on the adaptation of *Laku* ritual in Apsara Spa (See Fig. 1)
3. Stage 3 implications of the shift in the meaning of the *Laku* ritual on aspects of sacredness and spatiality in the context of Apsara Spa as a one of modern spa.

This series of analysis can contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between culture, place, and women's body care practices (See Fig. 2)

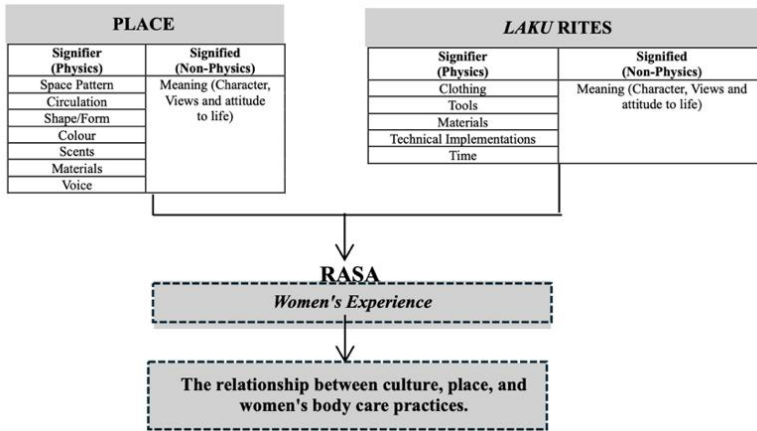


Fig. 1. Implementation of Architectural Semiotics Analysis for Stage 1 and 2

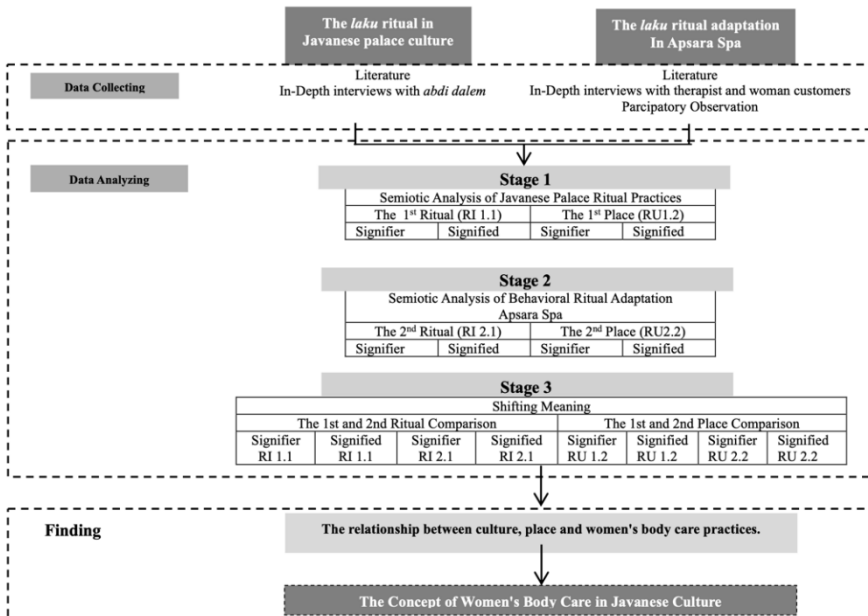


Fig. 2. Research Method

2. Findings and Discussion

2.1 The Ritual of Lakuin the Beauty Tradition of Past Palace Princesses

The *laku* ritual is very important in the life of a palace princess as it reflects the values and traditions passed down from generation to generation. This ritual is a common tradition in Javanese palaces, both in Central and East Java. Although there are variations in their implementation, the core of these rituals remains the same, which is to maintain a balance between physical and spiritual beauty.

The palace princesses were trained physically and mentally to become one, so that one day they could become true women, perfect wives, and ideal mothers.⁹ The princesses receive special beauty treatments concocted by courtiers according to the palace's secret beauty recipes. These traditional ingredients have been passed down from generation to generation to maintain the health and beauty of women inside and out. The presence of the palace as the center of Javanese culture has an important position and role in Javanese society. It is not surprising that the habits and way of life of the Javanese people are strongly influenced by the palace culture, including in the art of beauty care.

