

**IMAGINING JAVANESENESS  
IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN SOCIO-CULTURAL  
DOCUMENTARIES**

**Gerardus Majella Adhyanggono**

**31269160**

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**To my beloved Novi, Tio and Aghni**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gerardus Majella Adhyanggono', written over a horizontal dashed line.

Gerardus Majella Adhyanggono

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores imagination of Javanese-ness, from a selection of contemporary Indonesian socio-cultural-themed documentaries in the first decade of the Indonesian reform period. The 1998 political change of Indonesia, from the authoritarian regime of the New Order to a more democratic one, rendered significant impacts in many aspects of Indonesians' lives. Personal attempts to reinterpret ethnic identities was one of them. These were captured in the documentary filmmaking practices of the period where imagining Javanese-ness had been hardly problematised before. Such attempts matter as in the New Order period, the regime had developed its Java-centric state culture that was aristocratic, moralistic, and capitalistic.

The examined documentaries of this post-authoritarian period suggests that Javanese-ness is not a homogeneous construct, but heterogeneous, amorphous, and transient one. I make use of a hermeneutic constructionism to analyse Javanese-ness in the films. As a result, three models of Javanese-ness projected in the documentaries of diverse topics demonstrate the fluid nature of what it means to be Javanese. The first is an imagined Javanese-ness based on some interpretations of traditional Javanese values in their representational links to the Javanese courts. The second is an imagined Javanese-ness critical to some traditional values and unrelated to the courts. And the third is a projected Javanese-ness resulted from a negotiation with a political history.

By examining the imagined Javanese-ness of the documentary films of the period, this thesis not only provides how Javanese-ness is understood and represented in the post-authoritarian Indonesia but also a piece of evidence of the revival of documentary movement in the country. At the same time, there is a shift from the previously state-dominated documentary production to a more democratised, civic and liberal one.

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**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION**

This thesis is a study of documentary films that engage with the concept of cultural identity in an Indonesian context. The cultural identity here is of the Javanese, an ethnic group living in Indonesia. The research problem of this thesis lies in the projection of the Javanese in several socio-cultural documentaries of the first decade of the Indonesian reform period (1998-2008). The mental picture negates the only established and unnegotiable construct of Javanese-ness, which is refined in language and manner, highly moralistic, and capitalistic, as promulgated by the New Order regime (1967-1998) in the political history of Indonesia (Foulcher, 1990; Pemberton, 1994; Jones, 2012, 2013). Conversely, the projection of the documentary films under study is not a homogeneous construct, but heterogeneous, amorphous, and transient ones.

I examine the documentary films to uncover and delineate the images of Javanese-ness depicted beneath the surface of the films' subject matters. The documentary films studied here are *Jamu* (Utami and Prasetya, 2002), *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* (Noor, 2002), *Ksatria Kerajaan* (Darmawan and Nugroho, 2005), *Kulo Ndiko Sami* (Gunritno, Sobirin and Rabernir, 2005), *Wayang Kulit: Shadow Theatre in Java* (Tanzil, 2005), and *Bathik: Bebet lan Bobot Lakuning Urip* (Chrisna, 2008). This thesis will discuss the representations of the Javanese in the textual level of the films. As in the contextual level, this thesis will explore the imaginations the documentaries try to articulate and their meanings, which are perceived from the cultural vantage point, as indicated by the concern of the thesis above.

I divide this chapter into four sections. Section one explains the reasons why the documentary films are selected. Section two defines the purpose, approach, research questions, and hypothesis. Part three discusses why Javanese-ness matters in this undertaking. Section four outlines the content of each chapter in this thesis.

### 1.1. Reasons for Selecting the Documentary Films

The documentary films above become the object of analysis in this thesis because of two reasons, textual and contextual ones. The films textually express the filmmakers' interpretations and representations of Javanese as ordinary peoples. Erick Barnow mentions that "In most periods of documentary history, production has been controlled by groups in power" (Barnouw, 1993, p. 286). The filmmakers of the examined documentaries are not those in power. Non-professional filmmakers, in the sense of the mainstream cinema industry, produce the documentaries. They are not affiliated to government institutions nor main film industries in Indonesia.

They are filmmakers who come from different backgrounds but who have shown their passion for documentary filmmaking and for using actualities to voice their perspectives. A famous female novelist in Indonesia, Ayu Utami<sup>1</sup>, in collaboration with Erick Prasetya produces *Jamu*. A marginalised sub-Javanese ethnic community, *Sedulur Sikep*, produces *Kulo Ndiko Sami* in cooperation with Ford Foundation<sup>2</sup>. A group of Surakarta State University (UNS) students makes *Bathik: Bebet lan Bobot Lakuning Urip*. A non-governmental organisation, LKiS (Institute for Study of Islam), produces *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*. A band of documentary activists in Yogyakarta makes *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Wayang Kulit: The Shadow Theatre in Java*. All of them come from different places in Java.

The documentaries also involve ordinary peoples as their films' subjects who talk about their daily lives and viewpoints related to the films' topics brought to light by the filmmakers. *Jamu* is a documentary that highlights Javanese traditional herbal medicine. The film revolves around the mythic qualities of the traditional medicine about sex practices in Jakarta's urban life. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* is a documentary

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<sup>1</sup> Utami's famous works are *Saman* (1998), *Larung* (2000), *Lalita* (2012), and *Maya* (2013).

<sup>2</sup> Ford Foundation is a global private foundation advancing human welfare and cultures. The foundation is headquartered in New York (Foundation, 2017)

that describes the interfaith tolerance among the villagers of Sorowajan in Yogyakarta. The syncretism of local belief with different beliefs has paved the way to a new tradition of interreligious gathering and praying that follows *nyadran*. *Nyadran* is a tradition of praying for the departed souls of ancestors and family members.

*Ksatria Kerajaan* illustrates an ordinary life of a royal guard at the Sultanate Palace of Yogyakarta. The guard believes that serving the palace and the *Sultan* (the King) as an *abdi dalem* (king's servant) is a blessing. *Kulo Ndiko Sami* describes a struggle of *Sedulur Sikep* (*Samin*) people to get recognition of the government on their existence culturally, socially, and legally. *Sedulur Sikep* is part of Javanese society that is distinct from the majority Javanese. *Wayang Kulit: Shadow Theatre in Java* portrays a shadow puppet master, Sagio, who wholeheartedly devotes himself to preserving of *wayang kulit* making techniques. *Batik: Bebet lan Bobot Lakuning Urip* represents *Semen Rama*, one of the Javanese *batik* motifs, its history and symbolic meanings. *Batik* (the Indonesianised word of the Javanese *bathik*) is a traditional fabric worn by many ethnic groups in Indonesia, especially by the Javanese.

Contextually, in the history of Indonesian documentary film, the Indonesian governments from 1945 to 1998, particularly of the New Order regime (1967-1998), were in the full control of the documentary production, distribution and even exhibition (Hanan, 2010, 2012; Nugroho and Herlina S., 2015). Following the fall of the New Order regime in May 1998, various social, religious and cultural movements pervaded Indonesia. Among them was independent filmmaking (Ratna, 2007; Putri, 2013; Rosalia, 2016). The documentaries in this thesis embody this spirit of independent filmmaking in the first decade of reform periods (1998-2008). Freedom of expressions after the end of the New Order regime in 1998 has enabled documentary films to present socio-political and cultural issues more freely than in the New Order's times. With this spirit of freedom, documentary films became a medium to express multiple views on the

socio-political and cultural issues including Javaneseness.

Although the six documentaries studied embody independent spirit of the time, they are not truly “independent” in the sense of the contemporary American independent cinema and the Indonesian context. Yannis Tzioumakis (2015) reconfirms that American independent cinema is characterised by low-budget, low-key quality film and is regarded to have no ties with any prominent Hollywood enterprises. Ariani Darmawan, a documentary filmmaker of *Kineruku* film community, explains that independent cinema in the Indonesian context is understood as a kind of film that is self-produced, self-funded with minimum budget, and self-distributed outside conventional cinema theatres (Darmawan, 2007, p. 3). This kind of movie is mostly exhibited in campuses, cinema clubs, and public places, such as in malls and city parks. Independent films in Indonesia are often perceived as films with low quality cinematographically (Darmawan, 2007; Putri, 2013; Arifianto and Junaedi, 2014; Rosalia, 2016).

From the six documentary films studied, only *Jamu* that can be considered an independent documentary in the sense that the film is produced and funded by Ayu Utami and Erik Setiawan, without any external sponsors (Benny, 2003; unpaginated). *Jamu* is also screened and distributed by Ayu and Erik themselves and can be publically accessed on the internet<sup>3</sup>. Other films, *Kulo Ndiko Sami*, *Bathik*, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Wayang Kulit*, are funded in cooperation with the external party, especially with Ford Foundation. This fact, to a certain degree, explains that most Indonesian documentary films in the first decade of the reform era still heavily relied on the support of foreign funding, such as Ford Foundation, Hivos, and Ecco Films.

Kukuh Yuda Karnanta, an Indonesian documentary film scholar, even boldly

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<sup>3</sup> see *Jamu* at <http://www.indonesianfilmcenter.com>

concludes this dependency of non-state Indonesian documentary filmmaking on the foreign funding as “a new form of colonialism and Orientalism” disguised in the justification of the power of documentary films to bring socio-political impact to society (Karnanta, 2012, pp. 10–11). Karnanta expresses his criticism on the financing structure of the citizen-engaged documentary filmmaking in Indonesia. He thinks that instead of independently voicing out socio-cultural concerns from within the society, documentary filmmaking could be steered and dictated by foreign motives and interests (Karnanta, 2012, p. 11).

The “independent” spirit of the examined documentaries lies in their negation of the established image of Javanese culture constructed by the New Order regime in their filmic representation of Javanese culture. The New Order’s image of Javanese culture is a socio-cultural construct of the New Order regime that is heavily orientated towards the characteristics of the Javanese court cultures. In this regard, Javanese culture was imagined to be a representation of the Javanese and Indonesians who were refined and sophisticated by manner, language, customs, and that were heavily tailored to economic development. The regime considered such a construct absolute and unnegotiable. The New Order regime developed an aristocratic Javanese mentality to support their economic developmental agendas. This mentality was expressed in the regime’s bureaucracy and policies (Foulcher, 1990; Pemberton, 1994; Jones, 2013).

## **1.2. Purpose, Approach, Research Questions, and Hypothesis**

To uncover the articulation of Javanese culture in the films, I employ a synthesised approach that I call “a hermeneutic constructionism”. This approach subsumes theories of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic symbolism, Benedict Anderson's imagined communities and Stuart Hall's constructionist cultural representation, as well as Eugenia Siapera's typology of the regime of cultural representation. Also, I apply Bill Nichols' models and



modes of documentary exposition to identify the nature of the examined films. I regard this synthesised approach highly compatible to substantiate my hypothesis because the approach intrinsically and extrinsically provides strong links to the representation of Javanese-ness in the documentaries. The films speak of Javanese-ness through the incorporation of Javanese values, their usage and meaning in the documentaries' socio-cultural representations. Thus, this approach is a very supporting theoretical approach to examine Javanese-ness pertinent to the socio-political and cultural conditions in the first decade of the Indonesian reform era (1998-2008).

I limit the investigation during this period because of two reasons. First, Katinka van Heeren (2012), a Dutch scholar of Indonesian culture and film, considers that the first decade of the reform era was the most euphoric and liberal moment for the development of documentary filmmaking in Indonesia. Other Indonesian film critics such as Lulu Ratna, Garin Nugroho and Dyna Herlina also share Heeren's view (Ratna, 2007; Nugroho and Herlina S., 2015). Second, although the regime has changed, the period still shows uncertain economic, political, social and cultural dynamism that affects the majority of the Indonesian population. In such a condition, documentary films in Indonesia find their own space to express and criticise the situation. As regards the theories and the method applied, I will explain them further in chapters two and three.

In investigating the projection of Javanese-ness in the six documentaries, which is different from that of the New Order regime, I develop the analysis on the following research questions: By what means do the documentaries aesthetically and culturally express images of Javanese-ness? What images of Javanese-ness do the documentary films construct? How do the documentaries project different models of Javanese-ness viewed from a hermeneutic constructionism? I hypothesize that these documentary films demonstrate a dynamic interplay between social issues and Javanese cultures in their

representations. The interaction articulates images of Javanese-ness that are more democratised, personal, liberal, and ephemeral than the New Order's aristocratic Javanese-ness.

### **1.3. Significance of the Study of Javanese-ness**

Javanese-ness is significant in this investigation because, in the political history of Indonesia, the authoritarian New Order regime developed a hegemonic state culture orientated towards the characteristics of the aristocratic Javanese. The history of the modern Indonesian state is roughly divided into three periods. The Old Order period was led by Sukarno's regime (1945-1967). The New Order period was ruled by Suharto's administration (1967- 1998). Five presidents have governed the Reform period (1998-to the present day) because of the democratic elections.

The transitions of the power of these periods did not work smoothly as political upheavals, public demonstration and social movements (people power) always came along with them (Vickers, 2005; Mietzner, 2015). A political rivalry between the Indonesian Communist Party and the Indonesian Army took place during the Old Order period to gain President Sukarno's support. The competition led up to the abductions and the murders of some Army generals and officers in 1965. This tragedy became the main trigger to topple Sukarno's Old Order. Suharto, a Javanese origin and chief of the Army's strategic reserve command, subdued the attempt of a coup by Indonesian Communist Party on September 30, 1965. This incident preceded the rise of Suharto's New Order to replace Sukarno's regime through a transfer of power by the mandate of the People's Consultative Assembly (Vatikiotis, 2003; Vickers, 2005; Hunter, 2007).

Having overthrown the Old Order regime, the New Order regime highly prioritised economic development to boost Indonesian modernity. This policy neglected

other spectrums of people's life such as freedom of expression and human rights for over thirty years. The regime developed a state culture where unity was over-emphasised while diversity was domesticated to prevent threats to the regime's economic developmental agenda. In a condition where the state tightly oversaw its citizens through the state apparatus, the New Order regime developed the aristocratic Javanese-ness. The combination of policing its citizens and projecting the elitism of Javanese-ness induced a negative mentality of most Indonesian civil servants, a fear of superior authority, self-control and a lack of initiative-seeking (Vatikiotis, 2003, p. 109). As a result, personal relationships to get promotion among the civil servants and to approach public officials pervaded the regime's governance. This situation begot chronic corruption, collusion and nepotism in the bureaucracy of the New Order. In the mid of the 1990s, corruption, collusion and nepotism were aggravated by the state's foreign debts, the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and the domestic pressures forcing the New Order regime to its demise (Robertson-Snape, 1999; Vatikiotis, 2003).

In the Indonesian reform era, many people readily criticised and despised many things pertinent to the cultural past, especially Javanese cultural practices and beliefs that were once overtly politicised and manipulated by the New Order regime. *Wayang kulit* performance was a case in point. *Wayang kulit* performance carrying traditional Javanese worldview and values became less popular and even treated with suspicion, particularly in urban areas. The conventional Javanese worldview is a way of thinking and feeling of the Javanese of their life experience. The Javanese have a conviction that all existence is united and related in this universe. Existence is ordered in a regulated order of the world, a cosmological context (Mulder, 1970, p. 105). Human existence as an individual and part of a society is in this order. Human life is inseparable from both religious and non-religious dimensions. Thus, human life is related to supernatural powers (Mulder, 1983, 2005).

The Javanese consider that it is not essential to contradict between the seen and the unseen, the physical and the supernatural as they are always there and complementary. Keeping the balance of this universal order and within human life experience is significant. Therefore, the Javanese emphasise “inner- tranquillity, harmony and stability, the acceptance of events as they come and the subordination of the individual to society and of society to the universe” (Mulder, 1970, p. 105). With this worldview, a *wayang kulit* puppeteer traditionally used the show as an educational medium to remind the audience of the importance of keeping the balance and harmony in life. During the New Order period, *wayang kulit* performance was frequently politicised to deliver the regime’s developmental agenda (Basuki, 2006, pp. 74–75).

In the early period of the Reform era, this politicised art form of the New Order regime was in part misleadingly challenged for the government had positioned Javanese culture as a privilege among cultures of other ethnic groups (Budianta, 2000, p. 110). The challenge occurred because of several reasons. First, some Javanese cultural expressions and practices expressing traditional values, such as that of *wayang kulit*, were associated with the ways the New Order used to propagate the regime’s developmental programmes (Budianta, 2000; Basuki, 2006). Second, radical and reformist Islam distanced themselves from such cultural practices and even believed that the traditional methods would stain the true teachings of Islam. This general view of the reformist Islam has been mainly propagated since the revival of Indonesia’s Islamic modernist since the 1970s (Howell, 2001; Woodward, 2011). Third, young urban middle-class generations aligned themselves more with pop culture than with any traditional cultures (Budianta, 2000; Heryanto, 2008).

In connection with these reasons, the Indonesian populace in general associated the New Order’s *priyayi* culture to be the “whole” representation of Javanese culture.

Such an association is erroneous. Worse, Javanese culture was blamed for being responsible for aggravating Indonesia's acute problems of corruption, collusion, and nepotism (Robertson-Snape, 1999, p. 597). I perceive that such a generalisation is far from being sensible and acceptable as Javanese culture and identity are far more complex than what was believed and practised by the New Order regime.

In this thesis, I do not intend to provide a homogeneous understanding of Javanese culture. I do not believe that Javanese culture can be fixed into a set of attributes. There are no such definite traits "typically Javanese". One's attitudes and personalities may be found across different cultures. Nonetheless, it is still relevant to touch upon some attributes commonly associated with Javanese people precisely because the New Order regime confirmed such a stereotype. The Javanese are generally represented as being refined, reserved, socially caring, and religious. These characteristics are a fragmental piece of the gamut of Java, Javanese peoples and their complex values (Suseno, 1996; Herusatoto, 2000; Endraswara, 2013b; Werdiningsih, 2015). Such amiable attributes once became the hegemonic cultural representations of the Indonesian state run by the authoritarian New Order as the only historical truth to represent Java and Indonesia.

As I mentioned before, the New Order government adopted some elements of Javanese court-based *priyayi* culture to be the permeating values that characterised the cultural representations of Indonesia. The term *priyayi* originally stems from "*parayayi*", which means "younger brothers and sisters (of a king)". In the past, *priyayi* designated a ruling social group that included king and his families, nobles and officials, court-based administrators and local chiefs. Traditionally, a *priyayi* was a well-born Javanese holding government office thoroughly versed in the aristocratic culture of the courts. He should be familiar with Javanese classical literature, music and dance, the *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet), with the subtleties of philosophy, ethics and mysticism.

He should have mastered proper behaviour, refined language, and dress. He was also expected to be skilful in the arts of war (Sutherland, 1975, pp. 57–58).

The New Order regime projected this *priyayi* culture by envisioning it as an imagined representation of the Javanese and Indonesian peoples as a whole. They were described as educated peoples with lofty and refined language, civilised and well-mannered attitudes with Dutch colonial public moral standards (domesticating women in a family). The description was further mixed with an economic-orientated logic that justified self-profit seeking (Jones, 2012, p. 155). Eventually, *priyayi* culture is a court culture that is rooted in traditional Javanese beliefs and on the self-conduct of a Javanese leader. A conventional Javanese leader is expected to be trustworthy, to manifest his or her words in actions as the correlation of words and actions reflects self-integrity. Therefore, a traditional *priyayi* views society, social work, and self as something integral. This view becomes “*the priyayi ethos*” (Errington, 1984, p. 276).

However, I view that the New Order regime seemed to overlook this ethos when adopting the court culture. The administration stressed the obedience of the ruled to the ruler, the citizens to the government. Then, this obedience mentality along with the New Order’s developmental policy functioned as a cultural discourse to legitimise the Javanese-oriented regime. Two circumstances suggest such a condition: the general perception of the regime’s civil servants about President Suharto and the over-politicised *wayang kulit* performance by the New Order regime. In respect of the public opinion of the New Order regime’s civil servants, members of the government apparatus view Suharto like a Javanese king. Although Suharto was a Muslim, he still practised some Javanese asceticism.

Suseno (1996) and Endraswara (2013a) mention that traditional Javanese belief sees that there is a close relationship between worldly power and spiritual one. Javanese rulers are traditionally regarded to have these two powers and to be the

intermediary between the divine and the world. Such a reading was manifested in the fear of authority in the context of the New Order. This view seemed to find its justification as Suharto's wife, Mrs Tien Suharto, claimed to be a descendant of Mangkunegaran house, a Javanese principality in Surakarta region. His subordinates regarded these all as a sound reasoning of the aristocratic Javaneseness that the New Order regime practised (Pemberton, 1994, pp. 304–307).

As regards the over-politicised *wayang kulit* performance by the New Order, this traditional art form had to comply with the New Order regime's cultural policy. Culture was used to support regime's developmental agenda and political stabilisation. Such a plan was manifested in some strategies. In the first place, the New Order's cultural system made art and cultural performances become a means of communication between the regime and its ordinary citizens. Afterwards, such cultural performances had to communicate the regime's developmental slogans and messages. Then, the performances were compelled to avert any political topics and discussion. This attempt was achieved through promulgation of generic and inoffensive stories and messages of development and by applying some technical measurements such as reducing the performance time, using refined and polite Indonesian language and altering elements considered exposing vivid sexuality to the public (Jones, 2013, pp. 138–139).

The combination of aristocratic Javanese mindset and the cultural policy above became the frame of reference for all regional cultures in Indonesia to develop. This New Order's system was implemented to enhance the regime's cultural grand design. The grand plan was to orientate Indonesian cultural evolution towards progress and modernity. Ali Moertopo, one of Suharto's trusted advisors, reveals this orientation of the New Order's cultural strategy in his book *Cultural Strategies*.

The New Order must be capable of finishing the huge task that faces it, that is to make Indonesia into a stable subject, a strong subject, by the standards of world development. The New Order must be able to execute cultural tasks that are important, executing cultural borrowing (acculturation) in the passage of world

history both now and in the future. This is the cultural nucleus that we must formulate now. This includes thoughts and planning connected to scientific and technological progress, economic development, and the development of social systems [...] progress in language and the arts and development connected with religion (Moertopo, 1978 in Jones, 2013, p. 122).

The policy above suggests that local cultural expressions in Indonesia had to support the regime's developmental agenda. The New Order regime had the authority to ban any cultural practices and performances insofar as they do not accord with the regime's cultural policy. The diverse cultures in Indonesia were permitted to thrive based on this policy. The combination of this policy and the mentality of aristocratic Javanese shadowed the representations of cultural pluralism in Indonesia for over thirty years. Ethnic cultures at the same time became the vehicle of the New Order's justification to voice developmental agendas and to re-strengthen the idea of national identity (Jones, 2012, pp. 150–151).

Such a cultural construct disguised the New Order regime's main interest that is stabilising and controlling political condition. Therefore, the ideological language of this regime overvalued unity at the expense of diversity. This view applied to nearly all aspects of public life including cultural representations. Representations of cultural pluralism were still maintained after they were domesticated by the cultural policy aforementioned. Such a method was meant to give an impression that there was harmony between local cultures and state culture, namely Java-centric mentality, progress and modernity (Jones, 2013, p. 140).

An example was the control of *wayang kulit* puppeteers by the New Order regime. Suharto's cronies established and sponsored *Senawangi* and *Pepadi*, two organisations of *wayang kulit* puppeteers. Politically, they were designed to domesticate the puppeteers. Culturally, these organisations had a task to promote *wayang kulit* style of Surakarta as an essential part of Javanese traditional performing art (Cohen, 2014, p. 3).



Another example was the ban of *Genjer-Genjer* traditional song of Banyuwangi, East Java. The song's lyrics were about poverty in the region of Banyuwangi. The words told about a poor woman earning a living from picking *genjer* (a flat-tasting river plant) and selling it at the market. As the song was used by the Indonesian Communist Party to decry Indonesia's economic inequality and to attract the sympathy of the poor, the New Order regime banned it. The song was viewed as the enemy of the state (Parlindungan, 2016, pp. 237–239).

Some scholars point out that the New Order's version of *priyayi* culture is very much a simplification of Javanese culture and identity. Javaneseness cannot be summed up by *priyayi* culture nor by court-based culture alone. There are various Javanese cultures other than court-based one (Hatley *et al.*, 1984; Laksono, 1990; Pemberton, 1994). For example, Hatley mentions that both social and geographic factors constitute the diversity of Java. While the court culture is considered a refined (*alus*) and reserved one, those more distant from the palaces are stereotyped as being coarse (*kasar*). Other cultural practices away from the heartland courts are as culturally valid as the courts (Hatley *et al.*, 1984, p. 1).

Multiple expressions within Javanese culture are evident. Various traditions and rituals speak about them as in the case of the tradition and ritual in the district of Bagelen, Purworejo, in Central Java. In Bagelen, some villages develop their local histories, myths, legends and village cleansing (*bersih desa*) traditions irrespective of the past political influence of the court of Yogyakarta (Laksono, 1990, p. 76). Pemberton further confirms such phenomena as he demonstrates the various customs of village cleansing in different regions of Wilagen, Bayat, and Pedan. However, such diversity had occurred only in the period before the New Order's politicised emphasis on "unity" rather than variety came into the discourse. As a result, messages of harmony, security, well-being and one-ness were heavily promoted (Pemberton, 1994, pp. 239–

242).

