

## GENDER ROLE IN RURAL LIFE: AN AUDIENCE RECEPTION ANALYSIS ON BANYUMAS FILMS IN REFORMATION ERA

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### ABSTRACT

*This qualitative research was aimed at investigating audience's responses on gender role in rural life represented in Banyumas films. The data were taken from library research, questionnaire, and group discussion with Banyumas natives. The audience consisted of female and male university students as well as Banyumas film community. Media viewing was conducted before the discussion. The study findings show that the audiences, both males and females, tend to be receptive to the shifting role of wife as the breadwinner of the family since factories in Banyumas give more work opportunities to women than men. In addition, the respondents are appreciative to the role of Banyumas women who are actively involved in the cultural preservation. However, they think that it rarely happens as Banyumas people prefer working in factories to preserve the tradition.*

**Keywords:** Banyumas film, gender role, rurality

### INTRODUCTION

Reformation era, which is marked by the end of Soeharto's presidency term in 1998, has changed Indonesia significantly. The free election in 1999 indicates the implementation of democracy in this era. Moreover, the greater degree of freedom of thought, opinion, and speech encouraged Indonesian people, especially youth, to express their criticism on social and political issues openly in various ways and media. Film is one of the media which is chosen to express their ideas or thoughts as it gives the more real description with its audio-visual features. The development of technology, which offers cheaper and modern equipment, also enables anyone to make their own movies.

The enthusiasm of Banyumas people, mainly the youth, in making films has been increasing since the Reformation era. It is highlighted with the flourishing of film communities in Banyumas regency and the nearest regencies, namely Purbalingga, Cilacap, and Banjarnegara. Through these communities, many films are produced by the community members. Despite various issues and genres, Banyumas films have common characteristics which are consistently maintained by the filmmakers. The first is the use of Banyumas Javanese dialect known as Ngapak, to develop the plot of the story. Moreover, the language used is also significant as the highlight of Banyumas identity.

The second characteristic is the setting of the film, which is mainly in Banyumas areas. The third characteristic is the supporting features in the films such as Banyumas icon, symbol, and index. All these characteristics are then combined with simple conflicts which are subjects to the life of lower class society in Banyumas (Trianton, 2008).

This research tries to investigate audience's responses on gender issues in rural life which are portrayed in Banyumas films. There are five films used as the object of the study; they are *Gugat Pegat* (Maharani, 2015), *Mentari di Sambirata* (Adisty, 2012), *Senyum Lasminah* (Leksono, 2005), *Tasmini* (Cute, 2007), and *Skandal Arit* (Wulandari, 2015). Among many Banyumas films, those are chosen due to their eminent depiction of Banyumas' rural life. Above all, they also present gender roles in the rural family and in preserving culture, which is what the study is going to discuss.

The discussion of gender cannot be separated from the concept of sexuality. Gender is defined as the socio-cultural construction of sex (Atkinson, 1987; Francis et al., 2003; Ruth, 1990; Tyson, 2006). Traditional assumption believes that gender division of femininity and masculinity is determined by the biological traits which make female naturally feminine and male naturally masculine. It casts women as being emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive, while men are rational, strong, protective, and

decisive (Tyson, 2006). These traits influence gender role division manifested in any social institution. The family is considered as the smallest social institution which reflects the gender roles between men and women. Parson (Flynn, 2011) has proposed the division of gender roles in the family from a functionalist perspective, into instrumental roles and expressive roles. Instrumental roles are related to the roles of male (the husband) as the income provider for the family. On the other hand, expressive roles are related to the roles of female (the wife) as the caretaker of the home and the emotional relations of the family.

This traditional gender role division is challenged by feminists as it justifies men's superiority and dominance toward women. As a socio-cultural construction, gender roles may vary from different societies and culture. Tchambuli culture of New Guinea is a case in point. The women in that culture have roles such as fishing and manufacturing, even controlling the power and economy of the community. Meanwhile, the men are more dependent, flirtatious, and are concerned with appearance; often adorning themselves with flowers and jewelry (Coon in Wienclaw, 2011).