The practice of body care began when the princesses reached the age of *prawan sunti* (the period before the first menstruation). From this time onwards, the palace princesses lived within strict boundaries regarding the education of morals and manners, and knowledge of various feminine matters.¹⁰ The *laku* rituals that must be carried out by the princesses are divided into three major activities, namely *laku prihatin*, *ngadi saliro* and *ngadi busono*. *Laku prihatin*, *ngadi saliro* and *ngadi busono* are three traditional body beauty care activities that represent the individual maturation of a Javanese princess from all aspects including *raga* (physical), *cipta* (mind), *jiwa* (spirit), and *rasa* (senses).

Ngudhup mlathi, is one of the *laku prihatin* derived from the philosophy of the pistil of the jasmine flower¹¹. Some of the activities performed in this ritual are *Puasa mutih*, *Adus bengi*, and *Turu Sepisan*. The series of rituals are believed to purify the princess so that their life journey can be likened to a white color that is always clean from bad things, and their life will always be close to the Creator.

In the *Laku* ritual, the princesses will also be taught how to take care of their bodies, known as the *Ngadi Saliro* concept. This tradition encompasses various body care practices and rituals performed to maintain cleanliness, health, and physical beauty. Some of the practices included in *Ngadi Saliro* including *Mandi Bunga*, Lulur, Jamu, Massage, Ratus Vagina and applying oil from flowers to give a fragrant scent to the body.

In creating beauty inside and out, the princesses are required to dress and carry themselves properly, known as the concept of *Ngadi Busono* (beautifying clothes). This concept plays an important role in the formation of the image of the princesses in the community. A graceful and orderly appearance creates a sense of identity and pride that reflects nobility and elegance. *Ngadi busono* also represents spiritual values. By maintaining their appearance, princesses demonstrate their commitment to maintaining a balance between physical and spiritual beauty. A princess must be able to dress as

beautifully as possible when attending special ceremonies of the Keraton such as *Sekaten*, *Kirab*, and so on.

Spatiality, the *Laku Ritual* takes place in the Keputren area. Keputren is the residence of the Sultan's unmarried daughters¹². The Keputren area is located on the west side of the palace complex. The choice of the west side as the location of Keputren in the palace complex in Java is not accidental but has a deep philosophical meaning in Javanese culture. This position is closely related to Javanese cosmology, belief in the power of nature, and the symbolism of the fundamental directions¹³. The *Keputren* residential space is used for family ceremonies, especially those related to the domestic activities of women, fertility ceremonies and life rites¹⁴.

The *Ngadi Busono* Ritual takes place in the Keputren area. For example, the Keputren area of Pura Mangkunegaran has a very well-designed decorated room concept. The dressing room is in the form of a dark room with a mirror that is made around 5 sides. This dressing room is used by Princess Mangkunegaran to make up her face, hair, and dress which is usually assisted by the *abdi dalem*. The dressing position in this room uses a sitting position under the floor, following the Javanese sitting culture. The eightfold plan symbolizes the *hastagina*, the eight positive qualities that the people of Mangkunegaran should have as taught by their predecessor, Mangkunegara IV. Hastagin is a reflection of the eight qualities found in the universe, which can be responded to by the five senses and stored in the human body¹⁵. The Keputren Mangkunegaran dressing room has a Dutch colonial style that can be seen in several design elements such as the use of wooden panels on the walls, glass pantry, the use of chandelier lamps, the use of carpets as a cover for the room, and European-classical style furniture (see Fig. 3).