I need to reiterate my overall argument that the six Indonesian documentary films examined in this thesis show a complex interplay between social issues and Javanese cultures in their representations. This interplay has yielded more democratised, personal, interpretive, and varied imagination of Javaneseness unlike the one promoted by the New Order regime with its *priyayi* culture. Each documentary brings forth a different socio-cultural issue.

#### **1.4. Outline of the Chapters**

This thesis is by no means comprehensive as it focuses only on the Javanese cultural representations of the documentary films. I consider that such cultural representations express cinematic and cultural attempts to rearticulate Javanese cultural identity in the documentary films. Considering that all films are political (Zimmer and Leggett, 1974, p. 136), this research explores how cultural practices and expressions deeply rooted in Javanese traditional values and beliefs imply a message of redefining cultural identity, imagining Javaneseness.

I arrange the thesis into nine chapters. Chapter two, the literature review, explains the theories and references, and the reason why I employ them in this thesis. They are Ricoeur's hermeneutic symbolism, Anderson's imagined communities, Hall's constructionist cultural representation, Nichols' typology of documentary and Siapera's typology of cultural representation regime. These are the main theoretical frameworks that support my analysis, which I call the hermeneutic constructionism.

Chapter three explains the methodology for investigating the thesis subject. This part mainly describes how I will apply the hermeneutic constructionism in reading the films. This method sets off from reading the documentaries aesthetically. Then, such textual analysis will be developed into the cultural analysis contextual to the films'

contents. As the approach suggests, the hermeneutic constructionism, I will take one or two crucial scene(s) in each film and analyse them.

Chapters four and five concern the analysis of the symbolism used in the documentary films to project Javanese-ness. The documentaries examined in chapter three are *Jamu, Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami* while in chapter four are *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*, *Wayang Kulit: Shadow Theatre in Java* and *Bathik: Bebet lan Bobot Lakuning Urip*. These two chapters deal with the symbolism expressing traditional and contemporary Javanese cultural identity in the films. In Ricoeurian hermeneutics, beliefs that constitute symbols are also investigated. "Beliefs" in this case refer to the folkloric materials expressed in the films. These subsume folk-beliefs and myths manifested in particular objects or events in the documentaries. Therefore, both symbols and beliefs are also pertinent to the documentaries' iconography examined here. Iconography also speaks of the cultural meanings beyond the visual language of the film (see also Grant, 2007; Kuhn and Westwell, 2012).

The investigation is directed to unravelling the meanings of symbols in the films. It examines how the symbols are illustrated in the documentaries so that they may evoke further interpretation about Javanese-ness. This analysis aims to explain and to understand multiple meanings of the symbols both from cultural and filmic perspectives. Thus, questions raised in chapter three and four are what symbols are used, how the symbols are aesthetically and rhetorically described, and what the symbols hermeneutically suggest in the films. My argument in chapter four and five is that the employment of the symbols and their meanings determine the kinds of Javanese-ness represented in the documentaries.

From examining the symbols of Javanese-ness in chapters four and five, chapter six focuses on *Bathik: Bebet lan Bobot Lakuning Urip*, *Wayang Kulit: Shadow Theatre in Java* and *Ksatria Kerajaan*. This chapter argues that from the socio-political and

cultural analysis the films produce a specific image of Javanese-ness that is heavily orientated to traditional values. The Javanese-ness here provides a representation of what it means to be Javanese in the reform era of Indonesia. The questions following this projection are formulated as follows: What is the nature of this representation? What representational methods are used to illustrate such an image? How can the films produce the traditional value-based Javanese-ness that relates to the socio-political and cultural contexts of the era?

Chapter seven describes a different image of Javanese-ness. The films studied here are *Jamu* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami*. These films with their distinct representations demonstrate a marginalised model of Javanese-ness from its sexuality-related traditional medicine (*jamu*), and a marginalised social group (the *Sikep*). From the socio-historical contexts, this image has something to do with an idea to dissociate Javanese-ness from the New Order's construct of Javanese *priyayi*. This marginalised Javanese-ness is vital to be revealed as its representations communicate socio-political and cultural critiques of the early reform era. What image of Javanese-ness do they produce? How do the documentary films distinctively express their evaluations? Also, were their claims justified or not in the first decade of the Indonesian reform period?

Chapter eight represents another image from *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*. The image produced articulates a negotiated interpretation of Javanese-ness itself. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* illustrates Javanese-ness from the standpoint of a Javanese village tradition called *nyadran*. This tradition is remodelled and re-signified. On the one hand, the transformation reflects a public acceptance of the socio-political and historical change in the 1965's Indonesia.

On the other hand, it also expresses a need to maintain socio-cultural values. This negotiated effort is manifested by modifying the *nyadran* tradition. With this in

mind, questions arise, such as what image of Javanese-ness does the film produce? To what extent does this projection of Javanese-ness reveal a subjective truth that is documented? Why does tradition still play an important role in expressing the sense of belonging to Javanese culture and identity in the early reform era?

The final chapter, chapter nine, is the conclusion. This part underlines the three models of Javanese-ness that the films project. This chapter reiterates the significant relationship between the symbols and the models of Javanese-ness represented. Also, this final section concludes that the documentary films analysed can be said to have imagined a more democratised, subjective, interpretive and diverse representations of Javanese-ness. In this kind of projection, I argue that there is no presence of a single authoritarian narrative of Javanese-ness as once exercised during the New Order regime. This thesis concludes that the six Indonesian documentary films show a dynamic interplay between social issues and Javanese cultures in their representations. The dynamism, to a certain degree, also reflects the vibrant resurgence of documentary and independent filmmaking in Indonesia.

The documentary films examined showcase the convergence of creativity and freedom in highlighting themes once-repressed during the New Order regime. Each documentary brings forth a different socio-cultural issue. The represented models of Javanese-ness are an example of a productive imagination of being a Javanese. These models encapsulate the traditional, marginalised and negotiated images. In comparison to the established aristocratic image of being Javanese à la the New Order, the images are more interpretive, democratised, personal, and divergent. This chapter also hints a possible direction of further documentary research that can be conducted from this thesis.

**CHAPTER II**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW**

As was stated in chapter one, the research problem of this thesis lies in the projection of Javanese-ness that is heterogeneous, amorphous, and transient in the examined films. Earlier studies in this particular field of interest is very rare, almost none to the Indonesian context. Therefore, this chapter aims to explain the literature contextually relevant to my study only. I divide the chapter into five sections. The first section overviews how documentary film was used as a propagandistic instrument by all governments in the history of documentary film in Indonesia. The second section explains the urgency of documentary film research in the Indonesian context. The third section describes the relevance of documentary film to the multi-ethnic Indonesia. The fourth section elucidates the hermeneutic constructionism applied and the reasons why I utilise it. The fifth section discusses the nature of this thesis as a scholarly work, which culturally engages with the representational and subjective aspects of the documentary films.

### **2.1. Documentary Film and Governments in the History of Indonesia**

In this thesis, I would also like to touch upon a historical reason why documentary films were regarded as a propagandistic instrument of the ruling governments in the context of Indonesia, from the State Dutch colonial (1820-1942)<sup>4</sup>, the Japanese administration (1942- 1945), the Old Order (Sukarno, 1945-1967) and the New Order (Suharto, 1967-1998) regimes. Across these regimes, documentary films were solely used to deliver the government's voice, perspective, and justification (Hanan, 2012, pp. 106–107).

During the Dutch colonial (1820-1942) and the Japanese administration (1942-1945) periods, the governments intentionally made use of documentary films to

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<sup>4</sup> Before 1820, the Dutch through its state-sponsored company, Dutch East Indies Company/VOC had already colonised Nusantara (present-day Indonesia) since 1619 (Vickers, 2005, p. 10).

propagate their interests although there were a distinct style and approach between the two. The Dutch documentary films such as *Moeder Dao* (Monnikendam, 1933), *De Merapi Dreight* (Balink, 1934) and *Het Land van de Overkaant* (Franken, 1938) were ethnographic, exotic and social (Sen, 1994). For example, *Moeder Dao, de schildpadgelijkende* or *Mother Dao, the Turtlelike* is a 90-minute black-and-white documentary film by Vincent Monnikendam, a Dutch documentarist. It tells about how the Dutch ran its colonies in the period 1912-1933 as a colonial business enterprise. The footage shot without sound shows the exploitation of natural resources by the Dutch. It portrays forests burning, land clearing, oil and gas mining as well as road and railroad constructions. The propagandistic purpose of the film articulates the colonial attitude at that time where the Europeans were the superior while the indigenous were the backward. In most of the footage, the Dutch overseers are always described as the ones who instructed the natives to do the labour for them. They were represented in their white tropical garb standing by commandingly with their walking sticks and cigars (Monnikendam, 1933).

By contrast, the Japanese films such as *Celebration of the Emperor's Birthday* (Nihon Eiga Sha, 1943b), *Volunteer for the Army* (Nihon Eiga Sha, 1943a), *Berdjoang/Hope of South* (Nihon Eiga Sha, 1944a), and *Call for Romusha* (Nihon Eiga Sha, 1944b) were militaristic and imperialistic (YIDFF Organizing Committee, 1997, unpaginated). For instance, *Celebration of the Emperor's Birthday* in the *Berita Film di Djawa No. 2* is a newsreel produced by Nippon Eiga Sha Djawa. It tells about the celebration of the Japanese Emperor, Tentjo-Setsoe Hirohito in 1943. The footage shot with the sound of aggressive music and trumpet. Voice-over was employed interspersed with intertitles and subtitles in Indonesian and Japanese. The voice-over was also in Indonesian and Japanese languages. This black-and-white footage depicts various places where the Japanese Imperial Army was stationed. It shows a scene of Imperial Japanese



Palace at Tokyo where imperial soldiers and the Japanese masses paid homage to the emperor in a Japanese style of deep bow (Nihon Eiga Sha, 1943b).

During the Sukarno's era (1945-1967), the regime mainly produced newsreels aimed to record state affairs, national events, and the president's powerful oratories. As a result, they became the right instrument to boost the personality cult of the president. Sukarno's political rhetoric always brought out issues and spirits of nationalism, anti-imperialism, and anti-neo-colonialism that captivated the masses (Anderson, 2002, p. 6). Allured by his charisma, the mass media was used to record and capture the president's speech. This Old Order regime treated the mass media as a tool of the revolution and Sukarno was the supreme leader of the Indonesian revolution.

An instance is *Gelora/Independent Enthusiasm* (Komite Nasional, 1945). This black-and-white reel shows Sukarno's speech at Gambir or Ikada Square, Jakarta, on 19 September 1945. The film employs voice of God narration and intertitles in Indonesian and English. The newsreel depicts Sukarno's oration to the masses that hailed him exuberantly. Sukarno encouraged the masses to be strong and to have faith in him to secure Indonesian independence. The propaganda of this film speaks of the Indonesian freedom from the Dutch and the Japanese that had been proclaimed on 17 August 1945 by Sukarno-Hatta (Komite Nasional, 1945).

When the New Order regime (1967-1998) replaced the Old Order (1945-1967), the New Order banned all records relating to Sukarno from being published and aired (Sen and Hill T, 2007, pp. 84–85). In Suharto's era, the New Order regime manipulated documentary films as a propagandistic instrument to legitimise power. Most of the government programs were developmental ones and executed in authoritarian ways. Nearly all ministries financed the production of their documentary films to support their developmental agendas. A case in point was the programme of transmigration, moving people mostly villagers from Java, Madura, and Bali to other islands. It was produced by

the Department of Transmigration and the Department of Agriculture featuring the ministers themselves as the main characters in the documentary (Hanan, 2012, p. 107). All governmental programs, including documentary films, were exclusively broadcast on TVRI (*Televisi Republik Indonesia*), the only state television station in the country at that time (Nugroho and Herlina S., 2015, p. 134).

The extensive use of authoritative voice-over characterised the documentary films during this period, an illustrative map to designate the setting, organic and linear structure, and the absence of subjective and personal narration. It was the government type of documentary film celebrating the developmental process. There were also ethnographic documentary films that illustrated tribal societies in isolated regions of the country. The documentaries showed rituals, customs, and arts that gave the impression of underdeveloped peoples to the rest of modern Indonesians. This kind of documentary only seems to repeat what the Dutch Colonial's perspective did by using "Western's fascination" to disclose their fellow-countrymen living in distinct cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, another type of documentary film was that of the travelogue aimed to promote the tourism industry. In this kind of documentary film, Indonesia was described as an exotic place with its unrivalled natural beauty and authentic cultures (Mae, 2014, unpaginated).

The domination of the New Order government in the production of documentary films in Indonesia gave rise to highly propagandistic and indoctrinating documentary films. As a result, homogenisation of theme and narrative style of documentary films was inevitable. There were almost no variation and alternative documentary voice made but that of the regime. This situation continued until a non-commercial independent filmmaker, Garin Nugroho, produced a documentary entitled *Dongeng Kancil tentang Kemerdekaan/Kancil's Story of Independence* (Nugroho, 1995). It was about four street children questioning the meaning of freedom and challenging both

the society and the government for the fate of their lives in the legendary Malioboro Street of Yogyakarta (Nugroho, 1995; Hanan, 2010; Nugroho and Herlina S., 2015).

*Kancil's Story of Independence* was considered an attempt to counter the domination of the New Order government which always held the single narrative of "truth" over public issues in Indonesia (Isla, 2010, p. 461). The documentary was screened in NHK, a Japanese television station in 1996, and in Muslim organisations watched by teachers and public officials alike. Indonesian public officials watching the screening were stunned. They considered the documentary as an exaggeration of the social reality (Kwok, 2000, p. 2). The documentary was then fictionalised as a movie entitled *Daun di Atas Bantal/Leaf on a Pillow* (Nugroho, 1997) (Uhde, 1999; Nugroho and Herlina S., 2015). The movie was sponsored and produced by Christine Hakim, a famous actress and producer in Indonesia who also owns a film company under her name, Christine Hakim Film Production. She produced the film because she was moved by the documentary and realised she had not contributed much to the public yet. She realised that poverty and injustice still linger on in Indonesia. Therefore, she asked Garin who produced the documentary to be the director of *Daun di Atas Bantal* to make the film "true and powerful but also stylish and poetic" (Tanvir, 2009, p. 3).

With all of these in mind, what the general populace in Indonesia understands of a documentary is only associated with political, informational, and propagandistic films as indicated below.

Garin Nugroho, who has made prize-winning documentary films as well as features, has described the kinds of documentary films that most people have to see in Indonesia – particularly in the Soeharto New Order period – as mainly propaganda, either made by the state or depicting Indonesia in ways that satisfied state ideologies. In the New Order period, 90 per cent of documentary films were government propaganda [...] Another documentary type was the ethnographic documentaries that presented a portrait of lesser-known ethnic groups, showing examples of their rituals or arts. However, at the same time, the documentaries suggested that the ethnic groups were backward recipients of the paternalism of the state and had little engagement with modern Indonesia [and therefore informational only] (Hanan, 2012, p. 107).

Hanan underlines the cognisance of the New Order regime to use the rhetorical power of documentary films politically (see also Sen and Hill T, 2007; Hanan, 2010, 2012). As a result, the general public in Indonesia sceptically perceives documentary films as being propagandistic and boring (Irawanto, 2017, unpaginated). In this regard, I argue that the resurgence of documentary filmmaking in the early period of the reform era provides alternative documentary narratives. These narratives depart from the hegemonic documentary narratives of the state as once exercised during the New Order regime. In other words, there is no single hegemonic narrative of truth in the context of the documentary of this period. The stories of the documentary films are subjective and experimental, including in the representations of cultural identity.

## **2.2. Significance of Documentary Film Research in Indonesia**

The documentary films studied are of great importance in this thesis, not for their popularity, frequency nor their volume of public screenings. The power of the documenteries lies in their more personal narratives and representations of Javanese-ness. The Javanese-ness depicted was more varied than that stereotyped and believed by the New Order regime. Hence, these films express the filmmakers' projections and cultural interpretations of what it means to be Javanese. My thesis fills a space that has not yet been explored by many scholars about representing and reimagining Javanese-ness in documentary films in the context of Indonesia. It is true that expressions of Javanese culture have long been examined regarding theme, story, and setting in Indonesian fiction films. Some foreign and Indonesian scholars have also studied them (see Heider, 1991; Imanjaya, 2009; Hanan, 2010; Nugroho and Herlina S., 2015). Nevertheless, representation of Javanese-ness in the field of documentary research is still rare.

Above and beyond my interest in analysing the representation of Javanese-ness

in the examined films, research in the field of documentary in Indonesia deserves some attention. Documentary film research is still limited compared to that of the feature film<sup>5</sup>. This thesis is a way to appreciate documentary films and to fill the gap between the attention given to the feature and documentary films. In other words, the marginal position of documentary films in the context of Indonesia also becomes my concern in this undertaking. Fiction films have been more popular and extensively studied in the context of Indonesia (Said, 1982; Heider, 1991; Sen, 1994; Imanjaya, 2009; Heryanto, 2015). Unfortunately, this is not the case with documentary films.

The marginal position of documentary films in Indonesia perhaps is not something unique as many countries also experience it. My interest in analysing documentary films aims to help this form of non-fiction film to be well recognised in Indonesia and global context. It is not to say that documentary film is a new genre or has not been known in Indonesia. Documentary film, in the form of newsreel, has been introduced to Indonesia since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Nugroho and Herlina S., 2015; Irawanto, 2017).

While documentary research in Indonesia is generally still limited, documentary research on socio-cultural issues is even less explored. With this in mind, this thesis can be a significant contribution to the collection of documentary research, especially

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<sup>5</sup> This can be seen from some studies of Indonesian documentary films in journal articles and unpublished works: Effective Strategy of Documentary Filmmaking to Highlight Traditions behind Reog Ponorogo (*Strategi Pembuatan Film Dokumenter Yang Tepat Untuk Mengangkat Tradisi-Tradisi Di Balik Reog Ponorogo*) (Prihantono, 2009), Documentary Films: Media to Preserve Traditions (*Film Dokumenter sebagai Media Pelestari Tradisi*) (Utami, 2010), Local Image in Media: Representation and Negotiation of Locality on METRO TV's Documentary Show OASIS (*Wajah Sang Lokal Di Media: Representasi dan Negosiasi Lokalitas Dalam Tayangan OASIS METRO TV*) (Desembris, 2011), Symbolic Violence against Javanese on TRANS TV's Program "Life is Beautiful" (*Kekerasan Simbolik terhadap Suku Jawa dalam Program TV "Hidup Itu Indah" di TRANS TV*) (Hasfi, 2011), Political Economy of Indonesian Documentary Films: the Dependence of Indonesian Documentary Film Industry on Foreign Donors (*Ekonomi Politik Film Dokumenter Indonesia: Dependensi Industri Film Dokumenter Indonesia kepada Lembaga Donor Asing*) (Karnanta, 2012), The Act of Killing and the Dilemmas of History (Simpson, 2013), Framing Indonesian Problems in the Best Category Direct Cinema Documentary Films of Metro TV's Eagle Award Competition (*Framing Persoalan Indonesia Melalui Film Dokumenter Model Direct Cinema - Studi Pada Film-Film Dokumenter Terbaik, Program Eagle Award Competitions di Metro TV*) (Wibowo, 2014)

with themes of Javanese socio-culture. My argument makes a significant contribution to understanding how Javanese cultural identity is represented in documentary films contextual to a specified period.

This thesis is also essential to enrich studies on the broad topic of the rise of documentary filmmaking grassroots activism in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Indonesia. There have been some research works conducted on the subject of filmmaking activism of the grassroots in the context of Indonesia, but none of the post-New Order regime documentary research deals with Javanese-ness as I do. Lulu Ratna's research, for example, focuses on the movement of short filmmaking in the post-1998 era. Ratna (2007) in her article, "Indonesian short films after Reformasi 1998", states that the Indonesian short-film movement is burgeoning after the socio-political reform in 1998. However, she further explains that the campaign is still struggling to exist due to its central and non-permanent contribution of the film communities supporting it (Ratna, 2007, p. 307).

This situation occurs as the Indonesian government support and funding could only reach acknowledged and legalised film events, such as FFI (Indonesian Film Festival) and national student film competition. Film communities in Indonesia are established as underground communities by nature. Thus, the issue of their legal matters before the government. There are still special requirements and permits for the communities to be able to produce and screen their films legally. Although the reform era seems to make everyone able to create movies and make film festivals, without the legal status of film communities, a clear way to get government funding is hard to achieve. The fluid nature of film communities where their members can quickly come and give significant impact on their crowdfunding system (Ratna, 2007, pp. 306–307). In this situation, the funding aid offered by foreign sponsors is a promising source to make film communities survive and to hold film workshops, screenings and even

festivals (Karnanta, 2012, pp. 7–8).

In this early reform era, the circulation of Indonesian documentary films along with independent and short films made use of three channels outside the mainstream cinema theatres. These channels are the alternative sites of screening and distribution. They are film festivals, on campus (at classes and seminar rooms) and off-campus screenings (at cultural centres and even shopping centres). This situation occurred because of some factors. Indonesian documentary and short films could not be screened in cinema theatres for a film conglomerate that had monopolised distributions and screenings of films in its network since the 1990s rejected them. This conglomerate is known as *21 Cinema (Jaringan 21)*. This company mainly screened imported films of Hollywood and Hong Kong at those times (see also Sen and Hill T, 2007; Nugroho and Herlina S., 2015). Also, the burgeoning digital camera, digital video and computer editing have enabled amateur filmmakers to shift from expensive celluloid film productions to the digital ones, which are relatively more affordable. Thus, amateur and idealist filmmakers tended to use these three channels to screen their works to the public (Arifianto and Junaedi, 2014, pp. 80–81).

The resurgence of documentary and independent filmmaking activism also came along with the enthusiasm of women in the film production. The research of Felicia Hughes-Freeland describes this phenomenon. Hughes-Freeland (2011) in her article, “Women’s Creativity in Indonesian Cinema”, highlights the importance of women as film directors, producers, trainers, publicists and distributors to express themselves and speak for themselves. One of the methods is by using documentary films they produce and to encounter problems they face. She suggests that the involvement and creativity of women give rise to “a more diverse and heterogeneous film culture” in the context of Indonesia (Hughes-Freeland, 2011, p. 417).

Hughes-Freeland further argues that the contribution of women is more explicit

in documentary films than that in the mainstream films in the context of the first decade of Indonesia reform era. Women directors, such as Lulu Ratna, Yuli Andari, and Ucu Agustin, with their artistic, organisational and networking capabilities – their creativities – make both female and male audience of their films at least aware of the issues brought to light by documentary films. Their audience have become more appreciative of documentary films about the social realities and injustice framed from women’s angles (Hughes-Freeland, 2011, pp. 432–438).

### **2.3. Relevance of Documentary Film to the Multi-Ethnic Indonesia**

In addition, studies on ethnic groups are still relevant to the multi-ethnic society of Indonesia. The relevance of documentary film to the multi-ethnic Indonesia is also crucial as documentary films may help construct inter-ethnic cultural understandings. In Indonesia, how ethnic groups identify themselves through their cultural practices, traditional values and beliefs is still relevant and significant to address. The discourse of cultural identity provides a way to promote understanding and appreciation to the multi-ethnic Indonesia, which consists of 1,340 ethnic groups speaking over 2,500 dialects (Na’im and Syaputra, 2015, p. 6). In such a multi-cultural society, the diversity of cultures, customs, and traditions of the ethnic groups needs to be acknowledged and respected to lay a strong foundation of mutual inter-ethnic relations. Conducive inter-ethnic relations become strategic and important particularly because religious, economic and political interests are often engineered to stir communal tensions in Indonesia (Wilson, 2005; Klinken, 2007; Bertrand, 2008). The sectarian conflicts in Jakarta, Solo, Ambon, Sampit, Mataram, and South Lampung after the collapse of the New Order are the examples of this engineered motive by surfacing ethnicity.

Denny JA Foundation, a human rights and anti-discrimination NGO in Indonesia, issued a report mentioning that primordial and communal sentiments have aggravated



the discrimination and violence in the country since the 1998 Reform. Conflicts in Jakarta and Solo in 1998 were due to the state's failure to protect Chinese Indonesians living in the two cities from the mobs. The cases of Ambon and North Maluku were full of religious clashes between the Muslims and the Christians as well as between the settlers and the natives. In Sampit, Central Kalimantan, an inter-ethnic clash exploded involving the indigenous, Dayak, and the Madurese. In Mataram, religious violence sparked between different sects of Islam that put *Ahmadiyah*, one of the factions, as the victim. Inter-ethnic violence also occurred between the natives of South Lampung and the Balinese settlers living in the region. In other words, by locus, the conflicts portray the involvements of regional and ethnic-driven sentiments (Gustaman, 2012, unpaginated).

Further, a study by Klinken indicates that the tendency of inter-ethnic tensions has been promulgated by the politicised issue of "son of the soil" or "son of the region" (*Putra Daerah*) which is symptomatic in all regions in Indonesia (Klinken, 2007, p. 37). "Son of the region" refers to local-born candidates running for public office positions at provincial, regional and municipal levels, especially at the outer parts of Java. Local politicians frequently manipulate this idea of "son of the region" during the local and regional elections for their stakes, but such an act perpetuates and even incites ethnic sentiment and prejudice against other ethnic groups. As the Javanese have spread out and dwelt in many parts of Indonesia, they are also subject to this complication.