Gender roles assigned to men and women are also determined by the society itself. Through socialization, an individual learns to differentiate what behavior is acceptable or unacceptable in his or her society. The socialization process occurs soon after the birth of an individual. Wienclaw (2011) has further given an example of the way parents teach sons and daughters differently. Sons are told that 'real boys don't cry' and encouraged to control their softer emotion, while girls are taught not to fight and not to show anger and aggression. These series of behaviors which differ girls and boys are accepted as the feminine and masculine traits of gender differences. The femininity and masculinity which identifies one's gender shows what Judith Butler in Genz & Brabon (2009) formulates as gender performativity. It defines the gendered body as a performance that relies on a certain practice of repetition of conventions which are eventually naturalized and confirmed by society.

## METHODS

The audience reception theory employed in this study is based on the idea that audience has an active role in constructing and interpreting meanings of a text. Hans-Robert Jauss, the earliest figure of reception theory, has believed that literature and art only obtain a history with a character of a process when the succession of works is mediated, not only through the producing subject but also through the consuming subject-through the interaction of author and public (Holub, 1984). Meanwhile, Stuart Hall, the proponent of reception theory, has developed it for media studies by focusing on three decoding methods used by the audience in interpreting meaning; they are dominant, negotiated, and oppositional (Takacs, 2015). The different way through which people make sense of a text is influenced by the social background, including age, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs. These define and distinguish them from others (Davis, 2008).

To examine audience's responses, this qualitative study employs ethnographic approach, as it deals with a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system (Creswell, 1998). In the cultural lens, ethnography involves observation and documentation of the actual process and people who are part of cultural production (Davis, 2008). Data are collected through mixed method. The first method is documented research. The authors

gather information related to Banyumas films from books, newspaper, and internet. This method is also used to gather the secondary data, which consist of theories of Film, Media, and Cultural Studies.

The second method is the questionnaire. 20 students are given questions about Banyumas films and particularly, several gender issues in the film. Focused Group Discussion is the last method conducted. The discussion is held in two groups with 46 participants, consisting of an equal number of male and female. They are the youth generation of Banyumas natives, within the age of 16-30 years old, since the majority of Banyumas film audience is from this age. The group consists of common young people, who are high school and university students, and cinephiles, which belong to Banyumas film community known as Jaringan Kerja Film Banyumas (JKFB). This categorization is based on the consideration that these two groups of participants would have the different way of thinking and responding to the films watched. Moreover, it is important to have male and female participants since the authors need to find out their response on gender relations portrayed in the films. The discussion is initiated by viewing the five Banyumas films, followed by the discussion about issues of gender roles in family and tradition as portrayed in the films.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

There are three Banyumas films used in this research which describes issues related to gender role in the family; they are *Gugat Pegat*, *Tasmini*, and *Skandal Arit*. Each presents different problems which create a conflict between the characters as members of the family.

*Gugat Pegat* (Maharani, 2015) tells about a woman's role as the breadwinner of the family, while her husband has to stay at home due to his unemployment. In this film, the female character works in a factory to financially support her family, while her husband takes over domestic responsibility. The conflict arises as the husband doesn't want to have blue-collar work as he is a university graduate. However, the condition speaks differently. The lack of job opportunities in Purbalingga, the setting of the film, makes it hard to find the perfect job for him. The film shows series of disputes between the husband and the wife about his unemployment and the accusation of the wife's love affair. Eventually, this economic issue affects their marriage as the wife decides to file for a divorce.

Unlike *Gugat Pegat*, *Tasmini* (Cute, 2007) presents the poor but happy life of a married couple. The film is about a rumor related to the husband's love affair with another woman. The rumor begins when the husband is looking for a present in a store for his wife, but the shopkeeper thought it is for another woman. This rumor is then heard by the wife. Instead of being mad at her husband, she prefers to accept the condition if the rumor is true. She does not blame him and instead blames herself for her failure to be a good wife. The film ends with a happy ending since the rumor is not true.