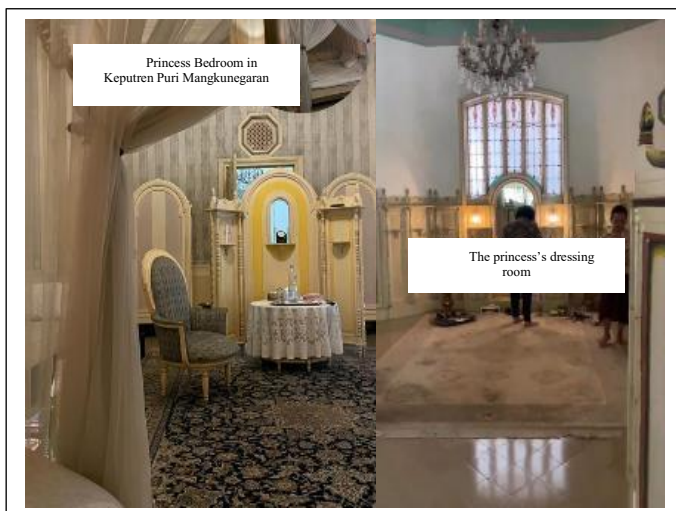


Fig. 3. Interior of Princess Mangkunegaran's Dressing Room and Sleeping Area

The implementation of *laku* rituals performed by the daughters creates a trilogy of female grace¹⁶. *Laku prihatin* forms the character and personality of Javanese women who are concerned with manners, becoming women who always maintain self-honor and morals. *Ngadi salira* teaches the princesses to take care of their outer and inner beauty. *Ngadi busono* teaches the princesses to have knowledge of good and correct clothing according to the customs and personality of Javanese women who prioritize politeness and fairness to achieve a graceful and attractive image. The purpose of the *Laku* ritual is the formation of women as main human beings who are happy souls, healthy bodies, and achieve a high quality of life. Without realizing it, this tradition has shaped the Javanese cultural view of the beauty standards of women both inside and outside the palace. Women's beauty is measured through the attainment of the highest level of Javanese aesthetic values such as a refined character; speech, attitude, and behavior based on proper manners; elegance and dynamic.

2.2 The Body Care Practices at Apsara Spa, Hotel Tugu, Malang

Spa is an acronym from the Latin phrase *Sante par Aqua* or *Salus per Aquam* which means *health from water*. The history of spa that uses water as part of the body care process developed in Rome (Roman Bath), then followed by other regions such as Hamam in Turkey and Onsen in Japan. In India, the Spa tradition is known as *Ayurvedic Spa* which focuses on hands-on treatments with the use of warm oils, massage and other treatments. *Ayurvedic spa* methods greatly influenced the spa traditions of Southeast Asia including Indonesia, these traditions are intertwined with community wisdom and local healing methods, shaping the traditional Indonesian spa experience that is recognized today.

One of the world-famous types of spas is the traditional Javanese spa, which focuses on massage and scrub treatments using special techniques with Javanese natural ingredients such as *kayu putih*, *cendana*, *lemongrass*, and others. The presence of Javanese Traditional SPAs often uses the term Keraton Princesses-specific beauty treatments, which then localizes the sacred concept of *Laku*. The *laku* ritual was originally a self-care practice that was considered sacred, being an integral part of the identity of a palace princess. However, as time progressed, the implementation of the concept of *Laku* became professionalized and its implementation became more inclusive

Apsara Spa is in Hotel Tugu, Malang. Apsara Spa describe the romantic history of the relationship between Indonesia and Cambodia hundreds of years ago. Apsara is beautiful heavenly dancers who only dance in front of the gods and members of the royal court. The legends of these beautiful dancers are engraved on thousands of reliefs at Angkor Temple, Cambodia. Apsara Spa provides body care that is rooted in the beauty and relaxation recipes of the Javanese court princesses that have been passed down from generation to generation. Apsara Spa has several areas including a lobby, waiting room, hair treatment area, foot and hand treatment area, massage treatment area, soak and scrub area as well as shower area (see Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Layout of Apsara Spa

In providing services, Apsara Spa therapists have clear procedures. This is reinforced by the presence of a spatial layout within Apsara Spa that is based on the flow of health services starting from the client's arrival, client reception, client health check, SPA treatment, herbal drinks, and then return (see Fig. 4). This is in line with the spatial quality designed to support spa treatments which are divided into 5 main phases²⁰.

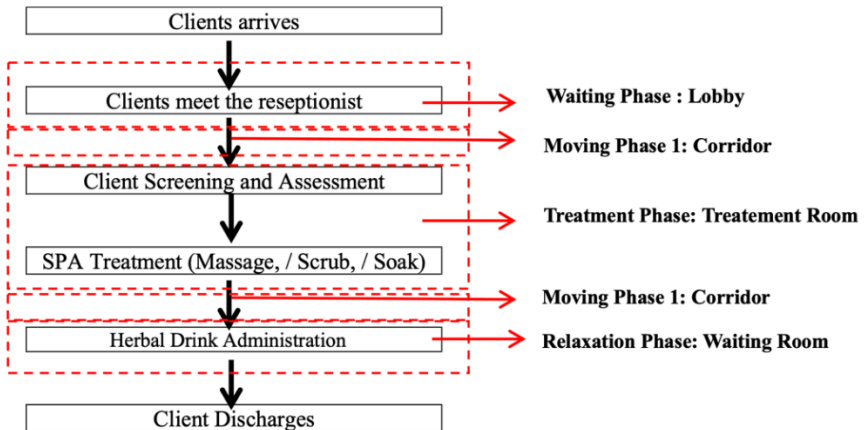


Fig. 5. Guest Service Flow and Case Configuration and Layout at Apsara Spa

The body care activity at Apsara Spa adopts the *Ngadi Saliro* Ritual. *Ngadi Saliro* is a traditional Javanese nursing ritual that focuses on restoring energy and balance to the

body. The word “*Ngadi*” means “to ask” and “*Saliro*” means “body”. So, literally, *Ngadi Saliro* means asking for the body to be healthy and refreshed. In practice, the nursing process does not involve prayers and matra performed by tourists or female consumers, and focuses more on the physical. *Ngadi Saliro* treatment at Apsara Spa usually includes several stages, including:

- **Cleansing:** It starts with cleansing the body using natural ingredients such as oil and spice base. This process aims to remove dead skin cells and dirt from the body.
- **Massage:** After the body is cleansed, it is followed by a traditional Javanese massage that focuses on the acupressure points. This massage aims to relax the muscles, improve blood circulation, and balance the energy in the body.
- **Use of Herbs:** After massaging, the body is massaged with a warm herb. This herb is believed to have properties to warm the body, relieve muscle tension, and improve skin health.
- **Soaking or Bathing:** In some SPA services in Apsara, there are treatment products that provide the opportunity to cleanse the body from the massage process.
- **Relaxation:** After a series of treatments, herbal drinks such as ginger, turmeric, curcuma, etc. will be given. This process aims to help warm up and restore body fitness.

The Apsara Spa area is located to the west of the Tugu Hotel Malang complex. The placement of the area in the western part of Apsara Spa creates a calm atmosphere and supports the implementation of the *ngadi saliro* treatments offered. The western area of the Hotel Tugu is protected from noisy public areas, given the position of the two sides of the Hotel Tugu facing the main road.

In terms of spatiality, there are physical qualities that influence the satisfaction of *ngadi saliro*'s maintenance, including:

- The presence of long hallways in Apsara Spa as a circular access and transitional space that is quiet, discreet and intimate (see Fig.6). This shows that body care requires environmental conditioning



Fig. 6. Presence of a Quiet and Quiet Circulation Hallway

- Strong connection with natural elements. The interior of Apsara Spa is dominated by natural elements such as wood, natural stone, and greenery (see Fig.7). The use of these natural materials creates a calm and comfortable atmosphere, so that visitors can relax more easily and focus on the treatment.



Fig. 7. Presence of Natural Elements in the Spa Apsara

- The presence of water elements is in the form of small containers filled with water and bathing area (see Fig. 8). The use of water elements in Apsara Spa is not only decorative but also has deep meaning and therapeutic purpose. Water, in various cultures, is often associated with life, purification and healing. In Javanese culture, bathing has a sacred meaning and is often associated with religious rituals. By presenting a bath room for bathing, Apsara Spa revives the traditional Javanese bathing tradition.



Fig. 8. Presence of Water Elements in Apsara Spa

- Glass utilization: pantry glass and curtains with shining colours gives a soft and calming shadow effect as well as creating an intimate and soothing atmosphere (see Fig. 9).



Fig. 9. Shadow Utilization in the Shower Room and Massage Treatment Room

- The aromatherapy utilization, oils and flowers or herbs greatly supports the relaxing atmosphere at Apsara Spa (see Fig. 10). Scents such as flowers, spices, and sandalwood can help reduce stress and improve mood. The presence of fragrance comes from flowers or aromatic oils. The scents found in Apsara Spas are flowers, spices, and cendana.



Fig. 10. The Scents in Spa Treatments

- The presence of femininity symbols in the curved and organic shapes of the furniture, flower carvings on the ventilator and pantry glass motifs (see Fig. 11). These curved shapes emphasize that the treatment room has a “close” relationship with women's activities.



Fig. 11. Feminine Curved Shapes

- In spite of shape, the colour elements in Apsara Spa pay attention to the philosophy of colour in Javanese culture known as *Hastaginam*. The symbolic

colours are *cemeng*, *abrit*, *jene*, *pethak*, *blue*, *ijem*, *wungu*, and *dhadhu*. At Apsara Spa, the colours in the hashtag are *dhadhu* (orange), *wungu* (purple), *blue* (blue), *ijem* (green), and *abrit* (red). In the massage and scrub treatment area, the blue and green colours are believed to be natural colours that are supposed to be able to heal. Meanwhile, the orange colour shows steadiness of heart and spirit. The colour purple becomes the colour of soothing the heart, relieving displeasure.

- The utilization of Javanese gamelan music in combination with natural sounds such as water gurgling, bird sounds, and other natural sounds. The soft and soothing sounds of nature and gamelan can help visitors to relax and enter the treatment atmosphere. The body care at Apsara Spa shows the desacralization process of the *laku* ritual.