The Javanese have been naturally in contact with other ethnic groups in the archipelago to establish commerce for centuries. When Indonesia was still under the Dutch colonisation known as the Netherlands East Indies (1619-1942), a systematic program by the Dutch colonial government moved a large number of the population in Java, Madura and Bali to other islands, especially to Sumatra, Kalimantan and Sulawesi in 1905. The new settlers opened new lands or worked for the Dutch plantations and

mining. The Indonesian government then continued this policy after the independence under the program of transmigration. The government program of transmigration was an integral part of the New Order's five-year development plans introduced in 1969 (van Der Wijst, 1985; van Lottum and Marks, 2011). One of the aftereffects of this program is ethnic tensions between the natives and the new settlers. To a greater or lesser extent, an issue of "Javanisation" is incited that shadows some of the causes of inter-ethnic tensions and communal conflicts (Brown, 2005; Gayatri, 2010).

Amidst many complex factors that brought about Indonesian political, economic and social reform in 1998, globalisation and regionalism, namely movements of local cultures and politics, were among them (Erb, Sulistiyanto and Faucher, 2005; Davidson and Henley, 2007). Globalisation is a multidimensional phenomenon that is obtrusive. Its emergence has brought profound implications that engender dramatic changes in nearly all aspects of life. This worldwide movement has opened up common borders of time and space, including geographic boundaries of a state. Flows of capital and goods, human resource mobility, as well as shared and exchanged information, ideas, and images are very dynamic either it is desirable or undesirable. Globalisation has also spurred localism and regionalism as the counter movements of the globalisation (Featherstone, 1996; O' Riordan, 2001).

In Indonesia, the emerging *Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara* (AMAN) or Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago in 1999 can show this regionalism and localism. Since its inception, this forum has organised more than 200 representatives of indigenous peoples from all over the country. Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (WALHI) or the Indonesian Forum for Environment-Friends of Earth Indonesia, the Indigenous Peoples Rights Advocacy Network (JAPHAMA) and other NGOs supported the birth of AMAN. AMAN at first struggles for the recognition and protection of the state towards indigenous peoples' rights over lands, forests and

cultures. The movement was due to decades of the governments' neglect to protect them on the pretexts of state policies, laws, and economic activities. This neglect is mostly rendered by the developmental programmes involving both domestic and foreign investors (Moniaga, 2004, p. 2).

Complex global and local tensions together with Asian financial crisis in 1997, a massive foreign debt to the International Monetary Funds (IMF), chronic corruption, collusion and nepotism in Suharto's bureaucracy culminated with the 1998 political reform. People power movement, in the form of public demonstrations motored by university students all across the country, was the result of the whole complication. Regional dissatisfactions towards the centralistic government's authority and cultural hegemony also found their moments to be expressed. As mentioned previously, the cultural domination at that time was associated with that of the Javanese culture due to a reasoning that Suharto's (New Order) regime had developed a privileged class culture and power based on a Javanese model of leadership and aristocracy, *priyayi* (Sarsito, 2006; Sutarto, 2006; Irawanto, Ramsey and Ryan, 2011).

The significance of documentary research and the inter-ethnic relations also need understanding from the Indonesian demography. According to the last census by the Statistics Indonesia (BPS-*Badan Pusat Statistik*) in 2010, Indonesia is a country inhabited by 237,641,326 people. Fifty-seven per cent dwell in Java rendering it the most densely populated island in Indonesia (BPS, 2015, unpaginated). Those living in Java are of diverse ethnic groups migrating from other parts of the country bringing their multi-cultures, belief systems and ways of life. Therefore, interactions between them and the natives (Javanese, Sundanese, Chinese, Betawi and other minor ethnic groups) of Java are highly vibrant. Sometimes, they result in personal and even communal tense relations, disputes and even physical conflicts. The nature of the sectarian violence was often economic and political, but it was unnecessarily extended to ethnic

and religious sentiments (Wilson, 2005; Klinken, 2007; Bertrand, 2008). These conflicts show that risks of inadequate ethnic and religious understandings are still inherent in the mutual relations in Indonesia. Racial disagreements have been as old as human history and have shaped history itself. The late twentieth century onward has witnessed the resurgence of ethnic conflicts in many modern states worldwide. The ethnic conflicts make it one of the issues central to contemporary politics (Smith, 1999, p. 3).

The Javanese, as one of the natives of Java Island, are historically an integral element of the modern state of Indonesia. Understanding them as a major ethnic group about other ethnic groups in Indonesia is necessary. Not only is it essential to non-Javanese peoples, but also the Javanese themselves. In other words, understanding how others see the Javanese, and how the Javanese perceive themselves, are equally important. Therefore, descriptions or representations of the Javanese cultural identity significantly contribute to achieving inter-ethnic understanding and self-reflection. The documentary films examined in this thesis express how the Javanese try to narrate themselves and be narrated. In this regard, the film narratives constitute representations of the Javanese.

#### **2.4. Hermeneutic Constructionism**

Hermeneutic constructionism is my approach to interpret the examined documentary films from cultural vantage point since the documentaries vividly demonstrate their cultural themes. The projection of Javanese-ness is, therefore, my implicit and symptomatic readings of the documentaries. As briefly introduced in chapter one, the combined theories applied are from Ricoeur's hermeneutic symbolism, Anderson's imagined communities and Hall's constructionist cultural representation as well as Eugenia Siapera's regimes of cultural representation. I use this

synthesised approach for it accords with the thesis's objective that is to uncover the projection of Javanesehood covertly articulated in the films. I consider that the method can significantly convey the representation of Javanesehood of the documentaries. Before this synthesised approach is applied, intrinsic analysis of the films, that is form and style of the documentaries, is also presented. In this part, models and modes of documentary exposition by Nichols are useful to identify and categorise the examined documentaries.

The six documentary films examined in this thesis are *Jamu*, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*, *Ksatria Kerajaan*, *Kulo Ndiko Sami*, *Wayang Kulit*, and *Bathik*. *Jamu* addresses sexuality through the convergence of jamu's aphrodisiac myth and sex practices in Jakarta's urban life. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* deals with the social harmony in Sorowajan expressed by the interfaith gathering, a modern form of the Javanese cultural and religious practice of *nyadran*. *Ksatria Kerajaan* engages with the description of a humble and loyal Javanese palace guard, Pardi, involving the myth of *ngalab berkah* (the king's blessing). *Kulo Ndiko Sami* expresses the cultural struggle of the Sikep people to make the Indonesian government officially recognise their traditional religion. *Wayang Kulit* portrays a Javanese *wayang kulit* artisan, Sagio, with his personal experience and outlook to create *wayang kulit*. *Bathik* demonstrates *Semen Rama*, a motif of Javanese court batik and its philosophical meaning.

#### 2.4.1. Nichols' Models and Modes of Documentary Exposition

In this respect, Nichols' typology of non-fiction models and cinematic modes of documentary films is very useful to help me identify the formal aspect of the examined documentaries. As to the credibility of the content aspect of the documentaries, Siapera's typology of the regimes of cultural representation is also convenient in this undertaking. Both Nichols' and Siapera's typologies are significant to explain the formal and content aspects of the films underpinning the projection of

Javaneseness.

Nichols categorises the types of documentaries into non-fiction models and cinematic modes. By “models”, Nichols refers to the pre-existing multi-faceted traditions of non-fiction discourse applied in films. The categorisation stems from the combination of non-fiction films and other fields of discourse from outside film studies, such as sociology, anthropology and literature. These fields take part in shaping the forms of documentary films. The non-fiction models encompass investigation or report, advocacy or promotion of a cause, history, testimonial, exploration or travel writing, sociology, visual anthropology or ethnography, first person-essay, diary or journal, individual or group profile/biography, and autobiography. As to the “modes”, Nichols suggests that the classification of a documentary is based on its arrangement of sounds and images in a specific way using particular aesthetic and rhetorical techniques. In this categorisation, documentary films are grouped into several modes: expository, poetic, observational, participatory, reflexive and performative (Nichols, 2010, pp. 149–153). Nichols claims that these classifications are not exclusive. Nichols thinks that a documentary may express qualities of different models and modes at the same time. They function to help a film critic to have a better understanding of the various types of documentary films (Nichols, 2010, p. 148).

From the category of documentary model, I will only explain some models related to the examined films. They are testimonial, individual profile, advocacy, first-person essay, and ethnography. The testimonial is a documentary film that presents oral history through the personal experiences of the witnesses. Individual or group profile/biography is a type of documentary that recounts an individual or group’s story of distinctiveness and maturity. The advocacy or promotion of a cause is a documentary film that conveys convincing and compelling evidence and examples. It is performed through an adoption of a specific viewpoint. The first-person essay documentary is a

film that illustrates a personal description of the filmmaker based on his/her experience and point of view. The visual anthropology or ethnography-formatted documentary is a film that explores cultures of ethnic groups. An exposition of fieldwork features this kind of documentary, presentation of informants as the social actors who provide reliable information about the cultures filmed (Nichols, 2010, pp. 150–153).

As to the documentary modes, some of them work in the examined films. They are expository, participatory, performative, and observational. Expository documentary is a film characterised by an exposition, a technique of explanation where the film directly speaks to the viewer with voice-over about a particular subject. The participatory documentary is a film that demonstrates an interaction of the filmmaker with his or her social actors. In this type of film, the filmmaker helps shape what happens in front of the camera. As participation and interaction matter, the interview becomes a pivotal technique in conveying these qualities. The performative documentary is a documentary that stresses the expressive qualities of the filmmaker in his or her engagement with the film's subject matter. To perform the engagement, the filmmaker actively and explicitly addresses the viewer. The observational documentary is a film characterised by a close observation of social actors or any subjects undergoing their lives. This close observation gives an impression as though the camera were not present on the spots (Nichols, 2010, pp. 149–152).

The documentaries show some features of these models and modes. *Jamu*, for example, is a testimonial, first-person essay, participatory and performative, documentary. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* is a testimonial, ethnography and expository documentary. *Ksatria Kerajaan* is a testimonial, individual profile and expository documentary. *Kulo Ndiko Sami* is a testimonial, advocacy and observational documentary. *Wayang Kulit* is a testimonial, individual profile and expository documentary. *Bathik* is a testimonial, advocacy and expository documentary. All films

studied do not exclusively belong to a particular model and modes. All of them show features of a testimonial documentary and yet at the same time they express their distinctive characteristics. I will explain this in detail in chapters four and five.

#### 2.4.2. Ricoeur's Hermeneutic Symbolism

All documentaries examined in this thesis have their different subject matters. The films share a similarity. The documentaries show how they articulate Javanese-ness. I observe that the demonstrations of the particular objects, events, actions, and actors in the films do not only represent the films' themes, narratives and arguments but they express the projection of Javanese-ness in the documentaries. I contend that the traditional medicine (*jamu*), the palace guard (*Pardi*), the struggle of the *Sikep*, the interfaith gathering of Sorowajan, the *wayang kulit* artisan (*Sagio*) and the batik (*Semen Rama*) are the embodiments of Javanese-ness in the films. They are the symbolic representations of Javanese-ness contextual to what the documentaries try to narrate.

My interest and concern to read the symbols from the cultural viewpoint shares a similarity with Ricoeur's hermeneutic reading of a symbol. I frame my analysis of symbolism in Ricoeur's hermeneutic symbolism. Ricoeur's concept of symbolism sets off from the interpretation of symbols from cultural aspects, such as beliefs and myths. It becomes his symbolic interpretation of a cultural discourse in a text (Ricoeur and Thompson, 1981; Simms, 2003, 2016). Ricoeur defines a symbol as "Any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, also, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first" (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 13). As a structure of signification, every symbol is a sign that conveys meanings. This inference needs to be understood carefully as Ricoeur also points out that although a symbol must be a sign, "not every sign is a symbol" (Ricoeur, 1969, p. 15).

Ricoeur further asserts that in the end, a symbol must have a significant



cultural meaning in the medium expressing the symbol, and not only an allegory of something. To understand a symbol requires an interpretation to know the function of a symbol in the medium that exhibits it (Ricoeur, 1969; Itao, 2010). Understanding the role of a symbol in a film suggests diverse meanings of the symbol. It does not devalue the literal sense of the symbol as shown in the medium that carries it (Itao, 2010, p. 3). Reiterating Ricoeur's idea, Simms advocates that "symbols within the contexts of hermeneutics [...] depart from the "accepted", or "scientific" definition of symbol [...] The value of symbols lies in their *not* referring, or at least, in their not referring in the way that language does" (Simms, 2016, p. 306).

In Ricoeur's hermeneutic symbolism, a symbol articulates its significant cultural meanings. A symbol can offer its figurative cultural signification, which is disclosed using interpretation. As a case in point, the hermeneutic symbol in *Jamu*, for instance, is the traditional medicine (jamu). The film's theme is sexuality. From the hermeneutic vantage point, jamu is not a symbol of sex nor the motive for consuming it (the aphrodisiac potency). I signify that jamu is satirically used as a symbol of challenge to the Javanese values of sex and marriage. It is my cultural understanding from the figurative meaning of the medicine (jamu) that is satirically represented in the documentary.

#### 2.4.3. Ricoeur's Productive Imagination and Anderson's Imagined Community

In this thesis, I hold that the symbols enhance Javanese-ness. It is my interpretation of the films' implicit meanings. Javanese-ness is seen as a mental picture, an image of being Javanese offered and constructed by the filmmakers in their documentaries. In this regard, Javanese-ness is an imagined creation that is established in the films through manipulating the actualities wherein the symbols reside. Taking an example from *Jamu*, the film does not only show the traditional

medicine in its literal meaning as a past medicinal product of the Javanese, but the medicine is also culturally ascribed to sexuality. As mentioned above, I hermeneutically read the medicine as the symbol of challenge to the Javanese values of sex and marriage. This reading brings jamu itself to move beyond its literal meaning as a medicinal product to the symbolic ones. Then, Javanese-ness imagined from this symbolism is an image of the Javanese who are liberal, sexually driven and secretive. About this image, I consider that Ricoeur's hermeneutic concept of productive imagination and Anderson's concept of an imagined community are very applicable to support my analysis.

Ricoeur proposes the notion of imagination in his hermeneutics. Imagination is the central point of this thesis because the concept becomes the analytical tool for me to answer the research question regarding Javanese-ness in the documentaries. Imagination in this thesis relates to creating images beyond the film's textual limits. Citing Immanuel Kant, Ricoeur considers imagination as both a process and a product of seeing, interpreting and thinking about the existing realities.

Imagination is not something marginal to or occasional in thought but rather permeates all thought, and conceptualization [...] imagination is not at all an alternative to perception but an ingredient of perception. It is encapsulated within the framework of perception [...] we can no longer oppose [...] imagining to seeing, if seeing is itself a way of imagining, interpreting, or thinking (Paul Ricoeur's 'Lectures on Ideology and Utopia' as cited in Taylor, 2006, p. 94).

Ricoeur suggests that imagination involves perception, concepts as well as ability to see realities in new ways. According to Ricoeur, there are two types of imagination, reproductive and productive imaginations.

Reproductive imagination is the kind of imagination that is a copy of the existing reality (the original). Productive imagination refers to the type of imagination that is not limited to the reality. It is not a duplication of the existing fact and the reality understood before. It may have a sense of escapism, but it discloses a new kind of reality

from what people know before. In other words, productive imagination “expands our sense of reality and reality’s possibilities” (Taylor, 2006, p. 96). An example of a productive imagination is the use of figurative expressions, such as simile, metaphor and symbol in a poem. The figurative meanings of a metaphor bring to fore new imagined realities to the existing one used in a poem (Taylor, 2006, p. 97).

Ricoeur mentions that imagination is a matter of forming images free from the boundaries of the text. This free nature of imagination provides renewed perspective and understanding of a particular human experience or phenomenon in life (Friedman, 2010, pp. 167–168). Ricoeur's emphasis on imagination stems from analysing fictional texts. Nevertheless, Ricoeur also asserts that non-fiction texts containing "reproductive imagination still leaves space for productive imagination" (Taylor, 2006, p. 95). It occurs because productive imagination still shows its plausibility. It is not like romantic escapism. Productive imagination always entails existing reality that is transformed and understood as something new. Ricoeur's productive imagination is intelligible and is even based on the reality, on the original. Thus, the gap between the source (the original, the reality) and its imagined form(s) is not significant (Taylor, 2006, pp. 97–98). Imagination frees the viewers from visual and aural constraints (including symbols) and leads them to activate a possible reality projected through the texts, in this case, the documentaries. Imagination is not confined within the textual limits of the films. Viewers need interpretation to understand the imagination that the documentaries offer. The productive imagination in this thesis relates to the interpretations that articulate a sense of belonging to Java and Javanese culture.

In *Jamu*, as I will explain later on in the analytical chapters, the represented Javanese-ness is the kind that is liberal, sexually driven and secretive. It is a productive imagination of the actualities filmed. Such a Javanese-ness is, of course, abstract. It is not the reduplication or the reproduction of the social realities per se. The liberal,

sexually driven and secretive Javaneseness imaginatively represents the social facts. Nonetheless, the Javaneseness projected in this documentary evokes a sense of belonging to Javanese people in general. In this regard, I find that Anderson's concept of imagined community is significantly relevant in this analysis of imagination. From Anderson's theory, what I take to strengthen my analysis is his idea that Javanese is an imagined community. He prefaces the concept with a premise that nation is "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). The sphere of communities is not only limited to a nation, but also an ethnic group. According to Anderson, Javanese is also an imagined community.

Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. Javanese villagers have always known that they are connected to people they have never seen, but these ties were once imagined particularistically – as indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship. Until quite recently, the Javanese language had no word meaning the abstraction 'society' (Anderson, 2006, p. 6).

Anderson's example of imagined Javaneseness is primarily foregrounded from the indicator of Javanese language for having no word or term of society. It happened before the influence and formation of Indonesian language with its words "*masyarakat*" (Sugiyono and Maryani, 2008, p. 994) and "*warga*" (Sugiyono and Maryani, 2008, p. 1808).

Further, Anderson affirms that "In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact are imagined" (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). The thesis of Anderson's notion of imagined communities lies in his explanation why a nation and an ethnicity is imagined. He thinks that a nation and an ethnicity is imagined because members of either a nation or an ethnic group hardly ever meet, see, and hear most of their fellow members. However, they are mentally projected or represented to exist. The image of their belonging, their attachment to the same nation or ethnic group exist. By "exist", Anderson suggests the idea that imagined nation or ethnicity is constructed

to produce an abstract of “horizontal comradeship” (Anderson, 2006, p. 7).

Javaneseness as an imagined community puts one in mind of the attachment to Javanese culture and people. I will use this notion to designate the constructed and imagined qualities of Javaneseness offered by the films. In the context of the examined documentaries, the symbols give rise to Java and Javanese cultural identity. Again, the traditional medicine in *Jamu*, for instance, will recall an image of the Javanese from the vantage point of sexuality. The image that *Jamu* offers is the Javanese who are liberal, sexually driven and secretive.

#### 2.4.4. Siapera’s Regimes of Cultural Representation

Regarding the cultural contents of the examined films, I view that the cultural representations of the documentaries ideologically articulate their credibility, their own “truths” to describe Javaneseness. It is significant to understand the different models of Javaneseness, which also prove the films’ plurality to express Javaneseness. In this perspective, I find that Siapera's cultural regimes of representation are useful to explain the cultural representations of the examined films. The concept is an ideological typology to describe how cultural diversity is represented through diverse media. This typology stems from some assumptions synthesised into a converged proposition. Siapera thinks that a work of representation, regarding having particular objectives and of communicating something, is unchanged across different media, different cultural settings, and different times. The content of what is represented is changeable, elusive, dynamic, and beyond the control of those producing it. A cultural representation can be very ideological regarding communicating “truth” of the content conveyed (Siapera, 2010, p. 131).

About Siapera’s typology, the word “regime” is used to suggest a notion and dimension of power concerning effective and systematic treatments of cultural

differences. These treatments categorise and shape subjects within particular cultural traits (Siapera, 2010, pp. 146–149). This positioning reflects one of Hall's cultural representation concepts, "regime of representation" (Hall, 1997, p. 6). Hall's regime of representation is influenced by Michel Foucault's notion of "regime of truth". The regime of truth denotes the combination and interrelation of particular ideas and discourses in the context of power structures and mechanisms for articulating "truth" (Foucault, 1977, p. 14).

Hall develops the Foucauldian regime of truth into the idea of the regime of representation. In this regard, Hall's regime of representation is deduced from his analysis of the historical descriptions of ethnicity. Hall infers that the historical representations in media always tend to reflect the dynamism of ethnocultural values. Qualities of the dominant ethnic group become the parameters to make representations of other ethnic groups. Hall exemplifies this authoritative cultural values-based representation by showing a racial representation, how people of a particular race are described by other dominant race. The dominant ethnic groups apply this using reducing the represented minor race into a set of binary oppositions. This set of binary oppositions is mainly of physical features and stereotypes. To a certain degree, such an attempt has contributed to making the people of the represented race themselves "believe" in such a construct (Hall, 1997; Siapera, 2010).

The idea that I would like to extract from the example of Hall above is the presence of some preferred Javanese cultural values used to determine cultural representations, in this case, Javanese-ness. I perceive that some Javanese values are incorporated in the films, whether the examined documentaries celebrate them, criticise them, or merely express them explicitly or implicitly. *Jamu*, for instance, implicitly questions the sex and marriage values in the Javanese culture. The Javanese sex and marriage values addressed in this documentary are that sex is philosophically

sacred and deserves to be established in a socially acknowledged relation, marriage. Hence, sex is socially recognised through a matrimonial bond as the relationship between husband and wife. Marriage, as a social institutionalisation of man and woman courtship, should be ideally based on love and respect (Suseno, 1996; Malhotra, 1997; Endraswara, 2013c). Therefore, Javanese culture celebrates this sacred view of sex and marriage in various forms of myths and legends, such as *Dewi Sri* and *Raden Sadana* as well as *Loro Blonyo*. These stories underpin such values by amplifying the notion of unity, fidelity, fertility and protection in sex, marriage and family life (Subiyantoro, 2011, 2012; Endraswara, 2013c). *Jamu* satirically conveys these values.

Other examined documentaries also express such an incorporation of Javanese values differently, which becomes dominant to project Javaneseness. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* explicitly depicts the social harmony of Sorowajan villagers, which implicitly expresses the manifestation of the Javanese values of *rukun* (harmony) and *hormat* (respect). *Ksatria Kerajaan* explicitly portrays a traditional Javanese myth of *ngalab berkah*. The film implicitly communicates the Javanese value of *manunggaling kawula-Gusti* (the union of the servant and God) manifested in the attitudes of humility, loyalty and simplicity of life (Moedjanto, 1986; Moertono, 2009). *Kulo Ndiko Sami* explicitly and implicitly describe the sincerity and non-violent attitudes of the Sikep, a manifestation of “*Wong Sikep weruh teke dhewe* [Sikep people only know what they possess and believe]” from their traditional faith, *Religion of Adam* (Shiraishi, 1990; Ba’asyin and Ba’asyin, 2014). *Wayang Kulit* exhibits the manifestation of the Javanese ethics of *sepi ing pamrih* (sincerity, having a no-ulterior motive), *ramé ing gawé* (commitment to the profession or *dharma*) (Suseno, 1996; Endraswara, 2013b). *Bathik* explicitly celebrates *Asta Brata*, the eight virtues of Javanese leadership (Moertono, 2009; Endraswara, 2013a). I will further explain the representations of the values in the chapters that follow.

The incorporation and expressions of the Javanese values significantly determine the kinds of Javanese represented in the examined films. The values will feature the accuracy, the truthfulness of the cultural representation of the documentaries. Ideologically, such cultural representations articulate how the regime of truth operates in the films. On this score, Eugenia Siapera (2010) asserts that there are five types of representational regimes: the racist regime, the domesticated regime, the regime of commodification, the essentialist regime and the alternative regime. The racist or racialised regime is identified by its simple representations of particular ethnicity, race and culture based on the physical characteristics of community members. Also, this type of representation highlights other corporeal aspects of culture belonging to that ethnic, race and cultural group (Siapera, 2010, p. 133). The domesticated regime encompasses representations of culture that stem from an attitude to assimilate, subsume, mix or hybridise cultural differences. It is executed with the intention not to acknowledge and celebrate diversity but to strip off differences and any potential threatening qualities. The ultimate goal is that a homogenising effect may prevail (Siapera, 2010, pp. 139–140).

The regime of commodification operates on a premise that cultural differences are “worthy” so long as they meet the logic of the market. It represents elements of diverse cultures in an exploratory manner, which can be treated and transformed into a profitable commodity. This representational regime deliberately ignores humanistic aspects of culture (Siapera, 2010, p. 143). The essentialist regime works by imposing a particular interpretation or understanding of history and authentic community identity. Consequently, diversity and other alternative versions in constructing identity and history are discouraged. The effect is marginalisation of any attempts to provide alternative representations (Siapera, 2010, p. 150). The alternative regime is the opposite of the essentialist. The alternative regime celebrates the



multiplicity of voices in its representations so that no singular voice is domineering. Images and discourses of this regime invite discussions, debates, critiques and even rejections (Siapera, 2010, p. 158).