The third film, *Skandal Arit* (Wulandari, 2015), does not present a story about a married couple; instead, it is about a dispute between a male farmer and a female farmer in a farming area. The dispute begins as the male farmer loses his sickle and accuses the female farmer, who is his neighbor, of stealing it. The duration of this film is very short as it only portrays the dispute in a one-act scene. The research chooses this film due to the portrayal of a female farmer in rural Banyumas.

Apart from different scenarios, these three Banyumas films present gender role in relation to the economy of the household. The first film, *Gugat Pegat*, depicts a female-headed family which is by definition a family structure economically dependent on the women (Buvinić & Gupta, 1997). Viewing this phenomenon in their perspectives, the participants of the group discussion have different opinions. Zaki, one of the participants, said that a woman being the breadwinner rarely happens. People in Banyumas, especially those who live in villages, believe that normally the husband works to feed the family, while the wife stays home taking care of the household. Thus, for Zaki at least, men have to be seen going out to work, not because of the income acquired, but of the working activities, to be considered normal/proper in the society. In conclusion, Zaki - who is a college student, personally accepts the phenomenon of women working in public areas, as long as the husband also works to support the family.

Similar to Zaki, another participant named Nanki Nirmanto, believes that image becomes the major concern in Banyumas society. He further explains that for Banyumas people, what a man (husband) does for a living to support his family is more important than the amount of income he gets. Nirmanto himself argues that domestic responsibilities (cleaning house, taking care of the children, etc.) is work to be done by either the husband or the wife. Thus, who stays at home doing the work is not a big concern for him. Zaki's and Nanki's statements indicate that the image built by going out to work is important, as it is natural in the rural society that men work and women stay at home. The gender division in rural Banyumas portrayed in the films indicates that Banyumas rural society still holds the traditional role. That is to differentiate women's and men's role in the family, both in domestic and public areas.

Unlike Zaki and Nanki, other participants named Haza and Kurnia find the social impact of this gender role changing. A woman's working will make her dominant over the man, as seen in *Gugat Pegat*, the husband looks powerless and inferior to his wife. For the man, work is something integral to his life; it is a part of their pride and identity (Haynes, 2016). It indicates that becoming the financial provider of the family makes the man (husband) superior to woman (wife). Thus, when the role is reversed, the attitude also changes. A similar condition is also seen in *Tasmini* (Cute, 2007). The female character of this film is a housewife, while her husband is the breadwinner of the family. She is described as being inferior, weak, and submissive, seen through the way she is coping with the rumor of her husband's love affair. These two examples show how financial dependence has a significant role in determining the leader among the family members.

Sulis Priyo, another participant of the group discussion, also adds that religion (Islam) doesn't require women to have a job to provide income. The husband should be the one responsible for making a living. He believes in that concept as it corresponds to what ulema (religion leader) ever taught him. The influence of the ulema is still an important consideration for villagers. Religious value is still believed to have a strong influence in assessing phenomenon and solving problems that occur in society.

Although there are some viewers who disagree with the shifting roles in the household, there are still more viewers among young people that can accept such conditions, but with an emphasis on economic grounds. The wife goes to work to help raise the family income that may not be fulfilled by the husband. However, due to having

low education levels, the women in the village usually only work as laborers in factories or as domestic assistants.

The debate among participants of the group discussion indicates two major factors which serve as the basis of their arguments. The first is gender ideology. Saptari and Holzner have stated that gender ideology influences behavior and social relation between men and women (Yulianeta, Soeratno, & Kusharyanto, 2016). Another factor is poverty. The audience is tolerable to the phenomenon of women being the primary income provider for the family as the solution to fight poverty. Thus, socio-economic factors in the family affect how gender roles and attitudes are exercised, as in the relationship quality and division of labor (Marks, Lam, & Mchale, 2009).

The number of women who work, particularly around Purbalingga, is due to the impact of the rapid growth of industries in that area. Purbalingga is known for having many factories which produce wig and synthetic eyelashes. Such factories prefer hiring female workers rather than male workers, which consequently makes many men unemployed. This condition is also shown in *Gugat Pegat* movie (Maharani, 2015), which viewers in Banyumas have agreed with. They assume that more women work in this industry because women are considered to be more patient and detailed in making wigs and synthetic eyelashes. This job is assumed to be a feminine work which is appropriate for female workers. The feminine traits which women adhere to are influenced by the traditional assumption that biological and physical differences determine gender construction.