As a matter of sacredness, Apsara Spa's body care does not provide any *laku prihatin* coverage in the process. *Ngadi Saliro* focuses on physical treatments to provide a relaxing effect to restore a woman's sense of wellness. In modern times, the services of the Apsara Spa do not accommodate the spiritual and social values that were formed through concern. In the past, the value of ritual practices in the past contained aesthetic, health, spiritual, and social status values, while the values contained in Apsara Spa treatments focus on commercial values with meanings that are highly dependent on each individual's experience. In terms of spatiality, the Apsara Spa environment still pays attention to the philosophy of physical space formation in Javanese culture, however, the absence of non-physical aspects such as ritual treatments has resulted in a different concept of women's beauty in Javanese culture.

2.3 The Shifting Sacredness and Spatiality of the *Laku* Ritual at Apsara Spa through Architectural Semiotics Theory

The *Laku* ritual consists of three major activities: *Laku Prihatin*, *Ngadi Saliro*, and *Ngadi Busono*. Signifiers of sacredness and spatiality in *Laku Prihatin* are everything that can be seen, heard, or felt physically during the ritual, among others:

- Objects used during the ritual process include offerings, flowers, incense, holy water, white-coloured rice or tubers, and special clothes used during the ritual.
- Actions during the *Laku Prihatin* ritual process include fasting, meditation, and prayer.
- Words during the *Laku Prihatin* ritual process are in the form of mantras, prayers, and various expressions spoken during the *Laku Prihatin* process.
- The space where the *Laku Prihatin* activities are held consists of several places, including Keputren, which is located in the western part of the palace complex. The process of meditation and prayer takes place in the dressing area of Keputren, which is shaped like a dark square as in Puri Mangkunegaran that accommodates the praying, meditating, and dancing activities of the princesses. For the *Adus Bengi* activity, the princesses have to take a midnight

bath around the *Windhu* well, while for *Turu Sepisan* activity, the princesses perform meditation in the semi-open *Pendopo* area.

The whole series of activities of the concerned coverage has a quite complex meaning. The following signified are contained in the coverage of Keraton princesses, such as:

- The value of purity: The presence of sacred objects, such as flowers and holy water, symbolizes the purity of the heart and soul.
- Purification: The act of bathing or washing the face with holy water symbolizes self-purification from sins and impurities that help the princesses purify themselves.
- Harmony with nature: Performing rituals in the open air, such as near a wind well or working late in the *Pendopo* area symbolizes the connection of the daughters with the universe, so that the daughters understand that they are “small” and always need the help of the Creator and Ancestors.
- Self-sacrifice: Fasting or abstinence from food symbolizes self-sacrifice to achieve spiritual goals. A daughter should be patient and be able to control herself.
- Self-seeker: Through the *Laku Prihatin*, princesses seek to find their true identity and purpose in life. The *Laku Prihatin* aims to shape the minds and feelings of the princesses which are reflected in noble thoughts, attitudes and traits.

Ngadi saliro is a deep self-nurturing ritual in Javanese culture, especially in the palace environment. This ritual is not only a way to cleanse the body, but also a spiritual process to achieve balance between body, mind, and soul. Signifiers of sacredness and spatiality in the *Ngadi Saliro* ritual including:

- Use of natural ingredients: beras kencur, scrub, mangir, massage oil, ratus, flower water and many others.
- Involvement of special movements: massages, scrubs, and other gentle movements.
- Involvement of words: mantras, prayers, or phrases spoken during the ritual.
- The presence of offerings that accompany the mantras and prayers before starting the *Ngadi Saliro* activity.
- Place: the *Ngadi Saliro* process takes place in the Keputren area and *Taman Sari* or bathhouse. The Keputren area and Taman Sari come in a feminine design with a strong Javanese philosophy. The feminine design includes carvings in the shape of flowers, supported by colours that represent the gentle character of princesses. The layout of the treatment room is made very private with long hallways to give peace to the princesses.

Based on the signifier of the *Ngadi Saliro* ritual, there is a signified contained in the *Ngadi Saliro* Keraton Princesses treatment ritual, such as:

- Self-washing: the process of bathing, scrubbing and soaking with flower water symbolizes the purification of the princess from physical impurities and negative energy.
- Maintaining physical balance and peace of mind: massages, scrubs, *boreh* and *ratus* are dominated by gentle movements aimed at restoring energy balance in the body.
- Harmony with nature: nature is the life centre, the utilization of natural materials creates a human connection between the princesses and nature. Beauty is natural and requires a process.
- Respect for oneself: *Ngadi salira* is a form of respect for the body and soul of the princesses as a gift from God.
- Body care is a woman's activity that is a woman's nature to take care of herself and the life around her.