I will apply Siapera's typology to the documentary films by examining how the cultural representations of the documentaries conveying the Javanese values above are communicated. If the cultural description of the film explicitly or implicitly celebrates the values as something credible, such a cultural representation can be said to express the essentialist regime. It happens because the film demonstrates its affirmation and admiration of the values to articulate the accuracy of the film's cultural representation. Three documentaries indicate this, *Wayang Kulit*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Bathik*. If the film's cultural portrayal expresses ambiguity and ambivalence in presenting the values explicitly or implicitly, then the cultural description of the film shows its alternative regime. It occurs as such a cultural representation produces contested voices in the documentary. *Jamu* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami* exhibit this feature. If the cultural representation of the film frames the values in an assimilated expression, then a possibility of the domesticated regime of representation works in such a film. It is exemplified in *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* that also happens to portray a hybridised tradition of *nyadran*.

#### 2.4.5. Hall's Representation of Cultural Identity

After examining the filmic and cultural representations, I will also investigate the kinds of Javaneseness projected in the films in chapters five, six and seven. In this context, the examination involves my analysis of the symptomatic meaning of the documentaries. Bordwell (1991) points out that the symptomatic meaning of film is the concealed meaning of a film resulting from treating the movie as "the consequence of the artist's obsessions", or from interpreting the film as "part of a

social dynamic” of the film. The meaning of this social dynamic disguise of a movie can be traced to economic, political, and ideological processes (Bordwell, 1991, pp. 9, 71–72). In this respect, I view that the set of values of Javanese culture implied in the films in the context of the post-New Order Indonesia help me establish the socio-ideological meaning of the examined documentaries. *Jamu* represents this fabricated and imagined liberal, sexually driven and secretive Javanese quite differently from the New Order’s refined, moralistic and aristocratic Javanese (Foulcher, 1990; Pemberton, 1994; Jones, 2013).

The films articulate Javaneseness through the incorporation and embodiment of Javanese values manifested in their actor, event, and subject matter. They become the symbols and cultural representations pertinent to the social, political and cultural conditions in the first decade of the Indonesian reform era (1998-2008). As noted in chapter one, I limit the investigation during this period because the period had become the most euphoric and liberal moment for the development of documentary filmmaking, especially before Indonesian Film Act number 33 was issued in 2009. The law was meant to confirm the strategic functions of film and to guarantee the involvement of all stakeholders in developing films of all genres in the Indonesian context. The period also exhibits documentary films that critically express the uncertain economic, political, social and cultural conditions in such a euphoric and dynamic moment.

About this, I read that the examined documentaries express Javaneseness that is plural, unstable, historically conditioned and interpretive. I consider that Hall's notion of the fluidity and the transient nature of cultural identity anchors my purpose to describe the ephemerality of Javanese cultural identity represented in the films. It gives me the reason to contextualise the models of Javaneseness in the documentaries with the socio-political and cultural conditions of the early reform era in Indonesia. From this context, I find that the examined films do not portray the established image of

Javaneseness of the New Order that was aristocratic, refined and sophisticated by manner, language, customs, and economically developmental (Foulcher, 1990; Pemberton, 1994; Jones, 2013). It once again supports my hypothesis that Javaneseness in this undertaking is subjective, historically fabricated, contingent and ephemeral.

Hall's theory of cultural identity representation is a concept of the relationship between cultural identity and representation whose constructed meanings emerge from interpretation, a discursive-constructionist approach (Hall, 1997, p. 1). There are some reasons why I consider that Hall's theory is useful in my analysis. In the first place, this thesis deals with how the representations of Javaneseness portrayed in the documentaries as the cinematic and cultural attempts of the ordinary peoples to reinterpret Javanese cultural identity. It stems from my reading that such efforts are interpretive, transient and not fixed. I use Hall's notion of cultural identity representation as something discursive and fluid contextual to the politics of representation of a particular time or "the regime of representation" (Hall, 1997, p. 6). The films indicate these qualities. I need to frame the cultural identity representations of Javaneseness within the socio-political and cultural conditions of the early reform era in Indonesia. I will apply Hall's cultural representation theory to support my analysis on representations of Javaneseness contextualised with the post-New Order Indonesia.

In the second place, Hall's contextual-based cultural identity representation suggests a possibility of making new interpretations from the cultural practices as shown in the examined films. It occurs in Hall's theory, contextual-based interpretation of cultural identity representation within a specific period creates its historicity or signification (Hall, 1997, p. 46). The films examined indicate their various significations of Javaneseness that result in the models of Javaneseness represented. They are the

traditional value-based Javanese-ness (the revival of traditional Javanese values), the marginalised Javanese-ness and the negotiated Javanese-ness.

Additionally, this discursive-constructionist approach is significant for interpreting the result of my Ricoeurian hermeneutic reading that is symbolism of Javanese-ness in the documentaries. Hall views cultural identity as a difficult concept that demonstrates amalgamated characteristics and conditions. He posits that cultural identity is never entirely clear-cut, and yet constructed, plural, unstable, contingent, within and not without representations, historical, positional, narrated, imaginary, symbolic, idealised, and fragmented (Du Gay and Hall, 1996, pp. 3–4).

Hall (1997) suggests that cultural meanings stem from an intellectual process. Such meanings influence people's emotions and feelings that have practical effects both collectively and individually. Members of a culture give meanings to anything they share. Consequently, those cultural things rarely have a fixed and unchanging meaning from time to time. This alteration occurs because members of a culture signify what they have, such as customs and tradition differently. They contextualise customs and traditions with relevance to their lives. What I mean by “contextualise” is analogous to what Hall says “interpret”, which has mental and practical dimensions.

We give things meaning by how we represent them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualise them, and the values we place on them (Hall, 1997, p. 3).

Hence, the result of this cultural interpretation, namely cultural meanings, is multi-dimensional. It involves cognitive, affective, and behavioural spectrums. However, what needs remembering is that they all begin with an intellectual activity that is signifying process. This process occurs because of producing and exchanging meanings among members of a particular culture.

In the context of signifying practice, this thesis is a product of my interpretation

of the films' total meanings: the referential, explicit, implicit and symptomatic ones from a cultural vantage point, Javanese-ness. The overall argument of this thesis is that the examined documentaries show a dynamic interplay between the films' diverse subject matters and their Javanese cultural representations. I view that the interplay articulates Javanese-ness that is heterogeneous, personal, liberal, and ephemeral than the New Order's aristocratic Javanese-ness. The examined films also indicate the filmmakers' cultural readings of the socio-cultural subject matters they bring to light.

Hall claims that ascribing cultural meaning is executed and circulated via different processes. The processes involve representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation, which are known as "the cultural circuit" (Hall, 1997, p. 4). As a representational practice, the meaning is contained, conveyed, and understood. As an identifying practice, the meaning is used to mark a particular entity that shows similarities and differences from others. As production and consumption practices, the meaning is variously expressed through human activities, such as customs, rituals and traditions. As a regulatory practice, the meaning is projected into norms, values, and beliefs that encourage people to have a sense of comradeship, an imagined community (see also Anderson, 2006). As this meaning-making and exchanging process always emerges, members of a social group can distort and provide alternative meanings on what they hold at different times and places. This situation, to a certain degree, explains why particular values, traditions or rituals may still exist while others vanish.

## **2.5. Research on the Representation of Javanese-ness**

Various representations of cultural identity of the examined films are individual stories of Javanese-ness. The documentaries discussed are subjective stories as they reflect the grassroots' perceptions of what it means to be the Javanese in the post-New Order Indonesia. Such perceptions are expressed in the various images of being

Javanese as mentioned in the first section. They are different from the representation of Javanese-ness projected by the New Order regime. As mentioned in chapter one, the New Order regime tried to create an ideal Indonesian society based on aspects of Javanese aristocratic culture. Jones describes this aristocratic Java-centrism as “an eclectic combination of aspects of *kebatinan* [Javanese spiritualism or mysticism], the Dutch colonial mix of public morality and private self-interest” (Jones, 2012, p. 155). This construct represents Indonesian national identity as an aristocratic Javanised society with lofty and indirect language, etiquette, secular moral standards, and economic-oriented logic that justifies self-profit seeking. The regime’s univocal construct stemmed from the regime's ultimate interest in the political and economic sectors. This interest “overrode all other possible considerations, such as cultural identity, traditional knowledge and lifestyles and considerations of equity” of non-state constructs (Jones, 2013, p. 123).

The freedom to interpret and express various images of Javanese-ness was apparent in the early reform era after the fall of the New Order regime. The examined documentaries were the products of this spirit of freedom. As touched upon in chapter one, two socio-political and cultural factors made the first decade of the reform euphoric and dynamic. There was a temporary bias against Javanese culture before and after the 1998 change. This bias became the stimulant to explore diverse interpretations of Javanese-ness possible. The univocal Javanised construct of the New Order in combination with the regime’s authoritarian governance was accused to have contributed to exacerbating collusion, corruption and nepotism in Indonesia. This bias was contributory to the political reform in 1998.

Consequently, Javanese culture was subject to public criticisms. Such biased criticisms occurred because “the New Order culture is paternalistic, with the power centralised in the metropolis, and more specifically in the hands of the president, who

behaves in the manner of a Javanese King” (Budianta, 2000, p. 116). It is not surprising that the escalating voices of discontent at the peak of the crises were directed at the centre of the hegemonic power and the state culture that was displayed, the aristocratic Java style.

Another factor was the religious and ethnic identity revivals in Indonesia as a response to globalisation (Davidson and Henley, 2007; Reuter, 2009). The revivals brought matters of local values and ethnic identities to light again. Locality and ethnicity have also become the central issues in the contemporary global politics (Smith, 1999, 2004). The complex problem of politics mixed with locality and ethnicity is exemplified by the conflict between ethnic Hutu and Tutsi in Africa and the conflict between Myanmar government and ethnic Karen as well as Rohingya in Myanmar.

My thesis focuses on the representation of Javanese-ness. It enunciates the subjective interpretation and expression of being Javanese recorded in the examined documentaries. I am interested in highlighting the description of Javanese-ness as the films studied, on the content side, express vivid socio-political and cultural portrayals of Javanese cultural identity. Such representations mingled with the social actors’ testimonies construct the narratives of the documentaries. The film narratives actively communicate their subject matters that are rhetorically disclosed. With this, the viewers will understand from whose angles the films are established.

Nichols (1991) suggests that the word representation carries with it at least three meanings. Representation indicates a likeness as in a model or a depiction of something. Representation is related to the portrayals of individuals and groups as well as classes in society. Also, representation suggests an act to convey meanings of a fact using discourse. It is executed in rhetorical, persuasive and argumentative manners explicitly and implicitly (Nichols, 1991, pp. 111–112).

Similarly, Chapman (2009) maintains that representation in a documentary film

can be construed in several ways. Representation can be understood as a photographic or likeness of something. It can be a way of standing for individuals, groups or agencies. It can also be apprehended as proposing a case or some aspects of the social realities. Moreover, a documentary film can do all of them. Concerning the film's subject matter, a documentary can offer representations via three means: testimony, implication and exposition. Testimony provides a first-person's viewpoint of experiences. Implication offers a situation where the viewer emotionally gets involved in the process of a lived experience through social actors. Exposition offers the presence of a third-person narration explaining and commenting on the film's subject matter (Chapman, 2009, p. 29).

From Nichols and Chapman's understandings of representation, I would like to stress the ideological dimension produced in a documentary representation of a particular group of society. A documentary film is potentially read to convey ideological aspect of the film's subject matter irrespective of having a direct or indirect connection with political subject matters (Nichols, 1981, 1991). In the case of the documentaries studied here, the ideological dimension is pertinent to the grassroots' reinterpretations of Javanese-ness in Indonesia. The films show diverse representations of Javanese-ness through different subject matters. The subject matters of the examined documentaries cover from the myth of sex and social hypocrisy in *Jamu* to the philosophical values of Javanese leadership in *Batik*. This range provides a space for ideological interpretations of Javanese-ness. In this context, cultural identity representations of the documentaries can be regarded as subjective stories of Javanese-ness.

Subjectivity is complex and is not a new issue in the history of documentary. It contains the pursuit of "truth" of the presented images, voices, and ideas. A documentary film should not be considered as a portrayal of truth objectively. Michael



Renov affirms that the valorisation of documentary objectivity has been taken over by “a more personalist perspective in which the maker’s stake and commitment to the subject matter were foregrounded” (Renov, 2004, p. 176). Documentary film is presently more complex than it was in the past because recognition of the subjective quality of a documentary film now turns out to be strong. Chapman points out that this complexity arises because documentary film involves a non-repeatable human factor, real chaotic events, real-time, opinions, and a process of reconstructing them all with editing that serve the filmmakers' viewpoints (Chapman, 2009, p. 49).

Renov (2004) views subjectivity as a thematic field in its own right. Subjectivity includes the subjectivity of the film and the filmmaker in presenting a subject matter through images and voices (Corner, 2006, p. 125). Similarly, Winston advocates the idea that the subjective quality of a documentary film lies in how the film shows a creativity to present actuality. He calls this “artistic subjectivity” because “the documentarist is an artist but one who constrains their imagination to process only what is witnessed” (Winston, Vanstone and Chi, 2017, pp. 22–23). A witness of actuality provides the evidentiary status of a documentary. Testimonies and interviews are forms of witness. According to Winston, the presentation of fact always involves witness and intervention, except for surveillance that is construed as a witness of non-intervention. Intervention is understood as the creativity of the filmmaker to present the actuality to the viewers. In this construction of witness and intervention, the subjectivity of documentary can be investigated (Winston, Vanstone and Chi, 2017, pp. 23–24).

I hold that subjectivity is significantly conveyed in this representational study of Javanese history. The examined documentaries offer constructions of witnesses through personal experience, case studies, and rhetoric. In this respect, the contents of the documentaries demonstrate witnesses of social realities imbued with Javanese history, cultural practices, beliefs and traditional values. The amalgamation of witnesses, social

facts, Javanese history, cultural traditions, beliefs and traditional values suggests a tendency to represent Javaneseness more diversely than the past representation of the 'New Order' Javaneseness. The representation of this amalgamation is subjective, personal and rhetorical.

In the following chapter, I will outline the methodology of this thesis. This part explains the research paradigm applied and the design chosen. I will also describe how I collected the documentary films; the instrument I used, and the methods to analyse them.

**CHAPTER III**  
**METHODOLOGY**

As was explained in the previous chapters, this thesis explores the representations of the Javanese in the textual and contextual levels of the examined documentaries. The aim is to uncover the imaginations that the films try to articulate and their meanings. These all are analysed from the cultural vantage point using the hermeneutic constructionism. Concerning the methods which will be used to investigate the films, this chapter mainly describes my research paradigm to conduct the study, research design, method of data collection and selection, as well as method of data analysis and interpretation. Therefore, this part is divided into four sections accordingly.

### **3.1. Research Paradigm**

The term “research paradigm” has several other names, such as research approach, research program, research tradition, and scientific paradigm (Neuman, 2014, p. 96). To avoid confusion, I use the term “research paradigm” or just “paradigm” in this thesis. The term is utilised to describe a researcher’s “worldview, perspective, or thinking, or school of thought, or the set of shared-belief, that informs the meaning or interpretation of research data” (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017, p. 26).

Different experts, such as Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln (2013), also maintain that paradigms are the most fundamental sets of beliefs that can drive a researcher to develop his or her alternative logic that may not often follow the rules of classical logic. Therefore, paradigms “need not be, and often are not, commensurable” (Guba and Lincoln, 2013, p. 59). As to Neuman, he defines paradigm as “a general organising framework for theory and research that includes basic assumptions, key issues, models of quality research, and methods for seeking answers” (Neuman, 2014, p. 96). The fundamental function of a research paradigm is to provide beliefs and dictates a researcher how meaning will be created from the data that he or she will collect

(Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017, p. 26).

There are four dominant types of research paradigms: positivist, constructionist/interpretivist, critical/transformativ, and pragmatic paradigms (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006; Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). I will not explain all of them but only a constructionist/interpretivist one as this is the research paradigm on which my thesis is predicated. Constructivist or interpretivist paradigm is the worldview of a researcher that has the intention of understanding human experience wherein it sees reality as socially constructed (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006; Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017).

Constructivist or interpretivist paradigm exhibits eight characteristics in nature. It admits that the social world cannot be understood from an individual's standpoint only. Realities are multiple and constructed socially. There is interaction between the researcher and the subject of research. Context is pivotal for knowledge and knowing. Knowledge is gained by the findings. It can be something implied, which, therefore, needs to be made explicit. Comprehending the uniqueness of individual's experience is the main focus than the universal laws. Causes and effects are interrelated. Contextual factors of the object being researched cannot be neglected; instead, they need considering very significantly (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017, p. 34). The reason why I make use of constructivist/interpretivist paradigm in this thesis is because I share the same outlook with the paradigm. This thesis also demonstrates all conditions or characteristics outlined above. The constructivist/interpretivist paradigm lays the philosophical bedrock of this thesis.

### **3.2. Research Design**

As was explained in chapter two, my theoretical framework to analyse the documentaries is what I call "hermeneutic constructionism". It is a constructed analytical tool from the domains of hermeneutics and cultural studies. Ricoeur's theory

is the representative of the hermeneutics domain while those of Anderson, Hall, and Siapera stand for the cultural studies. Therefore, it is clear that the research design or research strategy of my thesis is essentially a convergence of hermeneutic research and that of cultural studies. This converged research design aims to provide interpretation of the implied and symptomatic meanings of the documentaries (see also Bordwell, 1991). In this converged strategies, my thesis explores both the textual and contextual meanings of the lived socio-cultural experiences exhibited in the films.

Hermeneutics is the art of understanding a text. It is concerned initially with a textual exegesis, especially from scriptural texts. In its development, the orientation of hermeneutics shifts from a religiously philological one to a philosophical interest. Then, hermeneutics moves from the narrow textual and scriptural understanding to the search for understanding human actions and life experiences narrated in any texts. To do so, hermeneutics heavily relies on the process of interpretation to understand and provide possible explications of human actions and life experiences. As a result, hermeneutics deals with the subjective dimension of human activities and lives (Wernet, 2014, pp. 234–235).

As clarified in chapter two, the hermeneutics of Ricoeur that I apply in this examination of documentary films is Ricoeur's philosophical concepts of symbol and imagination. I have also explained the reasons why these concepts are employed in the previous chapter. However, I still need to reify the main argument why hermeneutics as the research design of this thesis is utilised. I hold the same view of Dudley Andrew (1984) and Alberto Barraco (2017) wherein a film text is not to be understood solely from its structural analysis but also a historically grounded interpretation of a film text and context. Their hermeneutic perspective in film interpretation adopts from that of Ricoeurian hermeneutics of text interpretation. My investigation of Javanese-ness in the documentary films stems from a typically textual research that is further interpreted

with a deeper and broader link to the cultural context of the examined films' narratives. This paves the way for another research design to be combined, cultural studies.

Cultural studies is a research strategy of diverse perspectives from humanities and social sciences that "applies itself to the analysis of lived experiences, social practices, and cultural representations, which are considered in their network-like or intertextual links, from the viewpoints of power, difference and human agency" (Winter, 2014, p. 247). As also explained in the Literature Review, I adopt Anderson's socio-political concept of imagined community, Hall's representation of cultural identity, and Siapera's regimes of cultural representation. These all resonate the presence and significant need of cultural studies in the investigation of Javanese-ness. The analysis of visual data (media texts), namely the examined documentaries, is aimed at revealing the cultural values which are hidden in the texts (Winter, 2014, p. 249).

The essential methodological nature of cultural studies is that it examines both a text and its contexts. Hence, it does not view the text as a discrete entity but always in the contextual setting. Therefore, research in cultural studies is interested in how texts and discourse are communicated with social, political, cultural and historical contexts (Saukko, 2003; Grossberg, 2010; Hall, 2016). The tensions between texts and contexts then become the focal arena where discourse is articulated and the examined media text, the documentaries in this thesis, is the bearer of this complexity (Winter, 2014, p. 255). I will further explain how to apply the above hermeneutic research and cultural studies in the section of research procedures of this chapter.

### **3.3. Method of Data Collection and Selection**

In the preliminary research, I collected thirty documentary films representing Javanese culture. The documentary films selected are part of hundreds of the In-Docs documentary collection. In-Docs is a non-profit organisation working with the aim

to promote documentary filmmaking as an open channel to new voices and ideas of diverse spectrums in Indonesia. This organisation was established in 2002. Before my research, I had already contacted In-Docs and made an inquiry to research documentary films about Javanese culture. In-Docs provided me with the list they had under the category of socio-cultural traditions and customs from 2002-2008. I thoroughly read all synopses of the films in the list and then selected 30 films that interested me.

From the way In-Docs swiftly provided me with the films and also from my personal experiences to attend documentary film screenings and festivals, I figured out that socio-cultural documentary already created its ecology in the documentary film environment in the first decade of the reform era. As for the examined documentaries, some of them were nominated in local, national and international documentary film festivals. *Ksatria Kerajaan*, for instance, was screened and nominated for Eagle Awards Documentary Competition Awards and Jakarta International Film Festival in 2005 (In-Docs, 2014, unpaginated).

The technique for data collection required for this thesis was observation, by watching documentary films that deals with Javanese cultural representations. Having had consultation with my thesis supervisors, a qualitative research on the thirty documentary films within four years was impossible to conduct. Then, I selected them and came up with ten films to examine. As my research topic evolved and became more focused, then I chose six out of ten documentary films. This decision was also partly suggested by my supervisors. The method to select them was purposive sampling since a qualitative research generally requires a purposive sampling (Terrel, 2016, p. 161). This technique of data selection was chosen as I already targeted and limited the kinds of documentary films in Indonesia that I would examine. They are documentaries that incorporate and describe expressions of Javanese culture to explain their subject matters.



### 3.4. Method of Data Analysis and Interpretation

As mentioned earlier, I will apply the hermeneutic constructionism in interpreting the films by analysing the documentaries textually. Textual analysis will be my first method in investigating the films. Alan McKee (2003) defines textual analysis as follows.

... a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world. It is a methodology – a data gathering process – for those researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and how they fit into the world in which they live” (McKee, 2003, p. 1).

What is meant by “text” in the above quote includes films, television programmes, magazines, advertisements, clothes, graffiti, and so on (McKee, 2003). The textual analysis in this thesis include textual analysis on the form and style (aesthetic properties) of the examined documentaries. As the approach suggests, the hermeneutic constructionism, I will take some vital scenes in each film and analyse them.

Analysing aesthetic properties of the examined documentaries is crucial as it will give a substantial justification of the meanings of the films. As suggested by David Bordwell (1991) in his book, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of the Cinema*, we know that there are four levels of meaning ascribed to a film. They are referential, explicit, implicit and symptomatic meanings (see also Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, 2013). The referential meaning is a meaning tangibly conveyed or illustrated in the film narrative. This meaning could be specific things or places to which the film refers. The referential meaning helps to establish the film’s subject matter. Viewers who are not familiar with this referential meaning would miss necessary information cued by the film (Bordwell, 1991, p. 8). In this thesis, the referential meaning of *Jamu*, for instance, is the Javanese traditional medicine consumed in the context of Jakarta's urban life. Other documentaries examined in this thesis express their referential meanings as I indicated at the beginning of this section.

The explicit meaning is precisely demonstrated in a film. This meaning

manifests in the salient statements of the actors, their actions, and in what a shot and a scene stylistically shows. As in the referential meaning, the explicit meaning of a film works within the overall form of the film (Bordwell, 1991, p. 8). The explicit meaning of *Jamu*, for example, is expressed in the narrator's statement saying, "We are a moralised society" at the introductory scene of the documentary. Such an account of the narrator explicitly puts forward the claim of the film. I will address this and other explicit meanings of the examined films in chapters three and four. In these chapters, the examination involves analysis of the narrator and (social) actors, the themes, the settings, the plots and narrative structure, the documentaries' arguments and some *mise-en-scène* elements.

The implicit and symptomatic meanings of a film are more abstract than the previous two meanings. The implicit meaning concerns what a film suggests or implies. It often relates to the film's theme as a broad concept. Ascribing the implied meaning of a movie requires interpretations. The viewers' interpretations should be based on the concrete features of a movie, the aesthetic and rhetorical qualities of the film (Bordwell, 1991, pp. 8–9). In other words, the implicit meaning should also relate to the referential and explicit meanings of a film. In this regard, I consider that the aesthetic analysis of the thesis provides the context where the documentaries portray the symbols as my starting point of interest. What the symbols suggest or imply in the whole contexts of the films leads me to the idea of Javanese-ness. It is my interpretation of the implicit meanings of the examined films.

From the textual analysis, I will concentrate on what object, event, or actor that well articulates and represents Javanese-ness in the films. It marks the analytical shifts from textual analysis to the cultural analysis of the films' contents. This is to say that I will focus on the cultural symbolism that the documentaries demonstrate. Such a cultural aspect of the documentaries becomes my primary interest and starting point to

examine the projection of Javanese cultural identity in the films. This is my first step to conduct the analysis and answer the first research question, “By what means do the documentaries convey images of Javaneseness beneath their diverse subject matters?” The answer is the employment of the symbols in the films.

In the chapters that follow (chapters four and five), two steps for exploring symbolism that represents Javaneseness in the films will be conducted. As suggested above, the examination will be on the aesthetic properties or the formal aspects of the documentaries in the first place. After that, the analysis will focus on the rhetorical quality and the hermeneutic reading of the films. In this step, I will further analyse the films’ arguments and interpret them hermeneutically. By interpreting them hermeneutically, I infer that particular objects, events, actions, and actors in the films do express their symbolic meanings. At this point, I analyse the symbols from the cultural vantage point, because the documentaries express an incorporation of traditional Javanese values in the films’ cultural representations.