The phenomenon shows that there are gender attributes attached to women and men, which turn out to be the particular consideration that ultimately gives impact on social and economic grounds. The availability of jobs in Purbalingga makes young women uninterested in continuing their education after junior/senior high school because they prefer to work in factories and make money instead of going to college. This is mentioned by a participant who also works at one of the factories in Purbalingga. The low awareness of education is admitted by another participant who states that most young women in her village are quite shallow-minded. These young women prefer to stop studying at junior high school so that they can buy makeup, have sophisticated mobile phone, ride motorcycles, and work at the factory.

Besides the social and economic aspect of women working issue in Banyumas, in particular, Purbalingga, some participants suggest there might be a political factor. Bowo Leksono (2005) has said that the preference of woman laborers for the factories in Purbalingga, is allegedly done to avoid the possibility of a demonstration by workers who demand higher wages. Woman laborers are considered submissive and unwilling to protest about the salary they receive. Financial demand in their family makes them fear to lose their jobs. In this case, women's characters which are considered weak and always putting emotion before reason, prevent woman workers from protesting against the factory's policy.

This condition shows how stereotype works. Ruth (1990) has defined stereotype as a composite image of traits and expectations pertaining to some group. This image is pertinent in the social mind though it is somehow off-center or inaccurate. Specifically, gender stereotype is a belief on the psychological traits and characteristics which distinguish men and women (Brannon in Ayuningtyas, 2015). The effect is harmful to the stereotyped group and those with whom the members of the group interact. The negative stereotype of women has created unequal treatment on economic, social,

and political areas, like those women who work in factories.

Another gender issue presented in Banyumas films is gender role in preserving culture/tradition in their village. Two films are selected as the object of the research, namely *Mentari di Sambirata* and *Senyum Lasminah*. *Mentari di Sambirata* (Adisty, 2012) is a Banyumas film made by a high school student from SMAN 1 Rembang, Purbalingga named Astri Rahma Adisty. Produced in 2012, this 11-minute film has received many awards; they are Best Short Fiction Film in Festival Film Purbalingga (FFP), The Second Best Film in Festival Film Dokumenter dan Fiksi/Cerita tingkat Jawa Tengah, The Best Cameramen at Festival Film Dokumenter dan Fiksi/Cerita tingkat Jawa Tengah, the winner of Best Fiction in Festival Film Pemuda, nominee of Best Film in Avikom Film Festival, Best Film at Festival Film Pelajar Jogja, and The Judges Special Award at Festival Film Indonesia (FFI).

Martini, the main character of *Mentari di Sambirata*, chooses to stay in her village and work as a potter. Pottery is a local industry which has been run from generations to generations. She refuses to follow her boyfriend and other young people who prefer to migrate to big cities like Jakarta. For villagers, migrating to big cities is considered as the best option to increase their living standard. This phenomenon can be seen every year, especially after lebaran (Eid) or the long holiday, when more people come back to Jakarta compared to those who leave. These rural people, mostly the youth, are interested in trying to find a job in Jakarta after seeing their neighbors who work there having better style and appearance. However as difficult as it might be, it is believed that big cities give new space to new challenges and opportunities as well as freedom for youth migrants (Dyryness, 2014). Thus, urbanization is multifaceted; it is related to changes in social and economic condition, and even political process (Armstrong and McGee in Setyono, Yunus, & Giyarsih, 2016).

*Mentari di Sambirata*, however, depicts the same issue from a different perspective. Migrating to Jakarta with no skills, as shown by Martini's boyfriend in this film, is not the right decision. That is because he cannot compete with other job seekers who have better set of skills. Effendi (as cited in Hanif et al., 2016) has stated that job seekers with low education and skills tend to deal with informal sector in industry and services. Martini's decision to stay in her village and continue the pottery tradition is considered as the right decision in this film.