Ngadi busono is an integral part of Javanese manners related to how to dress and groom. For the Palace princesses, *ngadi busono* is not just a matter of choosing clothes, but also a form of self-expression, a symbol of social status, and respect for tradition. Signifiers contained in the *ngadi busono* ritual include:

- Clothing: Kebaya, batik cloth, *jarik*, accessories such as bracelets, necklaces, and bun. The princesses must have knowledge of the rules of dress in Javanese culture.
- Colours: The choice of colours in clothing has certain symbolic meanings, for example, blue colour symbolizes calmness, while red colour symbolizes courage. Younger princesses choose bright kebaya and *jarik* colours, while older princesses will choose elegant colors.
- Motifs: Motifs on batik cloth, such as *kawung*, *parang*, or *ceplok*, have a deep philosophical meaning. The princesses should have an understanding of batik cloth motifs for certain rituals, ceremonies or activities.
- Makeup: The makeup used, such as lipstick, powder and eyebrows, is also part of the signifier.
- Posture: The way the girls stand, sit and talk shows manners and modesty.
- Place: The dressing area in Pura Mangkunegaran is part of the *ngadi busono* ritual. The placement of mirrors on 5 sides facilitates the *ngadi busono* ritual process. The installation of the mirror from the feet up to the head accommodates the dressing process with the culture of sitting on the floor (kneeling) which shows politeness. The eight-segment shape of the plan with the central pattern shows activities that are centered such as meditating, dancing, and praying in the middle of the room.

Based on the signifier of the *ngadi busono* ritual, there is a signified contained in the *ngadi busono* Keraton Princesses maintenance ritual, among others:

- Indicates social status: The type of fabric, accessories, and way of wearing can indicate one's social status within the hierarchy of the palace.

- Shaping the individual personality of the princesses: the choice of colours and motifs in clothing can reflect the person's personality. For example, a princess who chooses bright colours and lively motifs may have a cheerful and extroverted personality.
- Harmony with nature: The motifs on batik cloth are inspired by nature, such as plants, animals, or celestial objects.
- Elegance: the girls wearing kebaya, cloth and simple bun shows the elegance and modesty of Javanese girls.
- The value of politeness and manners: the culture of kneeling on the floor is a Javanese sitting culture that has the same manner and behaviour regarding to tradition. When entering the room, the *abdi dalem* offer worship, (*ngapurancang*), sit cross-legged, walk while squatting (*lakudodok*). This is understood as a way to stabilize the soul (*mangu*), clear the mind (*brojonolo*) and behave respectfully when entering the room.

The body care ritual at Apsara Spa focuses on the *ngadi saliro* ritual. The *laku prihatin* and *ngadi busono* rituals are not accommodated in modern spa services such as Apsara Spa. Signifiers of the sacredness and spatiality of Apsara Spa's traditional spa treatments include:

- Spatial Environment: The interior design of the spa adopts traditional Javanese elements, such as the use of wood, natural stone, and special ornaments; creating a calm atmosphere by placing the spa area in the western part of the Hotel Tugu complex; accessibility in the form of private hallways; soft lighting; utilization of aromatherapy, and traditional music combined with natural sounds; the presence of water.
- Natural Products: The use of natural ingredients such as scrubs, essential oils, and herbs in treatments. These ingredients are considered to have natural properties to nourish the body and skin.
- Massage Movements: Traditional Javanese massage techniques, such as massage are combined with modern massage techniques to provide maximum relaxation.
- Clothing: Spa therapists usually wear simple and elegant Javanese traditional clothing, creating a more authentic atmosphere. Female customers also change their clothes into batik clothes when doing treatments.

Based on the signifier of the *ngadi busono* ritual, there is a signified contained in the *ngadi busono* of Keraton Princesses maintenance ritual, including:

- Balance: Screen-inspired spa treatments aim to balance the energy in the body, mind and spirit.
- Purification: The treatment process is regarded as a form of purification of the body from physical impurities and negative energies.