*Jamu*, for instance, explicitly presents the aphrodisiac folk-belief of jamu. The film implicitly communicates its argument to question sex and marriage values in the Javanese cultural frame. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* explicitly addresses the social harmony, a manifestation of the Javanese values of *rukun* (harmony) and *hormat* (respect) in the Javanese village of Sorowajan. *Ksatria Kerajaan* overtly depicts a traditional Javanese myth of *ngalab berkah*, and the film covertly articulates the Javanese value of humility, loyalty and simplicity of life. *Kulo Ndiko Sami* explicitly and implicitly communicates honesty and non-violent principles of the Sikep, a manifestation of their traditional religion. *Wayang Kulit* explicitly demonstrates the expression of the Javanese ethics of *sepi ing pamrih* (sincerity, having a no-ulterior motive), *ramé ing gawé* (commitment to the profession). *Bathik* explicitly depicts *Asta Brata*, the eight virtues of Javanese leadership. These documentaries show that the

Javanese values are present and addressed, whether or not they are overtly expressed. I view that the incorporation of these values manifested through the symbols determines the kinds of Javaneseness that the films suggest. It is my cultural interpretation of the function of the symbols in the documentaries.

After explaining the symbolism in chapters four and five, the analysis will proceed to answer the second research question, “What images of Javaneseness do the documentary films try to express?” in chapters six, seven and eight. In these chapters, I will examine the correlation between the symbols and Javaneseness by describing the nature of Javanese cultural identity represented in the films. I argue that there is more than one image of Javaneseness described in the documentaries. Each film portrays a different expression of Javaneseness, and yet I view some similarities among them. These similarities can group the diverse representations of Javanese cultural identity into what I call “model”.

The first model is the traditional value-based Javaneseness. It is a representation of being Javanese from some documentaries expressing a revival of the traditional Javanese values. The documentaries that belong to this category are *Wayang Kulit*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Bathik*. The second model is the marginalised Javaneseness. This model is a representation of being Javanese from some films highlighting sexuality and a marginalised Javanese community, the Sikep. Sexuality, marginalised and under-developed community were subject matters less explored or better avoided during the New Order regime. The documentaries of this second model are *Jamu* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami*.

With this “better avoided” theme of sexuality in the Indonesian film context, Intan Paramaditha in her essay, *Cinema, Sexuality and Censorship in Post-Suharto Indonesia* (2012) provides a good example. Paramaditha maintains that in the first decade of the Indonesian reform era, film policy regarding censorship, especially the

idea of policing the sexuality of its citizens through visual images, still operates based on the old (the New Order) oppressive paradigm. This condition was significantly exacerbated by the growing radical views and influence of some Islamic groups who kept on struggling for upholding Islamic laws and anti-pluralism in Indonesia (Paramaditha, 2012, p. 69). In the New Order regime, depicting sexuality was permitted so long as it complied with the regime's gender and sexual politics, namely the family-based ideology of the military and Javanese *priyayi*, which is heavily patriarchal and domesticating for women (Paramaditha, 2012, pp. 71–72).

The third model is the negotiated Javanese-ness. It is a representation of being Javanese from a film, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*. This documentary depicts a transformed Javanese socio-cultural tradition, *nyadran*, in the early period of the reform era. From the correlation between the symbols and the three models above, I perceive that the symbolic object, event and actor well represent and enhance Javanese-ness.

Having explained the steps that I will take to answer the second research question, the investigation will respond to the third research question, "How do the films project various models of Javanese-ness?" in the same chapters (chapters six, seven and eight). I will examine the ways the films describe their cultural contents and arguments to project the three models of Javanese-ness.

As outlined above, the following chapter four sets off the analytical corpus of this thesis dealing with symbolism. The chapter is developed from the examination of three documentary films, *Jamu*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami*. The symbols of Javanese-ness and their meanings in the context of the documentary subject matters and narratives are significant in these films. This analysis of symbols becomes my initial step to describe the images of Javanese-ness projected in the documentaries.

**CHAPTER IV**

**SYMBOLISM OF JAVANESENESS IN**

***JAMU, KSATRIA KERAJAAN AND KULO NDIKO SAMI***

This chapter explores the symbols that convey Javanese-ness of three documentary films, *Jamu*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami*. Studying symbols in these films is crucial as I argue that their usage and meanings determine the kinds of Javanese cultural identity represented. In other words, the presence of symbols in the documentaries evokes the representations of being Javanese. In this respect, we need to know the symbols of Javanese-ness and their meanings in the context of the documentary subject matters and narratives. The analysis of symbols becomes the entry point to reveal the imagination of Javanese-ness offered in the films. To explain the symbols and their meanings, my review deals with what symbols the filmmakers use, how the symbols are represented, and what the symbols hermeneutically suggest in the films. Hence, my review in this chapter and the chapter five is a blend of the analysis of form and style as well as cultural interpretation of each documentary. For this reason, as explained in chapter two, my understanding of the symbols stems from Ricoeur's hermeneutics.

Symbol, in Ricoeur's hermeneutics, suggests "any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first" (Ricoeur, 1974, pp. 12–13). Symbol encapsulates not only concrete entities in the historical world, such as trees, labyrinths, mountains and inanimate cultural objects but also significant human experiences, symptoms and expressions. These anthropocentric matters could be manifested in conscious actions and unconscious ones, such as dreams. Therefore, Ricoeur points out that the "study of symbols belongs to too many and too diverse fields of research", such as psychoanalysis, poetics, and religions (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 53). The important thing is that a symbol is always narrated or part of a narration through a medium of language, having both linguistic (semantically literal) discourse and non-linguistic discourse

(Ricoeur, 1976, p. 54). Ricoeur underlines that in apprehending symbolic meanings, which can be plural or multiple, we need interpretation. He proposes that interpretation is “the work of thought which consists in deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning, in unfolding the levels of meaning implied in the literal meaning” (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 13).

According to Ricoeur, symbol and interpretation are correlative concepts. In Ricoeur's view, hermeneutic reading of symbol comprises three levels. It proceeds with the sensory level, the level of reflection, and the existential level. The sensory level here can be in the semantic level (phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs and the writing as a whole), in the visual and in the acoustic level in which the thing used as a symbol is expressed. In this level, the reading of symbol is achieved through our comprehension of the surface and the implied meanings of symbol, of what symbol first appears and what it may suggest beyond the surface. Ricoeur thinks that in this sensory or semantic level, we become aware of the multiple meanings of symbol (Ricoeur, 1974, pp. 13–15).

However, such a reading is not sufficient. In Ricoeur's understanding, the hermeneutic interpretation must move beyond the multiple meanings of symbolic expressions. He considers that the sensory or the semantic level with its multi-meanings is “the narrow gate” through which the hermeneutic reading must pass (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 16). Ricoeur suggests that the reading moves to the level of reflection where the interpretation of symbol is directed to self- understanding. Reflection, in Ricoeur's concept, is understood as “the link between understanding of signs and self- understanding. It is in the self that we have the opportunity to discover an existent” (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 16). Surpassing the semantic or the sensory reading is necessitated so that we do not become what Ricoeur calls “a prisoner of language” (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 16). He claims that the purpose of this interpretive attempt is to “conquer a



remoteness, a distance between the past cultural epoch to which the text belongs and the interpreter himself" (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 16). Ricoeur perceives that reflection is a critique of the interpreter regarding his/her self "cogito" or existence through the mediation of symbolic expressions (Ricoeur, 1974, pp. 17–18). In this context, relating the symbols employed in the examined documentaries to Javanese-ness is the result of my interpretation or critique, namely self-understanding of being a Javanese.

On establishing our self-reflection through symbolic expressions, Ricoeur explains that the hermeneutic reading further brings us to the existential level. In this level, he maintains that relating symbolic expressions to self-reflection of existence is significant as "by understanding ourselves, we said, we appropriate to ourselves the meaning of our desire to be or of our effort to exist" (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 21). Existence, in Ricoeur's reading, becomes one's self or one's existence only by appropriating "the hidden meaning inside the text of the apparent meaning" (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 22). He feels that it is the task of the hermeneutic reading to point out that "existence arrives at expression, at meaning, and at reflection only through the continual exegesis of all the significations that come to light in the world of culture (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 22). Consequently, this hermeneutic reading brings our understanding of symbol away from the semantic or the sensory level (textual level) to a higher cultural dimension that covers it (Ricoeur, 1974, 1976, 1991; Simms, 2016). In this respect, my critique of Javanese-ness will, later on, indicate that the notion of Javanese-ness is heterogeneous, subjective, and transient as exhibited by different images of being Javanese in the examined films.

I divide this chapter into four sections. The first section discusses Javanese traditional medicine, *jamu*, which becomes a significant symbol to represent Javanese-ness. The discussion revolves around what *jamu* signifies and why it expresses Javanese-ness in the context of the whole film. The second section explores Pardi, a

palace guard of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta, in *Ksatria Kerajaan*. What the palace guard symbolically means and why he represents Javanese-ness is crucial to reveal. The third section examines the cultural struggle of the Sikep community in *Kulo Ndiko Sami*. Hence, the discussion concentrates on what their struggle communicates and why their effort can be ascribed to Javanese-ness. The last section outlines the conclusion of this chapter.

#### **4.1. Traditional Medicine: Satiric Symbol of Moral Perspective and Javanese Marriage Values in *Jamu***

This section explores what *jamu* signifies and why it becomes the symbol articulating Javanese-ness in *Jamu*. In this respect, I argue that *jamu* is a satiric symbol that challenges a lingering moral perspective in Indonesia, “We are a moralised society”. In this respect, *jamu* articulates a distrust of the moralistic view and Javanese marriage values, expressing a wish to disengage from them. The documentary shows how *jamu* is introduced, investigated, and finally intersected with the free-sex phenomenon in Jakarta. Before discussing why *jamu* becomes the symbol, it is necessary to provide an overview of the form and style of *Jamu* as a point of departure.

##### **4.1.1. Form and Style of *Jamu***

*Jamu* is an essay-formatted documentary produced in 2002 in Jakarta, Indonesia. The film’s duration is 25 minutes in English and Indonesian languages with English subtitles. *Jamu* was filmed using a standard digital video (DV) format. The film was directed by Ayu Utami and produced by Ayu Utami and Erik Prasetya. Erik Prasetya was also the cinematographer. The documentary shows a personal city-tour of the filmmaker to unveil social reality and beliefs pertinent to the practice of consuming *jamu* and sex practices in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. The film takes *jamu*, Javanese

traditional medicine, as its subject matter.

The leading actor here is Ayu Utami (the narrator). Other supporting actors are Sariyem (a traditional jamu vendor), Suyoto (a street vendor), Pandu Riyono (a family health consultant), Jalu Patidina (a male consumer of jamu concocted from a cobra's liver) and Erik Prasetya (the cinematographer). Prasetya is seen before the camera in the last scene. In this scene, Prasetya performs as Utami's spouse in their intimate dramatisation.

The setting of the film takes place in several areas in Jakarta. These are the areas of the National Monument (MoNas) and the State Palace, a jamu stall in a Jakarta's urban district, some places of Jakarta's ex-red-light district Kramat Tunggak, a café and a jamu stall in the Old Town Batavia, Jakarta's Chinatown and a motel bedroom in the central region of Jakarta. A film scene also takes place in the Bogor Botanical Garden. Bogor is a town to the south of Jakarta.

*Jamu* demonstrates qualities of a first-person essay and testimonial documentary. As a first-person documentary, the film shows Ayu Utami's account of what she experiences disclosing the sexual and mythic-oriented motive of consuming jamu. This journey brings her further to expose sexual practices in Jakarta. The dramatic effect of the combination of this participatory, performative and first-person essay film lies in the gradual self-revelation of the correlation among the public moral view, jamu and sexual practices.

As to the testimonial quality, *Jamu* conveys oral witnesses of the actors' personal views and experiences regarding jamu and its aphrodisiac myth. The testimonial quality of the film is depicted in two interview scenes of *Jamu*. First is the scene presenting three persons, Sariyem, Suyoto, and Pandu Riyono. In this interview scene, *Jamu* shows Sariyem, Suyoto and Pandu Riyono giving their testimonies about a myth of "dry vagina". The scene starts with the interview of the narrator with Sariyem in

medium and close-up shots. Sariyem, depicted as a middle-aged Javanese woman wearing a bandanna, blue scarf and batik, confesses the importance of jamu for women to maintain their own organs free from excessive dampness. This condition is achieved by regularly drinking jamu.

According to Sariyem, the myth behind this practice is that a man likes to have a sexual intercourse with a woman whose private organ is moist or dry rather than excessively wet. Here, Sariyem asserts, "Of course men prefer "dry vagina". They don't like it if it is too wet". Afterwards, the film shows Suyoto in close-up shot, confirming Sariyem's statement, "Well, dry is nicer". Then, the scene presents Pandu Riyono in medium and close-up shots. He challenges the myth, "About dry sex; it is only men who believe that a "dry vagina" gives an extraordinary sensation". In the shot that follows, Suyoto in a close-up shot, with his serious facial expression reassures the narrator that the myth is true, "Dry is so nice, friend. You don't know it!" This scene signifies the intersection of jamu and sex from widespread social perceptions.

The second scene describes the interview of the narrator with a man drinking a cup of jamu concocted from cobra's liver and gin in a jamu stall at the Old Town, Batavia. The scene begins with a medium shot of a man holding a cobra with its head hanging downside. The man grabs the cobra's head and cuts it off with a blade. He extracts the snake's liver and blood and concocts them with a shot of gin in a small cup. Then, the scene, in medium and close-up shots, presents a male consumer, Jalu Patidina, drinking the concoction. Patidina holds up the container, smiles before the camera, and drinks it in one shot. He argues that drinking this kind of jamu is good for his skin and more importantly his vitality. Afterwards, the scene also captures a waitress who confirms Patidina's reasons to the narrator. She said that most male customers drink the jamu for skin care and virility. This cobra jamu scene also provides a social perception of jamu and sex.

*Jamu*, by genre, can be considered a participatory and performative documentary as well. According to Nichols, a participatory quality of a documentary rests on the filmmakers' involvement in shaping what happens in front of the camera. This kind of film shows a reliance on the personal interactions of the filmmakers and their actors. The film uses the speech between the filmmaker and the social actors in interviews. The film demonstrates the filmmakers' manipulation and distortion of confessions and actions. Besides, the film also engages with an intense encounter with other social actors and social realities to present a perspective (Nichols, 2010, pp. 210–211).

In this regard, *Jamu* shows how the narrator, Ayu Utami, is involved in the interviews with other actors. She even participates in consuming jamu as described in one of the scenes where she comes to a jamu stall. With asynchronous sounds of a traditional Javanese zither *chelempung* and “*E Jamune*” song at the background in combination with hand-held camera tracking, the scene shows a jamu stall in a dense residential area of Jakarta. The scene shows Ayu Utami and a male actor riding a motorbike. They are looking for a jamu stall. When they enter the booth, the camera captures and zooms in a favorite jamu brand *Sido Muncul* at the stall's signpost. In this jamu stall scene, the narrator orders a glass of jamu for women. Then, she gets involved in a brief conversation with the vendor as he is making the concoction of jamu.

The vendor: Iya telur bebek [Yes, we use duck egg]

The narrator: Nggak telur ayam *kampung*? [Not the egg of a free-range chicken eating natural diet?]

The vendor: Oh nggak... [No...]

After the narrator finishes the jamu, she says, “This is called *Sari Rapet* or the essence of tightness. It strengthens the contraction of woman's feminine organ”. While addressing this statement to the viewers, she puts her left index finger into her right palm, folds it and tightens it up to indicate the act of penetration and the contraction. The film captures this hand gesture demonstration of the narrator in close-up shot.

Afterwards, the narrator takes another jamu from a pile of jamu products in front of her. She, then, states: “This is also another kind of traditional product. We call it *Tongkat Madura* or Madurese Stick. Madura is very famous because of its products and jamu for women...Direction for use: insert this medicinal herbal into woman's female part, and let it remain for one or two minutes. Then take it out. It will absorb excess liquid and banish unpleasant odour”.

The action at first shows the narrator taking the jamu in medium shot. Then, as she explains the jamu, the shot shifts to extreme close-up highlighting the *Tongkat Madura* in its bright red package, then, the fingers of the narrator open the box and pull its content. It is a white cylindrical stick with oval forms at its ends, resembling a phallic shape. This phallic form jamu along with the narrator's explanation highly reaffirm the documentary's engagement with the theme of sexuality. The jamu stall scene illustrates a self-revelation on the part of the film's idea of sexuality. I consider that such an interactive scene between the narrator and the jamu stall vendor as well as her manipulative actions indicates the filmmaker's interference and provocative attitude that help express the participatory mode of the film.

In addition to being a participatory documentary, *Jamu* also shows its performative qualities. A performative documentary reveals the filmmakers' point of view dissociated from a more broadly social perception (Nichols, 2010, p. 210). In this case, the social perception is about the public moral view claimed by the narrator, “We are a moralised society”. A performative film, as Nichols adds, also shows the filmmaker's direct experiential encounter with the subject matter of the film and the film's social actors (Nichols, 2010, p. 211).

In this regard, *Jamu* demonstrates these qualities as shown in the jamu stall scene and the fictionalised sex of the motel bedroom scene above. Moreover, *Jamu* also relies on the filmmakers' voice to organise the film. A performative documentary, as Nichols

further explains, is also characterised by the use of testimonials, essayistic forms of speech and dialogue. The film underlines its strong personal engagement of the film's subject matter, of what it feels like to get involved with the topic in a particular way (Nichols, 2010, p. 211).

The central idea that the filmmaker of *Jamu* develops is that jamu as a cultural product of the Javanese is heavily imbued with the blend of the public moral claim and sexuality. The moralistic belief is no longer reliable as the tour indicates the opposite. The connection between jamu and sexuality the film shows lies in the sexual motives behind jamu drinking custom, the myth underlying the tradition, and the notion of jamu's origin. This idea of authenticity deals with a perception that jamu is indeed a cultural legacy whose ingredients, concoctions and consumption are mostly of Javanese and Indonesian origin. As the convergence of jamu and sex unfolds, the demonstrations of sex practice become further materialised. The best illustration is the dramatisation of the motel bedroom sex. The documentary argues that such a moralistic claim, "We are a moralised society", needs to be reconsidered or just that the free-sex practice needs to be socially admitted as a fact.

The establishing shot of the documentary begins with the portrayals of some buildings and state symbols, such as the Indonesian State Palace, the national emblem of Garuda, the flag, the National Monument, and some city's landmarks. Unlike the narratives of fiction films, those of documentary films rely heavily on the development of the central ideas instead of the development of actions and characters (Bruzzi, 2006; Bernard, 2007; Nichols, 2010; Bordwell and Thompson, 2013). In *Jamu's* opening, we see Ayu Utami, the narrator, introduces herself and reveals her intention to bring the viewers to a city-tour in Jakarta. The setting shifts confirm this sense of tour. The story evolves as she brings to light a public belief, a claim about the piety and morality of Indonesian society, "We are a moralised society". The narrator satirically argues that the

piety and morality of the Indonesians supersede those in the cities of Bangkok and Amsterdam notorious for their sex tourism. “But, we are not like Bangkok that is famous for the Amsterdam of Asia. We are not like that, you know. We are a moralised society. Our motto is Jakarta *Teguh Beriman*, or Jakarta - strong in faith”. She claims that such a pious and moralistic society is possible as the Indonesians well maintain their physical and religious lives. Then, she introduces jamu that is commonly consumed by the public and contributory to the well-being of the Indonesians.

As consuming jamu by the public is common, the narrator begins to expose the primary motive behind the practice. In so doing, she conducts some interviews and field observation and tries to contrast the moralistic claim above with the social realities. *Jamu* shows that the main reason of the public practice for consuming jamu is for virility and vitality. This motive applies to both men and women. From revealing this motive, the narrator develops the story into exposing the ex-prostitution area of Kramat Tunggak and the nightlife of China Town associated with sex businesses. The film, then, starts blending jamu, vitality and virility, and sex practices. The film shows that jamu is also served in the massage parlours and nightclubs, indicating the co-existence of jamu and practices of prostitution associated with those places.

As regards the film’s motif, to illustrate that the idea of sexuality is essential and recurrently manifested in *Jamu*, many scenes are associated with it. One of them is the motel bedroom scene (Figure 1). The motel bedroom scene dramatises the sex between man and woman who pretend to be “husband and wife”. The narrator (Utami) and the cameraman (Prasetya) perform as the husband and the wife in this dramatisation. The narrator claims that the making love in such a place has been part of urban sex life and trend in the metropolitan city of Jakarta. The documentary suggests that free sex has become a social phenomenon in Jakarta and Indonesia as indicated from the revelation of the narrator in the dramatised scene of the motel



bedroom sex.

...Jakarta is very crowded. Its population during the day is more than twelve million. Millions of people live in the satellite cities. They commute every day, and it takes a long journey, and they might already get tired and exhausted when they get home. To maintain the sexual intimacy between husband and wife, some married couple makes love here, after office hour or during lunch break, like me and my “husband”, Erik.

The word “husband” itself suggests an informal expression to show that the speaker is repeating someone else’s word that he or she disagrees. In this respect, the narrator refers to the moral claim, “We are a moralised society” that she challenges.



*Figure1: The Dramatisation of “Husband and Wife” Sex (Jamu, 2002)*

From the outset of the film, the narrator has questioned the moral claim above. This moral claim and the understanding of sex as "the intimate relationship between husband and wife" mark a general attitude towards sex in the context of Indonesia. Sex is morally and socially justified under a legal relationship, marriage. Therefore, the narrator uses the word “husband” in the quote above to satirise the moralistic view of sex in Indonesia, particularly in Jakarta. The documentary tries to deride the moral view by combining it with the cultural practice of drinking jamu, the vitality and virility motive behind it, and the dramatised motel sex. These converged ideas are crammed

into jamu, a product of cultural legacy whose name and origin are rooted in Javanese culture and tradition (Beers, 2001; Soedarsono and Roemantyo, 2002).

Throughout *Jamu*, the filmmaker makes use of rhetorical devices, such as the narrator's commentaries, the testimonials, the insertion of stock footages, and the demonstrations of places or items implying sexual connotations, to advance the film's argument. The film's argument derives from the filmmaker's subjective and personal experience to investigate, interpret and develop the subject matter, jamu. The theme of sexuality, which involves the moralistic claim and the social reality, is ironical as the film's argument begins to be revealed. The introductory scene convincingly displays a moralistic attitude of the narrator whereas the motel bedroom scene expresses a seductive portrayal. This changing representation also shows a shift of the film's tone, from solemnity in the introduction to humour and provocation in the end.

The presence of the narrator is crucial in *Jamu*. The narrator assumes the function as the explicit and implicit voices of the documentary (Nichols, 2010, pp. 74–75). The role of the narrator is to help the narrative progress from scene to scene is significant as the narrator interweaves the social realities and commentaries of the interviewees to be the evidence. There are two kinds of evidence employed in documentary film, inartistic or non-artificial and artistic or artificial proofs. Inartistic evidence refers to things that tend to be disputable, such as facts, ideas and beliefs. The artistic evidence designates anything shown out of the filmmaker's invention or creation that may appeal to the emotions of the audience (Nichols, 2010, p. 78).

Both inartistic and artistic evidence is present in *Jamu*. They heighten the moralistic claim, "We are a moralised society", and its opposing realities. The narrator counters such a moralistic view with some pieces of evidence. The first inartistic evidence is the social and cultural practice of consuming traditional medicine (*jamu*) for sexually-related matters, especially in the scene depicting the myth of sex. This

scene features three interviewees, a traditional jamu vendor (Sariyem), a street vendor (Suyoto), and a family health consultant (Pandu Riyono). The narrator separately interviews them about the motive of the people drinking jamu. Framed in close-up and medium shots, they tell the narrator that vitality and virility become the main reason why people consume jamu as explained previously.

Such an exploration by the narrator represents a situation wherein a society claiming to be pious and moralistic, the reason for vitality and virility in consuming jamu is still expressed. This description seems to nullify the moralistic view in that the documentary presents the ongoing social attitude and cultural practice connected to jamu. This discrepancy suggests that the claim, "We are a moralised society", is only used as a discourse to represent an idealised facet of the society politically. The film makes use of jamu as the cultural entry point to challenge such a moralistic claim.

The second inartistic proof is concerned with the exposure of the ex-red-light district of Kramat Tunggak, which is converted into Jakarta Islamic Centre. This scene illustrates a transformation in Kramat Tunggak, a district that was notoriously known as Jakarta's red-light district at the northern vicinity of the capital. The area once housed hundreds of prostitute strolling up and down the area. The scene shows the narrator explaining the history of Kramat Tunggak, in front of a nearly abandoned theatre, *Kramat Jaya* cinema. When she gives her explanation, the frame also captures some old film posters exhibiting some sexual contents. This portrayal seems to give an impression that the sexual materials the posters display echo the past "glory" of Kramat Tunggak. Now, the brothel, pub and bar have been changed into the Islamic Centre of Jakarta since the Indonesian 1998 political reformation. Another symbol of the opposite extreme now replaces the symbol of Jakarta's red-light centre. Shots of the construction of huge minarets and a green board on the site reading, "The Islamic Centre of Jakarta" in Indonesian and Arabic encapsulate the idea that the

transformation is in process. The scene shows a sign of amplifying the claim, “We are a moralistic society”.