Besides *Mentari di Sambirata*, another film which portrays women as a cultural nurturer is *Senyum Lasminah* (Leksono, 2005). This 20-minute film is produced in 2005 by Bowo Leksono, a filmmaker from Purbalingga. It won the second place of the Best Film at Festival Video Edukasi in 2007, which is held by Balai Pengembangan Media Televisi Pendidikan (BPMTP). Furthermore, *Senyum Lasminah* is also screened at Boemboe 3 Cities Short Film Festival in 2008. This film tells about Lasminah, a young orphaned girl who lives with her brother and grandmother. When her parents died, Lasminah does not continue her study. Instead, she decides to work and take care of her family. With a lower level of educational background and no working experience, Lasminah cannot provide good income from her work. Lasminah makes batik and sells it to several batik stores in the town nearby. She is interested in following her friend to migrate to Jakarta to get more money to support her brother's education. However, in the end, Lasminah decides to stay in her village and make batik with her grandmother. The female figures such as Martini in

*Mentari di Sambirata* and Lasminah in *Senyum Lasminah*, describe women who take part in preserving traditional culture amidst the modern era.

Responding to this phenomenon, most participants of the group discussion agree that it does not commonly happen in their village. Only a few women in their village prefer to live in the village and continue the tradition, such as in the film in which the female character chooses to make pottery, which is a traditional industry. Many young women choose to work in factories or to be a household assistant because it is considered to be more promising financially. Moreover, it also gives the new experience for them.

The participants of the group discussion state that women have no interest in preserving and continuing the tradition as it is considered outdated. The outdated term here is associated with Landis' explanation on the characteristic of traditional culture as the way of people adapting to their natural environment (Rahardjo, 2014). Rural life is dependent on the elements of nature, such as land, water, rainfall, and many others. Moreover, Landis also believed that nature affects rural people's passive and submissive attitudes. This attitude is in contrast with the characteristic of modern life with its technology advancement that demands a more dynamic life.

From the audience's perspectives, today, the ones who actively take part in preserving culture/tradition are women from the old generation. As stated by Tefur and Destriyani, group discussion participants from Pliken village and Karanglewas village in Banyumas, housewives take this responsibility while taking care of their children. They are engaged in the traditional industry only to make money to support the family financially. This indicates the villagers' lack of awareness in preserving culture/tradition which is supposed to be the identity of their village. The effort done by these women is underestimated by other people and even themselves, since they only do it as a part-time job.

Another opinion is stated by Ayu Hana Kristina, a participant of the group discussion from Pogung village, Kebumen regency. She sees that the majority of women become the caretaker of tradition because women are considered to be more precise than men. Moreover, the socio-cultural construction which divides the role of husband and wife in the family affects the phenomenon. Men's responsibility to provide income does not allow him to take part in preserving tradition. Consequently, women, who are mostly housewives, have better opportunity to take part as they have more time. A similar opinion is said by Slamet Rianto, a participant from Argapeni village, Kebumen. He thinks that women have lower mobility than men; women have more time to preserve and continue the tradition of their villages. In short, gender role in preserving culture/tradition is influenced by the gender role in the family. Women are considered to be the suitable party to preserve tradition/culture due to her nurturing character as a caretaker of the household.

## CONCLUSIONS

Through the films researched, the authors can conclude that people in rural Banyumas still hold traditional gender role in the family. That is for a husband to provide income to support the family financially and his wife to have domestic responsibility such as cleaning the house and rearing the children. However, the audiences, who are the young generation of Banyumas, tend to have a more open-minded perspective.

They can accept the changing gender role in this era which gives more opportunity for women to work in public areas. They take it as the wife's financial support to help her husband cope with their poverty. Despite their acceptance of the changing role, most audiences emphasize that the purpose of women working in public areas is mere to support her husband, not as the main income provider for the family. Moreover, the traditional gender role division in the family also affects the gendered social roles in preserving tradition/culture. The audience realizes that nowadays, Banyumas people, especially the youth, are less interested in helping with cultural preservation in their villages. They think that traditional culture is outdated; it is no longer suitable for today's era of globalization and technology advancement. However, the role of women in preserving culture is valued as women's expressive role as a nurturer.

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