From the results of the analysis in the table above (see Table 1), it can be seen that there has been a shift in the spatiality and sacredness of practices in Apsara Spa treatment. The results of literature studies, documentation data, and interviews with Apsara Spa therapists show that the process of meaning through signifier and signified theory illustrates that Apsara Spa does not fully accommodate the sacred value of ritual practices. The value of ritual practices in the past includes health, spiritual and social

statuses. Meanwhile, the value contained in the traditional Javanese Apsara Spa treatment focuses on commercial value meaning that it is highly dependent on the experiences of individual women. The value of women's experiences in viewing the place and treatment activities they carried out was mapped through in-depth interviews with ten women who visited the Apsara Spa between May and June 2024. The results of the interviews showed that 80% of the total number of respondents (eight people) chose to do so in the month of May-June 2024. Treatment at a SPA facility rather than at home. The results of these data show that women's need to get me-time that is different from their daily environment is very large. Traditional Javanese treatment experience is defined as an attempt to escape. The atmosphere of the place has a strong connection with the goals of these women, where the spa environment is expected to provide a different feeling from home which produces a feeling of relaxation such as calm, calm, relaxed and warm. This fun activity tends to be considered a lifestyle.

From the collective meaning system recognized by the Javanese community, the Javanese princess beauty care ritual has shifted to become a symbol of highly personalized ideals, dreams, and fantasies. This is very relevant to the current condition of women, where women's beauty standards are not bound by certain cultures but are freely defined by their own individuals. The self-love movement has become a new identity for women in various parts of the world. The traditional Javanese treatment Apsara Spa is variously interpreted by women. Some consider it as self-reward or me-times after doing activities and need a momentary escape to find their true selves. Some women interpret this traditional Javanese body care activity as an obligation that must be fulfilled to achieve a fit body condition, a beautiful and charming look like a princess.

The shift in the assessment and meaning of women's beauty is strongly influenced by various factors such as media, politics, economics, and socio-culture. One of the dominant factors shaping the definition of beauty is the emergence of feminism movements that encourage a more inclusive and self-acceptance-based redefinition of beauty. Feminism encourages women to define beauty based on personal values and internal strengths rather than following external standards.

Feminism in the tradition of *laku*, demands that the princesses focus on the beauty of a woman's essence, based on spiritual values, behaviour, and polite speech that support the physical (external) appearance of the princesses. The presence of women has not been neglected in the history of the Keraton in Java, where women are often considered inferior. Terms such as *konco wingking*, or woman which means *wani ditata*, indicate that women's roles were limited to cooking (*masak*), dressing up (*macak*), and passing on the bloodline (*manak*). The whole process of *Lakuis* carried out by the princesses to prepare the princesses to get the best match and become a wife and mother of the family.

The sacred and exclusive designation of the Lakuritual for the “princess of the palace” has shifted to a concept of body care that is profane and inclusive for all women in the world, where every woman has the right to feel special by doing this treatment. Behind the desacralization that fuels localization, the use of Javanese traditional body care is a reflection of cultural preservation with different interpretations. The level of special feeling created in each individual when performing traditional Javanese SPA

treatments is not the same, this shows that the more professional a culture is, the more it is an accumulation of personal experiences that are very unsolidified and flexible.

From the reading of the sign system, the researcher managed to map the process of shifting from the aspects of place (spatiality) and ritual (sacredness), namely:

A. The shifting of ritual meaning and value

- **The sacred ritual of Keraton Princesses:** The Keraton princesses *Laku* ritual involves three components: body care (*ngadi saliro*) such as flower bathing (siraman), massage, scrubbing, drinking jamu, and hundred; sight coverage known as *pengasihnan ngundup Melati* which includes meditation, fasting, *adus bengi* and *туру sepihan*; and appearance appropriateness (*Ngadi Busono*). Each ritual has a strict procedure and is carried out with full attention to detail with deep spiritual meaning. This ritual is carried out in a sacred and special Keputren for princesses. An example of a sacred ritual is the *Adus Bengi* ritual, which is done using water mixed with special flowers and performed at certain times that are considered sacred. Rituals of *Laku* as body care in Keraton not only function to maintain physical beauty but also as a means of meditation and self-purification. Each ritual has prayers and mantras that are chanted to draw closer to the Almighty. It is also a time for self-reflection and spiritual awarness.
- **Reduction of spiritual meaning in contemporary traditional Javanese SPA:** Traditional Javanese treatments at Apsara Spa have a primary focus on relaxation and physical comfort. While Apsara Spa still maintains traditional elements such as the use of natural materials and a calm atmosphere, spiritual elements are often de-emphasized. Prayer and meditation, which used to be an integral part of rituals, are not found in other spa services, thereby reducing the spiritual dimension that was once very important. The spiritual meaning of traditional Javanese body care today has shifted to become a symbolic matrix that shapes modern women's self-esteem through the self-image displayed as a dynamic personal lifestyle.