Another inartistic evidence is the representation of the nightlife in Jakarta’s Chinatown. This scene in mobile framing initially portrays street stalls selling food and jamu to increase virility and vitality, such as *ular* (snake), *biawak* (monitor lizard), and *monyet* (monkey). Then, the scene captures locales of nightlife entertainment, such as karaoke, nightclubs, bars, discotheques, and massage parlours, which are closely associated with prostitution in the Indonesian context. All of these shots seem to oppose the claim uttered by the narrator at the film’s outset, “We are not like Bangkok, the Amsterdam of Asia. We are a moralised society”. This scene articulates that in a society claimed to be “moralistic”, such profane facet still exists and has its own life.

As to the artistic evidence, the dramatised scene of the motel bedroom sex illustrates imaginative free sex practice in the metropolitan city of Jakarta. This scene becomes the artistic evidence because it shows the intervention of the filmmakers to represent the social phenomena imaginatively and echo the challenge to the moralistic claim, “We are a moralised society”. The scene implies that the moralistic claim and such an imaginative motel creates a paradox. The sex scene between the imaginary “husband and wife” as described previously suggests that sex has become more liberal in a big city as Jakarta in the context of Indonesia.

#### 4.1.2. Rhetorical and Hermeneutic Interpretation of *Jamu*

From the rhetorical vantage point and my hermeneutic interpretation of the documentary, jamu is the symbol in the film. It is the case since ideologically the central argument of *Jamu* lies in its rejection of the moralistic claim in Indonesia, which describes Indonesia as a moralised society. The claim seems to be on the wane for there is an irony, a disparity between the claim and its reality concerning free-sex

trend in the metropolitan city of Jakarta. The narrator introduces this moralistic claim as the voice of the documentary (explicit authorial narrator) at the outset.

Welcome to Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. My name is Ayu; I will take you city touring. Jakarta, together with Bali and Yogyakarta, are three major tourist destinations in Asia because of their rich culture. But, we are not like Bangkok that is famous for the Amsterdam of Asia. We are not like that, you know. We are a moralised society. Our motto is Jakarta *Teguh Beriman*, or Jakarta - strong in faith.

The filmmaker's statement, "We are not like that you know. We are a moralised society" is a rhetorical statement emphasising the idea of how religious and cultured Indonesian society is. It also signals that the documentary is pertinent to the theme of sexuality because Jakarta is compared to Bangkok and Amsterdam; cities associated with their "sex tours". Here, the narrator is situated at the national monument (MoNas) area. Her denying hand gesture and solemn expression seem to affirm that the truth of this moralistic claim still prevails (Figure 2).



*Figure 2: The Narrator by the National Monument (Jamu, 2002)*

The connection between jamu and the theme of sexuality is evident in the documentary. I want to reemphasise that jamu, the traditional medicine, is solidly the symbol in the film. It is not a symbol of sex nor the hidden motive for consuming jamu

as investigated in the documentary. From my hermeneutic reading, I read that jamu symbolises a mockery of the moralistic view and Javanese marriage values. It becomes the symbol for the film's narrative via its visual and verbal expressions (equivalent to the semantic level of the hermeneutic reading of Ricoeur) has placed jamu as the entry point to unfold an ironic situation.

The film portrays the irony where the belief in "We are a moralised society" seems to be opposed by the manipulated actualities of jamu, the interviews, the sexually associated places and the dramatised sex. Jamu is understood as a traditional medicine on the surface. It is obvious as the film portrays so. This is the surface meaning of jamu. When jamu is deciphered in relation to the whole narrative of the documentary, it can be read as my implied interpretation of the film. I use the word "can" to avoid absolutism in my interpretation and to underline what Ricoeur conveys by "multiple meanings" in this semantic level. My interpretation needs to be understood from these considerations.

I frame my interpretation of jamu pertinent to Javanese culture as the documentary echoes it. To explain this, I would like to start with the following statement of the narrator.

If we close down the prostitution area or ban visual images that have explicit sexual connotation from the public sphere, it does not mean that we hate sexuality. On the contrary, we honour it very high and name it "intimate relationship between husband and wife".

The narrator declares the above statement in the introductory part of a scene where the narrator is about to explain a men's jamu product, *Kuku Bima TL*, by the area of Kramat Tunggak, the Jakarta's ex-red-light district. From the narrator's statement, sex is understood as the intimate relation of husband and wife socially accepted in a marriage. This opinion of sex commonly meets the social norm and religious values in Indonesia. In connection with the moralistic claim, "We are a moralised society", sexual

relation performed in the boundary of marriage is encouraged as the film suggests in the motel bedroom scene that was described previously. However, the scene shows a dramatisation that ridicules this traditional understanding of sex, permitted only in a marriage.

The rhetorical statement of sex as “intimate relationship between husband and wife”, instead of male and female or man and woman implies the cultural values behind the scene. This implied cultural dimension of the scene is not without reason in respect of where the statement is situated and through what medium it is uttered. The place the narrator pronounces the report is in front of a jamu stall selling *KukuBima TL*. The jamu itself utilises a brand name originating from Javanese culture. This designates a Javanese mythological character, *Bima*, introduced as the jamu’s brand name. *Bima* is a mythical figure of the Javanese *wayang* world renowned for his great military skills, courage, honesty and masculinity (Aryandini S and Sriwibawa, 2000; Anderson, 2009; Winata, 2012).

Such an attribution to the Javanese mythological character is shown in the red advertising poster, on the left side behind the narrator, while a picture of a couple is on the right side (Figure 3).



Figure 3: *Kuku Bima TL (Jamu, 2002)*

The cultural aspect above matters in this hermeneutic investigation. The filmmaker has incorporated a Javanese cultural symbol and made it intersect with jamu, and then developed it into sex and social hypocrisy. The word “jamu” itself is of Javanese origin (Beers, 2001; Soedarsono and Roemantyo, 2002).

The cultural intersection here is not only, by function, to heighten the illustration and the rhetoric. It implies the filmmaker's perspective, or attitude towards Javanese-ness, in this case of Javanese marriage values. The scene of *Loro Blonyo*, a pair of man and woman statuettes, introduced by the narrator as “husband and wife in Javanese folk art” culturally illuminates the point of departure to which sex is addressed (Figure 4). *Loro Blonyo* is used to represent a union of man and woman in a marriage. This interpretation is the established reading in Javanese culture. Philosophically man and woman are different in many aspects, but once they have united, they become one. Not only does their union emanate physical matter but also psychological and spiritual concerns (Endraswara, 2013c, p. 72).



Figure 4: *Loro Blonyo* statuettes (*Jamu*, 2002)

The statuette couple is a manifestation of Javanese worldview in that a matrimonial bond should be ideally established based on love and respect. Such an



understanding also relates to a Javanese myth of *Dewi Sri* and *Raden Sadana* echoing the idea of couple's unity, fidelity, fertility, and familial protection. The Javanese, especially those who live in rural areas, know these myths of *Loro Blonyo* and *Sri-Sadana*. This understanding of Javanese myths in villages, to some extent, suggests that the spirit of communalism and kinship relation in rural societies of Java is stronger than that of urban communities (Subiyantoro, 2011, 2012; Endraswara, 2013c).

With this established interpretation, *Loro Blonyo* seems to be used to recall and re-establish the significant aspect of love, loyalty, and unity in the documentary. However, when these underlying values of *Loro Blonyo* are observed very carefully, in relation to the whole context of the film, such interpretation, which logically supports the moralistic claim, "We are a moralised society", is questioned in *Jamu*. I think this relates to the trend of urban sexual practices (free-sex) shown in the dramatised motel bedroom scene.

There is an essential shot in the motel bedroom scene where Erik appears on screen taking off his T-shirt and jeans; he wears underpants reading "*Jangan lupa pakai kondom* [Do not forget to use a condom]" on the back of his underpants. This shot immediately becomes an *aide-mémoire* of the scene illustrating the prohibition of condom advertisement on TV. This scene of condom advertisement portrays the narrator sitting by a desk computer while explaining why the government banned the advertisement. The advertisement illustrates some men going to date some women bringing condoms. Ironically, after the political and social protests of some radical Muslim groups, the narrator reveals the fact that the government responded the protests by banning the advertisement to air. The advertisement, which could also be understood as safe sex promotion, were regarded to expose and encourage free- sex trend. In this regard, I feel that the motel bedroom scene with the exhibition of "*Jangan*

*lupa pakai kondom* [Do not forget to use a condom]" further amplifies the satire of the moralistic claim, "We are a moralised society". Those Javanese values of sex and marriage – sacred, love, loyalty, and unity – are in question.

Thus, I interpret that jamu, as a Javanese cultural product is the symbol of mockery to the moralistic view and the Javanese values above. The film's narrative through the representation of jamu blended with sexuality discloses the irony of the moralistic claim and the marriage values. Jamu as the cultural legacy in combination with the voice of the documentary has made the current moral view and the Javanese marriage values objects of ridicule. The representation of jamu together with that of the narrator provides an image of Javaneseness that is sexual-oriented. I will address this sexual-oriented image of Javanese in chapter six. This unorthodox representation of Javaneseness will verify my thesis, the heterogeneity and subjectivity of the image of Javaneseness itself.

#### **4.2. Pardi, the Palace Guard: Symbol of Self-Attachment and Identity in *Ksatria***

##### ***Kerajaan***

This section explains what the palace guard, Pardi, represents and why he is the symbol in the film. While *Jamu* tells about the existing cultural practice that is consuming jamu, in the grassroots, *Ksatria Kerajaan* is more a portrayal of what is believed by the grassroots pertinent to the Javanese palace, one of the centres of Javanese culture. From this depiction, what becomes the hermeneutic symbol here lies in the figure of the palace guard himself. I consider that Pardi, the palace guard, symbolises self-attachment to power and self-identity. My analysis derives from what the film tries to show. The film demonstrates that a non-materialistic motive to serve the palace, *ngalab berkah*, is the driving force for some Javanese to join in and be the king's servant (*abdi dalem*).

#### 4.2.1. Form and Style of *Ksatria Kerajaan*

*Ksatria Kerajaan* is a documentary produced in 2005 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The film's duration is 21 minutes in Indonesian language with English subtitles. The documentary was filmed using a standard digital video (DV) format. Agus Darmawan and Fajar Nugroho directed the film while Shanty Harmayn produced it. *Ksatria Kerajaan* is a documentary that tells about the modest life of the palace guards in the Sultanate Palace of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, as the film's subject matter.

The leading actor here is Pardi. The significance of Pardi is evident as the documentary shows his presence throughout the film. Pardi is always on the screen whether it is he who testifies or other actors who do the testimonies with Pardi in the illustration. As to the supporting actors are Menik (Pardi's wife), Prince Yudhaningrat, Enggar Pikantoyo, and Angkara Murti. They are also the witnesses to the film. The setting mostly takes place in the vicinity of the Sultanate Palace of Yogyakarta, such as in the Pardi's house, in the inner part of the palace, in the residence of Prince Yudhaningrat, in the palace's secretariat and the northern esplanade.

*Ksatria Kerajaan* shows the qualities of a testimonial documentary as the actors provide their testimonies about the palace guards and the myth of *ngalab berkah*. However, most of the film's scenes are developed from the viewpoint of Pardi. In this respect, *Ksatria Kerajaan* can be identified as an individual profile documentary as well. The film distinctively demonstrates Pardi's story recounting his background to serve the palace and the king as well as his family's attitude to *ngalab berkah* (the king's blessing).

*Ksatria Kerajaan* belongs to the genre of expository documentary. Unlike *Jamu*, which employs a narrator, *Ksatria Kerajaan* applies titles and Pardi's testimonies to speak to the viewers and guide the story. The film's narrative here in many scenes is developed from Pardi's point of view and in some scenes by the testimonies of other actors such as Prince Yudhaningrat, Enggar Pikantoyo, and Angkara Murti.

The central idea of the film revolves around the belief of the palace guard. The palace guards believe that serving the palace and the Sultan is a blessing for them and their families irrespective of the meagre annual stipend they receive from the palace. *Ksatria Kerajaan* argues some Javanese people still believe in such a traditional myth of *ngalab berkah* in the post-New Order Indonesia. Not only do they believe in but also express it through their loyalty, perseverance and acceptance of their choice as the palace guards, despite the meagre income they earn. Therefore, the documentary celebrates these values, as reflected in the figure of Pardi and his family.

The establishing shot of the film portrays some locales in the Sultanate Palace of Yogyakarta. They are the relief of the palace wall, the gate of the royal esplanade, and the palace's watch tower where Pardi is seen on duty. These images all captured in long shots using low angle camera (Figure 5).

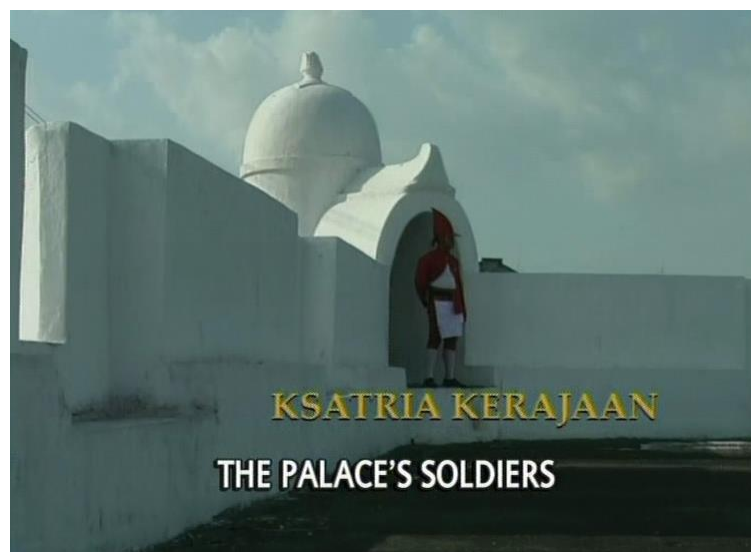


Figure 5: The Palace Guard, Pardi, on duty at a watchtower (*Ksatria Kerajaan*, 2005)

The story of *Ksatria Kerajaan* begins with a glimpse of the historical background of the palace guards in the Sultanate Palace of Yogyakarta. On the 5th of September 1945, the Sultanate of Yogyakarta and its peoples declared their support and integration to the newly born Republic of Indonesia. Then, the Sultanate dissolved its troops and treated

them as ceremonial guards whose main task was to represent and preserve a fragment of the abundant cultural forms and traditions of the court. The film illustrates some areas of the palace complex where the guards are usually stationed such as the main gate, the esplanade and the watchtowers.

Next, the documentary presents Prince Yudhaningrat, the commander in chief of the palace guards. He explains that the king's servants or retainers (*abdi dalem narakarya*) are ready to execute royal orders whenever needed. They get a meagre stipend from the palace, but it is only a kind of token of appreciation for their service. This stipend is not the kind of payroll that people commonly obtain from a company.

Then, the story focuses on Pardi, a simple palace guard, who believes that serving the court and the *Sultan* (the king) as an *abdi dalem* (king's servant) is a blessing, *ngalab berkah*. He expresses his gratitude that the court calls on him to be a guard after a six-month probationary period. He realises that financially being the king's servant does not promise anything. He has a commitment and a belief to serve the Sultan and the court for a peaceful life.



Figure 6: *The Modest Life of Pardi's Family* (Ksatria Kerajaan, 2005)

By being the king's servant, Pardi regards that his life and his other job as a street

vendor go smoothly. Not only does Pardi think so but also his colleagues. They testify that they experience a state of calm but straightforward and happy life (Figure 6). The film's highlight of loyalty, perseverance, acceptance to modest life is interlinked with this belief of *ngalab berkah*. The palace guards celebrate these values irrespective of the meagre stipend they receive. The motif in this documentary lies in the repeated idea of the royal guard's loyalty to the palace, their perseverance in life and their acceptance to live their daily lives modestly in most of the scenes. These all are due to their attitude towards *ngalab berkah*.

To emphasise the film's argument, *Ksatria Kerajaan* also utilises some rhetorical devices, as with the employment of the rhetorical devices in *Jamu* and *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*. The methods are the actors' verbal testimonies, their visual representations, and the visual representations of the settings. The film shows these devices, for instance, in the shots illustrating Pardi's day-to-day life and his family's gratitude for serving the palace. These visual and verbal representations are inextricably intertwined with the development of the subjective and personal accounts about the palace guards.

Also, the film also presents shots of other actors explaining *ngalab berkah* (the king's blessing). Their subjective and personal understandings of *ngalab berkah* show multiple interpretations of the belief. Angkara Murti, for example, understands the myth as a calmed mental condition of those serving the palace who find themselves always successful to do their businesses. They think and believe that such a mental calmness is because they have helped the palace and the king. This is Angkara Murti's interpretation of as *ngalab berkah*. Further, he regards that such a psychological equilibrium is a God's blessing to those working in the palace. Thus, the palace and the king are only seen as the medium.

Enggar, another actor, argues that the myth reflects both the fact and the wish

that the Sultan cares for the peoples of Yogyakarta, including those working in the palace. In his opinion, the working of the myth may also be apprehended when the king's servants reckon that their families gain more respect from their neighbours because of their service to the palace. He adds that receiving the king's blessing, in this case, does not always manifest in the form of money or wealth, but working in the palace is a form of grace in itself.

The cinematic techniques used here share a common similarity as those in *Jamu*. The filmmaker of *Ksatria Kerajaan* employs fast motion technique to mark time change as shown by the rapid movement of the city's traffic and the people at the background of a shot of a public clock in Yogyakarta. Besides, a coloured photograph of Pardi in his red and white uniform holding a pike is also presented to strengthen his image as a palace guard. While the diegetic sound used is of the actors, the soldier's drumbeat, flute, and cymbal serve both as the diegetic and non-diegetic sounds. The selection of these sounds is also designed to increase the once militaristic quality and palatial environments of the palace guards. Thus, I think the narrative structure and the cinematic techniques employed serve the documentary voice to achieve its rhetorical purpose.

#### 4.2.2. Rhetorical and Hermeneutic Interpretation of *Ksatria Kerajaan*

From the rhetorical standpoint and my hermeneutic interpretation of the documentary, Pardi as the palace guard is the symbol in this film. In the context of the film's narrative, he is, on the surface, the leading actor of the film. This is apparent. However, his role as the leading actor imparts cultural meanings more than his significant role in the documentary. In relation to the narrative, the subject matter, and the cultural content of *Ksatria Kerajaan*, I read that Pardi symbolises his self-attachment to power centred on the palace and his self-identity.

As the symbol of self-attachment to power, being a palace guard conveys Pardi's views about serving the Sultan and the palace. Pardi thinks that the Sultan and the palace are capable of providing psychological security for him and his family in life. It is expressed through his belief in *ngalab berkah*. His wife, Menik, also shows such an attitude. Both of them admit that since working in the palace, their lives have become more relaxed and more peaceful. Before serving the palace, their family life was bleak as Pardi earned money from selling traditional Javanese drink, *dawet*, only. Pardi always felt insufficient financially. This condition inflicted his anxiety over his family life grew unbearable. The situation has changed since Pardi started serving the palace. Pardi can be more grateful irrespective of how much money he can produce from selling the traditional Javanese drink, *dawet*. Another scene also illustrates Pardi's grateful attitude. Pardi and Menik express that their family life has changed since Pardi began serving the court. They feel calm and blessed.

This phenomenon has its roots in the traditional Javanese worldview about the relation between the commoners and their ruler known as *manunggaling kawula-Gusti* (servant and master union). About servant and master union, Soemarsaid Moertono (2009) maintains that this kind of relationship between servant and master is never impersonal, but a personal one involving an ideal, close tie of mutual respect and responsibility. This union of servant and master stems from a Javanese magi-religious belief of the merging between humans and God. This magi-religious belief is applied in the socio-political relationship and communication between the subjects and their ruler.

Such manifestation takes place because the Javanese believe that there is a specific tie between property common to man and God, namely divine light or soul. As all humans possess souls, therefore, this "inter-communication of souls" enables people to relate to each other outwardly within hierarchical social functions that the



Javanese perceive (Moertono, 2009, p. 25). *Ksatria Kerajaan* demonstrates this servant and master union when Pardi expresses his gratitude and respect to a royal family member, Prince Yudhaningrat. Yudhaningrat has allowed him and his family to dwell at the prince's residential complex, *Yudhanegaran*. Pardi also believes that his tie with Yudhaningrat and his stay at the prince's complex makes his probationary period as a palace guard is shorter than those of his colleagues. Own feelings of gratitude, closeness, as well as pride, emanate from Pardi's conviction.

As the symbol of self-identity, being a palace guard marks Pardi's social identity in his neighbourhood. Pardi has become "someone". This image does not necessarily suggest that Pardi turns out to be a significant figure or a wealthy, influential and bright individual. In the Javanese worldview, it is essential that an adult individual knows his and her position within the social structure and takes part in maintaining the imagined equilibrium, the social harmony (Mulder, 1989; Suseno, 1996).

I argue that by becoming a palace guard and a self-employed individual, the *dawet* vendor, Pardi has shown his capability and function in the society. Pardi's decision to serve the palace is very unusual as he is among few Javanese who are willing to pay attention to preserving traditions mostly ignored by many post-New Order Javanese. His service to the palace to keep the Javanese traditions is not a promising source of income and way of life. However, Pardi realises from the very beginning that he and his family will receive no financial security and assurance by serving the court. The film shows that Pardi sees his life modestly and yet honestly. He perceives that there is "something" by being a palace guard. It is verified in several scenes of Pardi's testimony. In this testimony, Pardi mentions that when he wears the palace guard uniform, he feels very different (Figure 7). He feels calm and comfortable, appreciated by neighbours, and he is ready to devote himself to the court whenever the court calls on him.

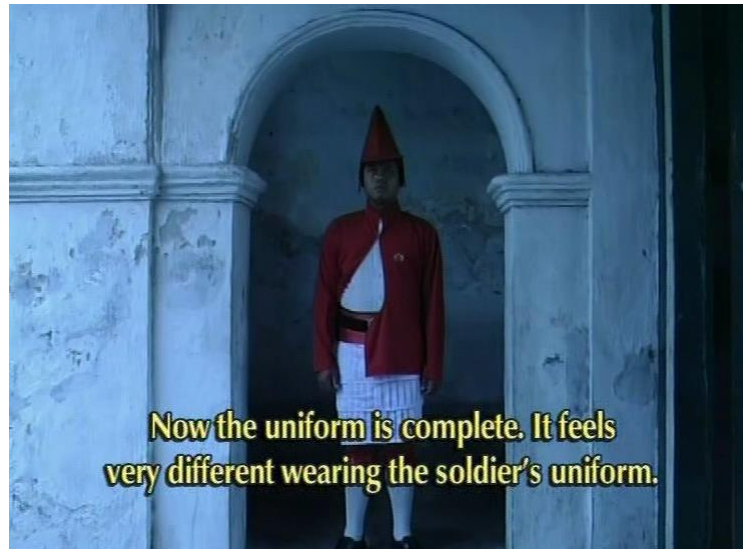


Figure 7: Pardi in his Palace Guard Uniform (*Ksatria Kerajaan*, 2005)

My reading of Pardi's self-identity is also based on *dharma* as depicted in the Javanese *wayang* world. In the traditional Javanese worldview reflected in the *wayang* world, *dharma* is one's primary obligation or task for living in society. Everyone has his or her *dharma* that must be fulfilled. Therefore, everyone is bound to his or her *dharma*. Again, this *dharma* refers to one's duty or function in society (Suseno, 1996, p. 152). In the Javanese *wayang* world, society is constructed by a hierarchical order, but not a caste system as in India. The king holds the privilege to communicate to the supernatural powers and secure their benevolence for his realm. The *brahmānā* perform the state rituals and transfer values and education for the generations to come. The *satryā* administer the government and protect the state. The traders, farmers, and workers enhance the economy of the country. Also, the artisans produce the material and cultural works of the civilisation. Each of them maintains social order and harmony to support the big structure of Javanese society (Anderson, 2009, p. 18).

In this respect, Pardi's being a palace guard can be read, to some extent, as his search for his *dharma*. In other words, his service as the palace guard marks his role in society. Consequently, Pardi gains his respect from his neighbours and environment as conveyed in his testimony and the testimony of Enggar about the social perception

towards all those serving the palace, the *abdi dalem*. It is true that contemporary Javanese society has experienced significant changes in its social structure and tradition (Laksono, 1990; Schweizer, Klemm and Schweizer, 1993) as well as in its culture and ideology (Mulder, 1983, 2005). Nevertheless, beliefs and mental attitudes of the past remain vividly traceable.

Hence, I need to say again that Pardi, the palace guard, symbolises his self-attachment to power of the palace and his self-identity. He is the symbol because I read that the film's narrative through its visual and verbal expressions, the film's theme and cultural content unfold the non-materialistic motive of Pardi to serve the palace. Besides, his belief in the myth of *ngalab berkah* is the driving force for Pardi to join in and be the king's servant (*abdi dalem*). In the film, the representation of Pardi, bringing about such a symbolic meaning projects an image of Javaneseness that is closely linked with Javanese tradition and values. Pardi embodies the values. His belief in the myth of *ngalab berkah* and his respect, gratitude and service to the court indicate this bond. I will address the representation of Pardi as one of the exemplary models of a Javanese that exhibits attitudes oriented to traditional values in chapter six. This representation of Pardi is crucial as it provides an example of how his image as a Javanese shares similarity and differences with other images of Javaneseness from the examined films.

#### **4.3. Sikep's Struggle for Equality: Symbolic Expression of Sikep's Belief in *Kulo Ndiko***

##### ***Sami***

This section deals with a documentary portraying Sikep people. Sikep people are a variant of the Javanese living mostly in the border between the Province of Central Java and the Province of East Java in Indonesia. They have distinct characteristics that are different from the majority of the Javanese. They have often been

misunderstood and misrepresented for being stubborn, disobedient to the laws and exclusive (Benda and Castles, 1969; Widodo, 1997; Ba'asyin and Ba'asyin, 2014).

This section examines the cultural struggle of the Sikep. This part also reveals what the cultural struggle of the Sikep suggests and why their effort becomes the symbol of *Kulo Ndiko Sami*. The cultural struggle of the Sikep communities depicts their attempts and appeals to obtain the government's recognition of the Sikep's traditional belief, *agama Adam* (the religion of Adam). However, the government denies their appeals on the basis that the government only acknowledges five "official" religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism. The Sikep intend to have their traditional belief officially stated on their identity cards. In the Indonesian laws, it is compulsory for Indonesian citizens to state their beliefs on their identity cards. I argue that the cultural struggle of the Sikep people for equality demonstrates their faith in the ethical values they hold in common, honesty and non-violent attitude, from their traditional belief. Thus, I consider that their sincere and non-violent struggle represents their moral values.

#### 4.3.1. Form and Style of *Kulo Ndiko Sami*

*Kulo Ndiko Sami* is a documentary produced in 2005 in Pati, Central Java, Indonesia. The duration of the film is 18 minutes in Indonesian and Javanese languages with English and Indonesian subtitles. *Kulo Ndiko Sami* was filmed using a standard digital video (DV) format. The film was co-directed by Gunritno, Mohammad Sobirin and Rabenir. Dian Herdiany and F. Satriantoro produced it.

Unlike the *Jamu* and *Ksatria Kerajaan*, *Kulo Ndiko Sami* is a documentary with a more explicit political theme. The political topic in this film is not in the sense of vying for power control nor domination. This political theme is in the context of the cultural struggle of the Sikep communities to obtain the government's recognition of their

traditional faith.

The leading actor here is Gunritno whose function is as the narrator and the witness (Figure 8). The supporting actors from both Sikep's communities and the local and regional authorities provide their testimonies. The setting of the documentary takes place in several locations: the Sikep village and its farming fields, the district office of Sukolilo, some houses of the Sikep people (Gunritno's, Turlan's, Gunawan's and Kukuh's), the regional registrar office of Pati, and the office of the regional legislature of Pati.

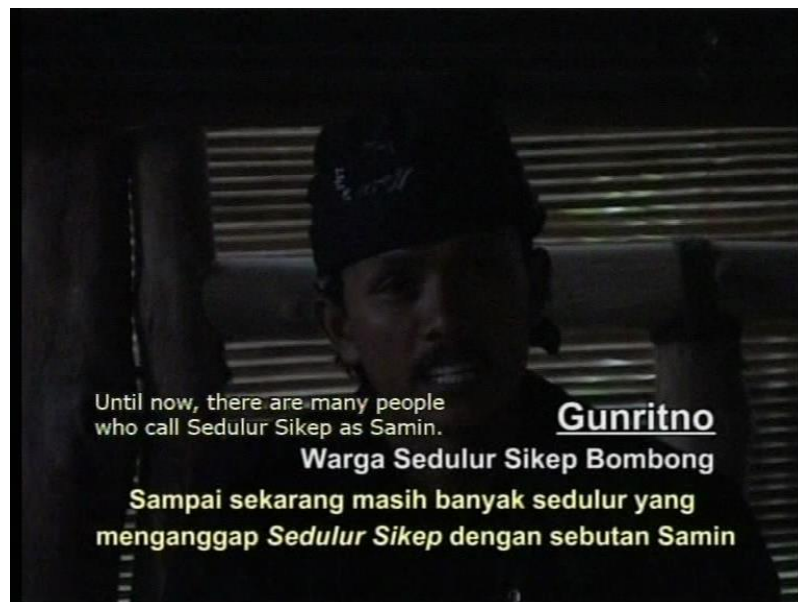


Figure 8: Gunritno, the Narrator (*Kulo Ndiko Sami*, 2005)

*Kulo Ndiko Sami* expresses advocacy and testimonial qualities of a documentary film. Advocacy documentary is a non-fiction film presenting strong evidence and examples of a particular subject matter from a specific perspective (Nichols, 2010, p. 149). *Kulo Ndiko Sami* demonstrates this quality. The film urges that the Sikep is culturally marginalised and treated differently by some government officials. This is the film's specific point of view, the perspective standing for the Sikep communities. The film expresses the identity card problem they face, which becomes the film's subject matter.

With regard to the testimonial quality, *Kulo Ndiko Sami* is similar to other films examined in this thesis. Testimonial documentary is featured with oral witnesses of the social actors to recount their personal experiences (Nichols, 2010, p. 151). The testimonies used in the examined films are designed to make the narratives of the films more convincing and actual than without testimonies.

*Kulo Ndiko Sami*, by genre, can be regarded as an observational documentary as well. The observational quality of *Kulo Ndiko Sami* resides in the film's capability to capture the actors going about their lives as if the camera was not there for them. Nichols (2010) argues that an observational documentary rests its power on the film's images and their indexical links to synchronous sounds and actions. Thus, there is a sense of continuity matching images, words, and actions of the film's shots. As a result, this kind of documentary lets the viewers decide for themselves about they see and hear (Nichols, 2010, p. 211).

The establishing shot of the film captures panoramic shots of paddy fields and the sunrise. Then, an introductory scene appears. It shows morning activities in a Javanese village where both the Sikep and non-Sikep, the majority of the Javanese, live closely. Two Sikep families with family members riding motorbikes to go to a social event in the village. Then, the scene is interspersed with some shots of other villagers going to the event. The harmonious communal life of the Sikep and other Javanese people is expressed in the event shown. The event host cordially welcomes the Sikep members and other guests. Here, the scene captures Sikep people helping the event-host to prepare a banquet. Then, the scene shows Gunritno, the Sikep and the narrator, providing his testimony in a close-up shot.

We think that we do not differentiate people. In fact, we get along with others well. For example, if another relative is holding an event, we, the Sikep, also come and join the celebration. Thus, we do not treat them differently.

Gunritno is represented as a Sikep man wearing *iket* (Javanese bandanna) and

Sikep's typical black garment. He persuasively addresses the viewers that the harmonious life of the Sikep and other Javanese is not just a manipulated social conduct for the sake of politeness. As explained in chapter three, Gunritno and the Sikep believe that all human beings are equal and they deserve the sincere respect to each other.

The story of *Kulo Ndiko Sami* sets out with Gunritno explaining why his community accepts being called *Samin* people by fellow Javanese. *Samin* people call themselves *Sedulur Sikep* (Sikep brother/sister) or *Wong Sikep* (Sikep people). Gunritno explains that the word "*Samin*" in Javanese *ngoko* (the first stratum of Javanese language) eventually means "*sami*" or "*podho*" (the same or equal). Thus, the Sikep believe that all human beings are equal. Gunritno also tells the history of Sikep people established by *Ki Samin Surontiko* who firstly taught rural Javanese peasants some principles of life. The teaching emphasises a simple life wherein farming and managing household chores are celebrated. About the principles of life of the Sikep, the film demonstrates how Gunritno claims that Sikep people admit what they do and do what they accept. They also do not differentiate people based on their different backgrounds.

As the story unfolds, the testimonies of the Sikep describing the difficulties to get public service they encounter heighten the effect of the government's denial of the Sikep's traditional belief, *agama Adam* (the religion of Adam). The film shows the complexity, for example, when Sikep people also want to apply for the driving license and electric power installation in their houses. The testimonies of Gunawan, Turlan and Kukuh underscore the adversities. They express that it is practically impossible for them to obtain the public services without an identity card. All social safety networks and public services provided by the government are based on the citizens' identity cards. The documentary narrative is developed out of the testimonies of the actors from both the Sikep and the government.

Besides revealing the adversities of the Sikep, *Kulo Ndiko Sami* also portrays their daily life. The representation of the daily life of the Sikep shows how Sikep women and girls do their domestic chores, such as sweeping the floor, preparing dishes, and hand-washing kitchen utensils, bathing their children and feeding them. At the film's end, the documentary shows how the Sikep meet, discuss and find a consensus that they will keep on pleading for their wish granted by the government. This scene does not serve as the "resolution" of the problem as no resolution is achieved in the film.

*Kulo Ndiko Sami* is developed on the argument that Sikep people are just like any other ordinary Javanese, and therefore they deserve to be justly treated. With this thesis, the filmmaker aims at revealing the fact of the reluctance of the Indonesian authority, especially in the district and regional levels, to recognise the Sikep communities' traditional religion officially on their identity cards. I perceive that the film suggests that their act reflects the widespread religious discrimination and politicisation towards its citizens. This situation compels Sikep people to "negotiate" with such adversity for the sake of practicality, their practical needs. However, from the Sikep's idealism vantage point, the unjust situation does not principally cause Sikep people to abandon their traditional religion for it is their core value and belief with which they identify themselves (Shiraishi, 1990; Ba'asyin and Ba'asyin, 2014). Therefore, this documentary examines how Sikep people encounter their problem with the local authorities concerning their need to obtain the official recognition of their traditional religion.

Interestingly, the way the filmmakers show their support to the struggle of the Sikep is articulated consistently in the cinematographic technique applied. Whenever the film captures the Sikep as the victim of the situation, the camera angle always captures them in low angle or, to the least, eye-level positions. The low angle shot



suggests that Sikep people are the victims worth supporting and empowering. The eye-level shot implies that they deserve to be treated equally. These shot-angling techniques is utilised in most of the scenes even when Sikep people are in argument with the civil servant and the government officials. The scene below shows how this angling technique is employed. It demonstrates Gunritno, in a low-angle shot, demands an explanation from a civil servant of the district office of Sukolilo regarding the exclusion of Gunritno's traditional belief from being stated in his identity card (Figure 9).



Figure 9: A Civil Servant of the District Office of Sukolilo in argument with Gunritno (Kulo Ndiko Sami, 2005)

In demonstrating its argument, *Kulo Ndiko Sami* tries to show it through voices of the actors from both parties, the Sikep communities and the government officials. Both of them oppose each other and, of course, come up with their attitudes. The Sikep people want their religious belief to be stated on their identity cards while the officials refuse it. Instead, the officials put on a different religion for them, for instance, as what Turlan has experienced. Turlan testifies that based on the experiences dealing with the district office staff, his religious belief has been changed by the district office staff from the religion of Adam to Islam and Buddhism without his consent.

On the other hand, the office head of Sukolilo district elusively argues that he has no authority to change one's religious belief so long as one's religious faith is accommodated in the five "official" religions acknowledged by the government. This incident suggests a form of manipulation. This technique to meet the opposing arguments proves to be useful in making the voice of the documentary explicitly and implicitly well manifested. As a result, sympathetic tone towards Sikep people and ironic or even agitating tone directed towards the officials pervades the film.



Figure 10: The Head of Sukolilo District rejects Gunritno's appeal captured in superimposed images (Kulo Ndiko Sami, 2005)

The scene above with superimposed technique describes the meeting of Gunritno and the head of Sukolilo district (Figure 10). Gunritno appeals to the official for granting the Sikep's wish, recognising their religion of Adam on their identity cards. At this district level, the Sikep's struggle fails as the official rejects the appeal. The head of Sukolilo district recommends Gunritno and the Sikep to channel their aspiration to the regional registrar office of Pati that has higher authority regarding matters of identity card.

In representing the viewpoint of Sikep people, the filmmaker rhetorically employs several ways. Some techniques are expressed via the oral witnesses of the

actors. Some methods are demonstrated by the actions of the Sikep to represent their life and their struggle to obtain justice. Another way is through the film's message at the film's end. In the end title, the film manifests its message, "Brothers, do not believe in this little story. You may believe this, but you have to understand it; that is why you need to prove it yourselves". The end title prompts the viewers to think critically about the film. At the same time, the end title also invites the audience to come to the Sikep community and witness what has happened to them. I regard that this appears to be a strategy of the filmmaker to highlight the problem and to make the viewers stand for the Sikep. What the Sikep have experienced is not a groundless story of the Sikep but an invitation to an experiential reality of the community.

#### 4.3.2. Rhetorical and Hermeneutic Interpretation of *Kulo Ndiko Sami*

From the rhetorical and my hermeneutic reading standpoints, I see that the cultural struggle of Sikep people is the symbol in the documentary. As was explained at the introductory part of the chapter, Ricoeur regards that a symbol can be real entities as well as human experiences and actions of fundamental significance narrated in a medium of language (Ricoeur, 1976, pp. 53–54). In this respect, the cultural struggle of the Sikep is a human experience and action narrated in the visual language of film. The cultural struggle of Sikep people is salient because their effort is not only compelled by the pragmatic reasons, but also by the principles life that they hold in common, namely honesty and non-violent principles.

In the literal level of the film, the scenes capturing their struggle moving from office to office articulates no more than the demonstrations of the Sikep's search for a solution of their problem of identity cards. The Sikep's struggle symbolises their ethics mentioned above. In addition, the documentary portrays the sincerity and non-violent manners of the Sikep. In other words, their cultural struggle seen from a

hermeneutic standpoint is a representation of honesty and non-violent principles which have characterised their way of life (see also Benda and Castles, 1969; King, 1973; Korver, 1976; Sulistiono, 2011).

Such values are part of the core teachings of the Sikep's traditional religion. One of the instructions says "*Wong Sikep weruh teke dhewe* [Sikep people only know what they possess and believe.]" (Ba'asyin and Ba'asyin, 2014, p. 13). A code of conduct result from this teaching. The law subsumes some values of being honest, benevolent, patient and non-violent. Also, the Sikep have some prohibitions on murdering, quarrelling and being spiteful, greedy, accusatory and envious; on robbing, stealing, shoplifting, and making money from trading, being a broker, levying, practising usury, seducing and committing adultery, lying, scheming and betraying. To undergo their life, Sikep people have to establish a family and to farm. They must obey and do them all faithfully (Shiraishi, 1990; Ba'asyin and Ba'asyin, 2014).



*Figure 11: The Struggle of the Sikep at the Regional Legislature Office of Pati (Kulo Ndiko Sami, 2005)*

The cultural struggle of the Sikep articulates that the Sikep prefer leaving the religious affiliation statement blank on their identity cards, as opposed to being replaced by other religions they do not profess. This problem of recognising one's religious affiliation here is not merely about "completing a mere administrative task"

as stated by the district head of Sukolilo, nor that there were only five “official” religions admitted by the government at that time (Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism).



*Figure 12: A Member of the Regional Legislature denies the Sikep’s appeal (Kulo Ndiko Sami, 2005)*

In this context, I see that identity, which is understood as a religious affiliation, is never immune to multi-dimensional contestation and negotiation. Why is it multi-dimensional? In the case of *Kulo Ndiko Sami*, the contestation and negotiation are indicated by how the Sikep appeal to the government and how the government disapproves their appeal. The government officials exert their authority using manipulation, indifference, and soft authoritative evasion upon Sikep people so long as their traditional religious belief is concerned. The statement of the Sikep’s religious belief on their identity cards is manipulated as shown in the incident experienced by Turlan. Turlan’s identity cards say that his religion is Islam. To the Sikep, the attitudes performed by the civil servants and the legislature member blatantly suggest that the Sikep’s traditional religion is not officially recognised (Figures 11 and 12). Nevertheless, the Sikep have decided to struggle for the recognition peacefully.

For the practical purposes, Sikep people admit that to fulfil their needs of

mobility and electricity, the logical way is to condone those practices by the authorities. This may be seen as if Sikep people have “surrendered” to such practices. However, this is not entirely the whole story as Gunritno in his testimonial scene mentions, “What’s the point of stating our belief on the identity cards if the authorities know nothing about it? What is the purpose of it?”. From Gunritno’s questions, there are three points that I can infer here. First, being stated or not on the identity card, the belief of the Sikep people remains unchanged. Second, the Sikep regard the identity card as a mere instrument to fulfil their needs. Third, the documentary does not only portray the fervent belief of the Sikep people and their pragmatic negotiation, but the film also articulates the fact of the unachieved goal of the Sikep.

The Sikep's intense reliance on their religion demonstrate that they honestly admit what they believe in, and struggle to make their religion stated on their identity cards. To perform their struggle, the Sikep has shown their non-violent strategy. Their strategy by appealing to the government directly, face-to-face, expresses the Sikep’s attitude of being direct and without pretence. The unjust and discriminatory acts they have received do not compel them to give up their hope. Instead, the reality has made the Sikep continuously aware of their unsettled cultural struggle. They have decided to continue their effort peacefully. Thus, I deduce that honesty and non-violent principle of their religious teaching significantly influence and are manifested in their struggle to attain justice and equality.

My deduction becomes more indicative as the scene below shows a meeting that is held at Gunritno’s house (Figure 13.) In the meeting, the Sikep people exchange their bad experiences dealing with identity card problem. They have agreed and devised a plan to go to the central government in Jakarta peacefully to help them realise their aspiration. As the meeting scene dissolves, a scene of the Sikep farmers harvesting their rice crops emerges. When this scene appears, a traditional Javanese chant in the

background follows. The chant conveys the message for the Sikep not to abandon their way of life as simple farmers who are honest in what they do, say, and treat other people justly as exemplified by their forefather, Ki Samin Surontiko.



Figure 13: Sikep's Consensus to continue their Peaceful Struggle (*Kulo Ndiko Sami*, 2005)

This section explains that the cultural struggle of the Sikep is a symbol in *Kulo Ndiko Sami*. Their cultural effort is of great importance in the film. The struggle, on the surface, demonstrates the Sikep in search of the solution but it also implies their ethical principles, honesty and non-violence. As a result, an image of Javanese people who are resilient and yet honest is expressed from the film. This image, as with those in the previous documentaries, supply the diverse representations of Javanese-ness in the context of my thesis.

#### 4.4. Conclusion

The analysis of symbols in *Jamu*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami* substantiates the premise of this chapter. I contend that the documentaries studied enable to present the manifestations of their subject matters as the hermeneutic symbols of Javanese-ness in these films. The hermeneutic symbols produced from this

analysis are the visual representations of a cultural material (jamu), of a figure portrait (Pardi) and a socio-cultural activity (the struggle of the Sikep). Their representations become significant entities as they express beliefs and values of the Javanese world. These expressions of beliefs and values do not merely provide the cultural background of the films, but they are also part of the subject matters from which the films' narratives develop and on which their rhetoric is based. The way the symbols are aesthetically and rhetorically depicted and situated within the films' narratives invite the cultural interpretation of their presence and significance. Two documentary films demonstrate a common concern in their hermeneutic symbolism. The symbolism of the palace guard figure in *Ksatria Kerajaan* shares a concern of identity with that of the Sikep's struggle in *Kulo Ndiko Sami*. This similarity does not automatically produce a shared projection of Javanese-ness. Their imaginations of Javanese-ness are heterogeneous and complex. The following chapter will discuss the symbolism of Javanese-ness in the other documentary films, *Nyadran à La Sorowajan*, *Wayang Kulit: Shadow Theatre in Java* and *Bathik: Bebet lan Bobot Lakuning Urip*.



**CHAPTER V**

**SYMBOLISM OF JAVANESENESS**

***IN NYADRAN À LA SOROWAJAN, WAYANG KULIT AND BATHIK***

As with the preceding chapter, this chapter also discusses the significance of hermeneutic symbols that represent Javanese-ness. The documentary films examined here are *Nyadran à La Sorowajan*, *Wayang Kulit: Shadow Theatre in Java* and *Bathik: Bebet lan Bobot Lakuning Urip*. I divide this chapter into four sections. The first section explores the hermeneutic symbol employed in *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*. In this documentary, an interfaith gathering of the *nyadran* tradition turns out to be an essential symbol to express Javanese-ness. The analysis focuses on what the meeting suggests and to what extent this cultural practice contextually demonstrates Javanese-ness in the film. The second section examines the hermeneutic symbol used in *Wayang Kulit: Shadow Theatre in Java*. Almost similar to *Ksatria Kerajaan* in the previous chapter, this documentary portrays Sagio, a *wayang kulit* artisan. I view that he is the symbolic character in the film. The analysis focuses on what his portrayal signifies and to what extent his description expresses Javanese-ness. The third section discusses the hermeneutic symbol in *Bathik: Bebet lan Bobot Lakuning Urip*. The traditional batik garment of the Javanese, *Semen Rama*, is a significant symbol in this documentary. The discussion of this section revolves around what *Semen Rama* suggests and why the garment represents Javanese-ness. The last section concludes the analysis of this chapter.

### **5.1. Interfaith Gathering: Symbol of Communal Identity in *Nyadran à la Sorowajan***

In this second section, the discussion is about an interfaith gathering in *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*. As with *Jamu* in the previous chapter, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* demonstrates the living Javanese cultural practices in the grassroots. I contend that the interfaith gathering is the symbol of the need of the Sorowajan villagers to perpetuate a communal identity, a sense of belonging to Javanese-ness (Figure 14). The need to express the collective sense of Javanese-ness is intended to remind the village

members about who they are and where they come. They manifest it through a Javanese tradition called *nyadran*. The *Nyadran* tradition originates from *śrāddha*, a Hindu rite to deceased ancestors conducted after the conclusion of Hindu funerary rites, *antyeṣṭi* (Cush, Robinson and York, 2008, p. 823). As with the previous chapter, the examination begins with the overview of the documentary's form and style.



Figure 14: *The Interfaith Gathering (Nyadran à la Sorowajan, 2002)*

#### 5.1.1. Form and Style of *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*

*Nyadran à la Sorowajan* is a documentary produced in 2002 in Bantul-Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The film's duration is 23 minutes in Indonesian with Indonesian subtitles in some scenes when some information given is delivered in Javanese. The documentary was recorded in a standard digital video (DV) format. It was directed by Huda S. Noor and produced by M. Jadul Maulana.

*Nyadran à la Sorowajan* is an ethnographic documentary. The film portrays the socio-cultural and religious practice of the Javanese in a village of Sorowajan in their *nyadran* tradition. Sorowajan is a village located approximately seven kilometres to the east of Yogyakarta, the capital of the Special Region of Yogyakarta, in Indonesia. The film's subject matter is a *nyadran* tradition with a particular focus on its interfaith

gathering.

The filmmakers of *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* claim that their documentary is an ethnographic one. Indeed, the term “ethnographic” here does need not to be understood as the sense of “ethnographic film’s age of innocence” or ethnographic films of the colonial times. Ethnographic films of the colonial times were focused to depict mostly the cultural aspects of the colonised, of the foreign cultures (Kuhn and Westwell, 2012, p. 144). At the present time, an ethnographic film also embraces a form of self-representation of one's own culture instead of only focusing on foreign cultures (Matthews, 2011, p. 97). Karl Heider (2009) maintains that many films, be those of fiction and non-fiction, may have ethnographic features that are worth studying, but they are not necessarily ethnographic films with specific meaning from an ethnographic vantage point. These films are said to have “ethnographicness” (Heider, 2009, p. 2). All documentaries examined in this thesis do have their varying degree of ethnographicness. However, it is only *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* that I consider an ethnographic film in this thesis.

According to Heider, there are four characteristics of an ethnographic film. First, an ethnographic film provides a relatively sufficient description and analysis of human behaviour based on a field study. Second, such a documentary focuses on a specific observed behaviour pertinent to cultural norms. Third, the film displays a holistic feature wherein the events and things represented must be understood in their social and cultural context. Lastly, it projects a search for truth in the sense that ethnographers and filmmakers need to be well aware of a possibility that somehow distortion must be there. Therefore, accuracy to reduce that distortion is worth doing (Heider, 2009, pp. 5–6). *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*, in my view, shows the characteristics of an ethnographic film.

As regards the first feature, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* represents a description of

human behaviour in his or her socio-cultural activity with a strong religious dimension. The film shows this in the scenes that demonstrate the villagers practising their faiths and tradition. In relation to the second quality of an ethnographic film, the documentary focuses on a specific observed behaviour, in this case, attitudes of tolerance through a socio-cultural tradition, *nyadran*. The interfaith gathering and prayers confirm these attitudes of tolerance. What the villagers demonstrate is pertinent to their cultural norms, the preservation of two Javanese cardinal ethical principles, *hormat* (respect) and *rukun* (harmony), and the belief in venerating the deceased ancestors and family members.

Concerning the third point, *nyadran* is a socio-cultural phenomenon that is rich in its mentifacts, sociofacts, and artefacts<sup>6</sup> dimensions. The Javanese believe that they need to venerate their ancestors (Mulder, 2005; Endraswara, 2013b). About this, venerating their ancestors is understood as an act of remembrance of their origin. With this, their awareness for having a sort of identity relations is maintained. Not only do such identity relations happen in individual and familial domains but also a communal one. This occurs because more people sharing the same idea and belief get involved in this act of remembrance. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* demonstrates the act of remembrance of the villagers' origin. *Nyadran* is the symbolic act of the socio-religious experience of Javanese people. The tradition has become the ritual and tradition conducted individually and communally.