B. The shifting of spatial meaning and value

- **Sacred space in the palace:** Rituals of *Laku* in the care of the female body are performed in special spaces that have a sacred and symbolic meaning. For example, flower baths are conducted in special baths designed to provide privacy and a sacred atmosphere. These spaces have interior layouts and decor elements such as carved building patterns that support spiritual practices such as the Keputren area which is reserved for princesses.
- **The spatial design of the Javanese Traditional SPA:** Apsara Spa is designed with modern comfort and aesthetics in mind. However, Apsara Spa

still adopts traditional Javanese design elements such as the use *jati* wood, woven bamboo, and batik motifs, the atmosphere created is more commercial and open to the public. The spaces that used to be exclusive and sacred, located inside the fiberglass walls, are now more inclusive and profane, located outside the keratons area and designed to attract as many customers as possible.

C. The shifting concepts of female body care in Javanese culture:

The *Laku* ritual is a way of life for princesses that represents the maturation of the body (physical), mind (creation), soul (spirit), and taste (senses). Initially, this ritual was spiritual and sacred, but over time, traditional Javanese body care became a lifestyle activity for women from a commercial perspective. The ritual function of *Laku* is closely related to the princess's preparation to become wives and mothers, meanwhile body care in traditional Javanese spas focuses on the needs of women themselves with a more personalized meaning. Globalization has caused the spiritual value and exclusivity inherent in rituals to be replaced with comfort, relaxation, and physical aesthetics that are more universally accepted by women today.

The concept of female body care has also undergone significant changes. In the past, this ritual was collectively understood as a form of self-discipline, spiritual purification, and preparation of princesses for important social roles. Today, the activity of body care is understood more as a means of relaxation, beauty, and physical health. Although there are still attempts to retain traditional elements, the deep sacred and spiritual meanings tend to be diminished, replaced by personal meanings that focus on shaping a woman's self-confidence.

3. Conclusion

As a culture, the existence of the *Laku* ritual cannot be separated from the concept of beauty of Javanese women in the past which focused on balanced inner and physical beauty. The concept of beauty of the palace princesses emphasizes the balance between outer and inner beauty and is often viewed as a standard that is difficult to achieve in the modern era. The demands and pressures towards a "perfect" physical appearance are getting stronger, so the spirituality and water purity aspects are sometimes neglected.

Place and ritual are aspects that cannot be separated from one another. The use of *semiotic theory* in architecture helps us read space and cultural activities as a signifier. Changes in space and activity along with the development over the decades are a sign of change in meaning (signified). The reading of the sign is also the role of women in Javanese culture has changed according to the spirit of the times. The existence of

women, who were originally sacred and hidden in the *Keputren* and Taman Sari has become more prominent.

Place and ritual are aspects that cannot be separated from one another. The presence of female body care in Apsara Spa can be seen as an invention or redefinition of tradition, where elements of the ritual *Laku* are adapted and modified to suit the context and needs of women today. Glocalization is the process of adapting global elements into local contexts, which often involves a process of negotiation and transformation. In the *Laku* ritual, this process can be seen from the transfer of body care practices that were originally limited to the very private area of the *Keputren* and Taman Sari to traditional Javanese facilities that can be accessed by the public. This process does not necessarily have a bad impact or eliminate the meaning and value of real Javanese women's beauty, glocalization can be an opportunity to preserve and revitalize cultural heritage, if the preservation efforts are carried out appropriately.

This study focused specifically on Apsara Spa in Malang as a case study to explore the evolution of Javanese *Laku* rituals in a contemporary context. Therefore, the findings and conclusions may not be directly generalizable to other spas or cultural contexts. Additionally, the study primarily relied on qualitative data from observations and interviews. While this approach provides rich insights into the cultural and symbolic aspects of *Laku*, it may not capture the full range of quantitative data that could further support the findings.

Future research could expand upon this study by investigating a wider range of spas and traditional Javanese treatments to assess the generalizability of the findings. Employing a mixed-methods approach that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative data collection could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, future studies could delve deeper into the specific impacts of commercialization on the preservation and revitalization of cultural heritage within the spa industry. Examining the perspectives of spa owners and practitioners could offer valuable insights into the motivations and challenges associated with adapting traditional practices for a modern market. Finally, cross-cultural studies comparing the evolution of beauty rituals in different societies could shed light on broader global trends and their implications for cultural heritage.

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