Rituals and traditions are some of the expressions to define Javanese-ness (Schweizer, Klemm and Schweizer, 1993; Herusatoto, 2000). *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* demonstrates that in the meantime the villagers of Sorowajan have maintained the values, belief and function of their *nyadran* tradition in the post-New Order era. This is

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<sup>6</sup> Artefacts (things which are made, created or produced), sociofacts (the ways in which people organize their society and relate to one another), and mentifacts (the ideas, beliefs, and values that people hold) (Fantini and Fantini, 1997; Morris, 2012)

where I consider *nyadran* as an expression to reaffirm Javanese-ness. My view is based on an interrelation that *nyadran* constitutes its meaning, purpose and form in the framework of Javanese mental thinking. To foreigners, what the Javanese, especially those of the Sorowajan villagers, exhibit may seem superstitious and frivolous. It shows that the sense of belonging, the need to reaffirm ethnic identity – their Javanese-ness – in such ways, is still relevant to be expressed. The Sorowajan villagers still need to show the tradition in the unprecedented progressive social transformation of the reform era Indonesia.

The fourth characteristic that *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* demonstrates as an ethnographic film is concerned with the accuracy in representing *nyadran* and its tradition. The documentary suggests that the filmmakers rely heavily on the fieldwork observation and testimonies of their informants or social actors. The testimonial parts of *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* are depicted in many scenes. For instance, some shots represent the involvement of some social actors in some religious activities of the Hindu community, the Catholic family, and the Muslim community. These religious activities are all conducted before the interfaith gathering. The social actors feature those of Islam and Hindu with the sound of *gambang*<sup>7</sup> and *gender*<sup>8</sup> musical instruments in the background. First, the film shows Muhammad Badroni, the Muslims dignitary, revealing a fact that he has been the Muslim leader of the village for more than ten years. He testifies that during his leadership, no religious conflict ever occurs. The villagers of different faiths are close to one another, and they live harmoniously without any conflicts. The tradition of *nyadran* is held annually

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<sup>7</sup> *Gambang* is one of the Javanese xylophone instruments made from wood, occasionally used in gamelan orchestra (Kunst, 1973, p. 185).

<sup>8</sup> *Gender* is a Javanese xylophone instrument made from metal, such as iron or bronze, which is essentially part of a gamelan orchestra but could also be played as a recital. In Javanese shadow puppet (*wayang*), *gender* is one of the key instruments dramatising the puppeteer's narration besides *keprak* and *rebab* (Kunst, 1973, p. 172)

as well. Badroni observes that he was the one initiating the interfaith gathering on every 20th day of *Ruwah* month. A night before the interreligious prayer, the villagers are expected to conduct their ritual based on each religion in groups or every family.

After Badroni's testimony, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* shows a scene illustrating a ritual conducted by the Hindu community that represents their solemnity in front of an offering altar. In this scene, the film presents Wasi Akhir, the Hindu priest of Sorowajan. Akhir mentions that in Hinduism there is *Sradha*. *Sradhanan* or *Sadranan* is an occasion held as a commemoration connecting people to their ancestors. Next, the camera, in the combination of long, medium, and close-up shots, represents a family prayer by the Pujo Susanto. The employment of these framing techniques suggests the solemn intensity that the shots intend to communicate regarding the intercession. This family, one of the Catholic families in the village, is praying for their well-being and deceased ancestors. The final part of this testimonial sequence depicts the Islamic community of Sorowajan performing their *tahlilan* or *dzikir*<sup>9</sup> in the village mosque.

Besides conveying the testimonies of Muhadi about the village cleansing ritual in the old *nyadran* tradition and of Basri about the political interference of the New Order regime on religion, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* still displays one more witness near the end of the film. In this testimony, the scene goes back the scene of the interfaith communal prayer and gathering. Here, the shots focus mostly on the continuation of the interfaith gathering, the end of praying rite from the Islamic community, the collection of the villager's donation, the allotment of the contribution to the three religious leaders and the distribution of foods at the end of the ritual. Regarding the collection of the donation, the film shows a master of ceremony announcing to the villagers

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<sup>9</sup> *Tahlilan* or *dzikir* is a ritual prayer in Islam closely associated with Islamic Sufism practice by reciting the Islamic confession of faith for several hours. This act of recitation is meant to give some benefits to both the community and the departed souls (Gulevich, 2004; Woodward, 2011)

that the donation collected is IDR 350,000. As much as IDR 140,450 would be allocated for the religious dignitaries leading the prayer. Then, the film captures how the donation is shared and passed on to the three dignitaries.

The scene of the villagers who are gratefully consuming the blessed foods follows. These shots are interspersed with a testimony from the village head, Mr Bardiman. The film shows the close-up shot of the village head, Bardiman, providing information that the total population of Sorowajan is 2,156 peoples. This close-up shot is used to heighten the valid information he is about to communicate. Bardiman mentions that the population of Sorowajan consists of men 51.9% (1,119) and women 48.09% (1,037). He further adds that about their religious background, the composition would be the Muslims 60.6% (1,037), the Catholics 28.8% (622), the Protestants 4.8% (104), the Hindus 5.6% (121), and the Buddhists 0.09% (2).

All testimonies above aided by illustrations and figures suggest the attempts of the filmmakers to search for and present accurate and reliable information regarding the tradition and the social conditions of Sorowajan. Such portrayals seem to make the documentary express its rhetoric of “objectivity” with a historic-anthropological tone. This “objectivity” is further amplified by the presentations of demographic data above, the geographical map of Sorowajan demonstrated before the interfaith gathering scene, the authorial voice of Bardiman, the head of the village, opening the interfaith gathering, and the historical review of the *nyadran* tradition in Sorowajan.

The scene depicting the map of Sorowajan comes in between the scene of the cleaning grave ritual and that of the interfaith gathering. The *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* shows the geographical location of Sorowajan in an indigo map with red, green, light blue and white colours on it designating various sites and buildings in the village. As the scene displays the map, the voice-over narrator says

Sorowajan is a village located approximately 7 kilometres to the east of the City of Yogyakarta. The village is around 50 acres and inhabited by 2,156



people. Since the beginning of the 1970s, the *nyadran* tradition has significantly changed its form in the village.

The film shows the head of the village in batik shirt standing before the villagers who sit, crossing their legs, on the floor. Bardiman confirms the purpose of *nyadran* and the gathering that is to preserve the ancestor's tradition. He officially opens the interfaith gathering and invites the villagers to follow the ritual attentively. The film depicts the historical review of the *nyadran* tradition in the scenes delineating the old *merti desa* ritual and the fate of *merti desa* during the New Order regime. With all of these features, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* strongly demonstrates its ethnographic characteristics to strengthen its argument that the villagers indeed maintain the tradition despite the socio-political transformation that has happened since the fall of the New Order regime. This preservation implies that their negotiated expression of Javanese-ness through the *nyadran* tradition remains.

By genre, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* also shows its expository quality. The voice-over palpably provides the expository function of the film. Nichols mentions that an expository mode of a documentary is typified by its obvious use of verbal commentary and an argumentative logic (Nichols, 2010, p. 31). I view that this is the case in *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*, especially with its voice-over and its anthropological perspective. The voice-over commentary and the use of intertitles help express the film's subject matter, as achieved by the voice-over's analytical commentaries regarding the socio-cultural behaviour of the villagers. The socio-cultural behaviour of the villagers is expressed through the transformed ritual of *merti desa*, the interfaith gathering.

The central idea of *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* is about the unique convergence of socio-cultural practice and religious tolerance in the village of Sorowajan. From this idea, the film argues that in the meantime the villagers have shown their perseverance to continue their *nyadran* tradition. This seems to be evident that the tradition cannot

be easily disengaged from the villagers' socio-cultural life. The villagers of Sorowajan still need to express their communal bond and Javanese-ness. In this regard, I think the attitude as demonstrated by the villagers is motivated by the need to maintain both individual and societal respect as well as harmony.

The establishing shot of the documentary presents a number of shots capturing a train heading toward the camera, people crossing the railway, and the way to the Sorowajan village using an omniscient POV (Point of View). Then, the harmonious life in the village as exemplified by piestic activities in the village mosque, a Catholic elementary school *Kanisius*, and a Hindu's *Pura* (Shrine) are captured before the film's title appears.

The story of *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* begins with a depiction of Sorowajan village with its multi-religious followers living side by side in harmony. There are Muslims, Christians, and Hindus. The portrayal is then followed by a scene of the villagers cleaning their ancestors' graves as the commencement of *nyadran* tradition. In this scene, the film represents how the villagers collectively clean the graves and individually pray for the departed souls of their family members. Afterwards, a geographical illustration of Sorowajan appears to provide a description where the village is situated before the interfaith gathering shows.

The interfaith gathering is an extended scene comprising four segments: the introductory remark of the village head, the communal prayers, the shared donation, and the feast. It begins with a scene demonstrating the villagers who attend the event, exchange greetings and handshakes. Foods are collected and placed at the centre of the venue showing that they are going to be consecrated and consumed by the villagers in the feast. Then, a master of ceremony invites the village head to open the gathering by delivering a welcome remark. Afterwards, the master of ceremony introduces the religious leaders to the participants and encourages them to lead the

prayer rite. They will lead the prayer for the whole villagers by each religious manner. The Catholic elder, Mr Pujo Susanto, first begins the prayer. Next, the scene captures the Hindu priest, Wasyi Akhir. Lastly, the Muslim *kyai*<sup>10</sup>, Muhammad Badroni takes his turn. While each of them is leading the prayer, the scene shows how the villagers professing the same religion respond to the prayer.

Meanwhile, other religious members respectfully maintain the solemnity of the prayer. Following the prayers, there comes a scene showing the collected donation, which is equally divided and passed on to the religious leaders. Then, the feast segment appears.

What comes next after the feast is a scene of testimonies by some religious leaders and villagers. They testify that *nyadran* tradition has transformed its ritual, from *merti desa* (cleansing of the village) into the present interfaith gathering. Then, illustrations of different religious activities in the evening before the gathering show. It is followed by a flashback of the villagers' lives in the past. This scene describes the moments when the old ritual of *merti desa* was still organised. From this scene onwards, the film's narrative focuses on the transformation of *nyadran*.

In the old *merti desa* ritual, Javanese rites and incantations were performed. In addition, a *wayang kulit* performance and the feast of food were also held. In the present form of *nyadran*, the Javanese rites and incantation are left out, leaving only the shadow play and feast to perform. From the personal testimony of the social actors, the transformation was rendered by the major political shift in 1965-1967, from the Old Order regime (Sukarno) to the New Order regime (Suharto). The cause of the regime change was the rivalry between the Indonesian Army and the Indonesian Communist Party culminating in the attempt of coup by the communist party. I explain the cause of

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<sup>10</sup> *Kyai* is an honorary title of a knowledgeable and pious traditional Islamic teacher and dignitary, especially in Java

transformation thoroughly in chapter eight as it relates to the effect of the change of the Old Order regime witnessed by the social actors, which gave way to the shift of *nyadran*. Then, the scene of the interfaith gathering reemerges, showing the villagers having a feast before they return to their homes.

In the last scene, the documentary brings the viewers back again to the present interfaith gathering, the communal feast and togetherness. At this stage, the evaluative voice over to question the future sustainability of the modified ritual is proposed to the audience. With such a chronological arrangement, the documentary shows how the villagers of Sorowajan have been so far successful in maintaining their communal identity and religious tolerance as demonstrated in the interfaith gathering of their *nyadran* tradition.

Interestingly, voice-of-God commentary and some social actors' testimonies are present to help guide the development of the film's subject matter and the film's narrative. This is unusual as Jay Ruby, an American visual anthropologist, considers that voice-over has been "*déclassé*" in an ethnographic film (Ruby, 1991, p. 48). *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* still employs this narrating technique.

The representations of respect and harmony as depicted in diverse activities conducted by the villagers seem to be the motif throughout the film. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* employs voice-over commentaries that appear in most of the scenes. As a case in point, the voice-over gives commentary and analysis on what the villagers have practised in their *nyadran* tradition.

The villagers of Sorowajan have been through metamorphoses of their spiritual life wherein they used to be harmonious with nature once. Their harmonious-oriented life is presently directed to develop an interfaith tolerance. They are by faith diverse. Will this tradition make them all united to encounter the difficulties of life that they are experiencing? At the same time, we can also question whether they will be able to enhance their humanity through this interfaith gathering that they have practised. It indeed is a challenge for the villagers of Sorowajan who have experimented their social and cultural behaviours with the interfaith gathering and communal prayer to face hardships and uncertainty in the future.

The voice-over above expresses the documentary voice to evaluate the interfaith gathering from the anthropological point of view. The documentary voice is clear. It underlines what the villagers have done by preserving *nyadran* and by experimenting their socio-cultural practice through the interfaith gathering.

The voice perceives this all as a communal endeavour to maintain social harmony in Sorowajan. The voice-over also challenges the socio-cultural practice as a relevant instrument to develop their collective sense pertinent to the difficulties, the hardships and the uncertainty of life. I perceive that this last point of the voice-over commentary is crucial to note. The voice-over tries to link this socio-cultural behaviour of the villagers in the context of reform era Indonesia. I read “hardships and uncertainty” above pertinent to the socio-economic and political aspects of the time, which will be further explained in chapter eight.

In *Jamu*, the film’s rhetoric is mostly guided by the verbal commentary of the narrator, on-screen and off-screen. This reliance on the narrator creates the impression that the actuality (the inartistic evidence in Nichols’ term) only functions to support the commentary of the narrator (one of the devices of artistic evidence in Nichols’ term) (Nichols, 2010). Unlike *Jamu*, in *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*, the film’s rhetoric is highly visual with the portrayals of *nyadran* and the interfaith gathering, supported by the testimonies of the social actors and the use of demographic data, maps, as well as the historical backgrounds of the transformed ritual. Selections of images and editing still matter in *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*, but the voice-of-God commentary in this film is not as influential as the voice-over narrator in *Jamu is*.

Besides demonstrating the perseverance to continue the tradition, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* also conveys the flexibility of the villagers to modify their *nyadran* tradition. The interfaith gathering functions as a new ritual of the *nyadran* tradition, replacing the

old ritual of *merti desa* (cleansing of the village). The old ritual of *merti desa* was characterised by the accentuation of Javanese mystic rituals and incantation. In one of the scenes, Muhadi, one of the social actors, gives his testimony about the transformation of the tradition. He testifies that the old tradition of *merti desa* ended in 1967 before the ritual metamorphosed into the interfaith gathering.

Another example of the film's narrative designed to enhance the film's argument is the utilisation of sepia tone to give an effect of the nostalgic *merti desa* ritual. This technique is employed in the retrospective illustration of *merti desa* tradition and the fate of *merti desa* in the face of the New Order regime. In the sequence of the old *merti desa*, this sequence begins with asynchronous sounds of *gambang* and *gender*, traditional Javanese wooden and metal xylophones. These sounds are followed by a scene in a sepia tone that illustrates a farmer ploughing the rice field manually, with a wooden plough moved by oxen. As the scene shows, the voice of God commentary said:

A long time ago before the New Order regime, most villagers were mere poor farm labourers. Their life was so agraria that was close to dirt in the paddy fields, manure, ox drops, and their sweat. Their religious life was deeply rooted in their Javanese spirituality and was forged by the hardship of life. One of their spiritual manifestations was expressed through *merti desa* (cleansing of the village) ritual, to ward off evil spirits and bad luck. The ritual went on as an expression of 'thanksgiving' for their harvest with a wish to sustain prosperity in the future, or next harvest.

As the scene describing the farmer working with his oxen advances, another scene follows. When the shift takes place, the colour tone changes gradually from the sepia to the coloured one. My point by showing this shift of colour tone is to underscore the notion that this arrangement is fabricated. It is invented to heighten a specificity of the film on the nostalgic idea and the transformation of the *merti desa* ritual to the interfaith gathering. The scene that follows presents a social actor, Dullah Kamari, uttering a traditional Javanese chant in his prayer. The scene captures him

sitting cross-legged on the floor while chanting (Figure 15).



Figure 15: The old Qunut Prayer (Nyadran à la Sorowajan, 2002)

From portraying Kamari, the scene moves to showing a *wayang kulit* performance. This scene in a chiaroscuro lighting illustrates a puppeteer skillfully manipulating his *wayang kulit* characters on the white screen. As the scene shows, the voice-of-God commentary explains that a shadow puppet performance was obligatory in the old *merti desa* ritual. Then, the scene presents another social actor, Muhadi, framed in a medium shot. He gives his testimony about the ancient ritual of the *nyadran* tradition. Muhadi affirms that a *wayang kulit* performance was compulsory to hold in the *merti desa* ritual. He adds that the story usually performed was related to their farming environment, such as “*Sri Mulih*” (The Return of the Goddess of Agriculture). Muhadi also testifies that the old ritual ended in 1967, the time when the New Order replaced the Old Order regime.

The scene illustrating the old *merti desa* is then followed by the scene delineating the fate of *merti desa* during the New Order regime. This scene begins with a man with his military boots stamping on some chickens as though he would flatten them all with his boots. Then, the scene moves to a panoramic rice field with birds flying over the field

in the misty morning. Voice of a man singing a Javanese folk-song precedes a scene showing the man plastering the wall of a constructed house with cement. Nostalgic lyrics of his singing expresses his feeling of the past life. Next, the scene changes depicting a mosque, a church and a Hindu shrine (*pura*) being constructed in Sorowajan. As the scene portrays these buildings, the voice-of-God commentary narrates the regime change in 1967 and the effect it brings about in the religious life of the villagers. When the commentary ends, the scene framed in a medium shot changes, presenting another social actor, Basri, who gives his testimony about the effect of the regime change. I will explain his testimony further in chapter eight.

#### 5.1.2. Rhetorical and Hermeneutic Interpretation of *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*

From the rhetorical and hermeneutic reading of the film, the interfaith gathering is a symbol of the communal identity of the villagers. The documentary rhetorically shows the significance of the interfaith gathering in their *nyadran* tradition. The gathering expresses the villagers' need to perpetuate a communal identity, a sense of shared Javanese-ness. This manifestation of collective identity is also confirmed through the speech delivered by Bardiman, head of the village, as he opens the gathering. Bardiman said, "Dear Mr Wasyi Akhir, representing my fellow brothers and sisters of the Hindus, Mr Muhammad Badroni of the Muslims, and Mr Pujo Susanto of the Catholics. Let us praise to the Almighty God for His bounty so that we may gather here to do what our ancestors, through our tradition, *nyadran*, have taught to us". His emphasis on the idea of "doing what the ancestors have taught the villagers to do" articulates the perpetuation of the tradition as their communal identity, the Javanese.

Thus, on the surface, the interfaith gathering is part of the *nyadran* tradition of Sorowajan. This is transparent as the film shows. However, in a deeper level, I interpret



that the interfaith gathering expresses the need of the villagers to preserve their communal identity as a Javanese society. From my hermeneutic angle, the symbolism of the gathering is evoked by the values and belief they hold in common. Ricoeur mentions that connecting a symbol to the values considered sacred or fundamental behind it is not something alien in hermeneutic interpretation (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 53). In this respect, the interfaith gathering is qualified to be a symbol as it is a significant human expression and experience manifesting values considered fundamental to the villagers (see also Ricoeur, 1969; Simms, 2016). The values are societal harmony and respect while the belief is that the dead and the living are still connected. This explains why *nyadran* itself in its spiritual dimension is an expression to show respect to the dead as a form of communication. Harmony (*rukun*) and respect (*hormat*) are two fundamental principles in Javanese societies (Mulder, 1983; Geertz, 1989; Suseno, 1996; Endraswara, 2013b). Harmony (*rukun*) in Javanese society is understood as a condition in which equilibrium, calmness, and security exist; a situation where invoking tension and conflict is best avoided; and a state where a society is unified to support its members (Mulder, 1983, p. 39).

However, this condition does not stem from efforts to engineer a social equilibrium but to maintain the social equilibrium. In this view, the social balance is imagined to have already existed. Therefore, the Javanese try not to disrupt it. In the Javanese worldview, calmness and social stability are conditions that emerge naturally so long as people do not interfere with them (Suseno, 1996, p. 39). From this understanding, I observe that harmony is conceived as being both individual (psychological) and collective (societal). Thus, the Javanese are encouraged to preserve this imagined equilibrium personally and collectively. This is represented in the interfaith gathering as shown by the village members' solemnity while praying. The scene of the gathering demonstrating this solemnity captures the villagers, men and

women alike bow their heads and close their eyes repeating the prayers led by the village elders representing different religions in Sorowajan. Some villagers are seen rising their palms up, some other fold their hands or cross their arms while praying. They keep their voice low as they pray (Figure 16).



*Figure 16: Preserving harmony as villagers of different religions are praying (Nyadran à la Sorowajan, 2002)*

Respect (*hormat*) in the Javanese worldview demands everyone to honour other people in both individual and social relations based on an imagined hierarchical social structure to which he or she belongs. This is based on the belief that such a hierarchical society maintains social order in which everyone knows his or her place and function so that self-dignity and dignity of others can be preserved (Geertz, 1989, p. 147). Honouring others is manifested in the ways people speak to and treat others. Therefore, an aware Javanese applies this principle in many aspects of life, but the most obvious one is in his or her socio-linguistic practice. Three strata structure the Javanese language: *ngoko* (informal), *madya* (semi-formal), and *kromo* (formal). Each is applied according to different situations and to whom one is speaking. This is known in a phrase “*sopan santun dalam budi bahasa*” or simply a linguistic etiquette (Endraswara, 2013b, p. 141). This respect goes beyond the language use as it is also applied in the

socio-religious practices of the Javanese to maintain social unity and harmony as indicated in the speech delivered by Bardiman above. Bardiman politely greets the village elders before giving his address as a sign of respect to them.

In the film, expressions of respect are also represented, for instance, during the gathering as the villagers greet one another and serve food to all of the participants. In the early scene of the interfaith gathering, the documentary shows how the villagers who attend the gathering bow, smile, exchange greetings and handshakes. The scene depicts how the villagers who have just arrived do these all to those who have been present in the venue for a while. In the Javanese etiquette, it is customary for the host and the guests to do these all. Also, in the Javanese societal gathering, after being greeted by the hosts, the guests who have just arrived also need to welcome those who come earlier. On a smaller scale, they do handshakes to all those who have been present more previously, especially to the senior citizens (Figure 17).



*Figure 17: Exchanging bows, smiles, greetings and handshakes, the Manifestations of Respect in the Interfaith Gathering (Nyadran à la Sorowajan, 2002)*

In the scene that portrays serving refreshments to the participants, the film also shows an expression of respect. This scene demonstrates how a villager voluntarily takes a tray of *lemper* (a Javanese traditional roll snack of steamed sticky rice with

coconut milk) and warmly offers the bite to the guests irrespective of age and gender (Figure 18).



Figure 18: Serving Refreshment Voluntarily, a Manifestation of Respect in the Interfaith Gathering (Nyadran à la Sorowajan, 2002)

When I perceive this interfaith gathering from its cultural form, the gathering is a modified form of village *slametan* in Javanese culture. *Slametan* is parallel to Thanksgiving in US. Village *slametan* has the purpose of cleansing of the village (*bersih desa* or *merti desa*). This is a rite of intensification with its aim at either appeasing the guardian spirit of the village or celebrating abundant harvests granted by the gods. In the ancient times and around the Indonesian independence era in 1945, such a *slametan* was conducted when some misfortune hit a village. In addition, villagers also hold *merti desa* every year as a way to express the villagers' gratitude to God.

*Merti desa* can be used for several purposes, to ward off misfortune and evil spirits from the village, to improve agricultural production as well as to maintain propitious religious (with God and local spirits) and social relations. To express these purposes, a *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) performance and a feast for all villagers traditionally

accompany this form of *slametan* (Geertz, 1976; Hecht and Biondo, 2010)<sup>11</sup>. Although Javanese rituals with prayers and incantation are no longer practised communally in the *nyadran* of Sorowajan, the villagers still hold a *wayang kulit* performance and the feast. The feast is integrated into the interfaith gathering while the *wayang kulit* performance is contained in the night after the gathering (Figure 19).



Figure 19: *Wayang Kulit Performance in Nyadran (Nyadran à la Sorowajan, 2002)*

I consider that the significance of the interfaith gathering does not solely reside in its being evidence of the existing religious tolerance in the village, but it also expresses the idea to perpetuate the communal identity, a sense of Javanese-ness. The film depicts how the villagers of Sorowajan from different faiths come to an event, pray and have a feast together for the prosperity and safety of the whole village. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* imparts two things to viewers. First, the film implies that the perpetuation of Javanese values and beliefs is still present in the *nyadran* tradition

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<sup>11</sup> Clifford Geertz points out that “the *bersih desa* or ‘cleansing of the village’ *slametan*, is concerned with sanctifying relationships in space, with defining and celebrating one of the basic territorial units of Javanese social structure – the village. What is cleansed of, of course, is dangerous spirits. This is accomplished by giving a *slametan* in which food is offered to the *danjang desa* (‘guardian spirit of the village’) at the latter’s place of burial...and for him a shadow play must be given (Geertz, 1976, p. 82). Richard Hecht and Vincent Biondo also mention that “in preparing for the *bersih desa* [or *merti desa*], each household in the village contributes money for a *wayang* (shadow play) performance and trays of prepared food” (Hecht and Biondo, 2010, pp. 188–189).

regardless of its transformed manifestation. Second, the transformation of the old Javanese mystic rituals to the interfaith gathering in the context of modernity has been indeed established. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* through the testimonies of the social actors narrate the transformation of *nyadran* itself from their perspectives. Their declarations designate a link between the transformation and the effect of the political upheaval in 1965. The political unrest is known as the so-called *G-30S PKI* (the 30 September *coup d'état* of the Indonesian Communist Party). I will touch on this matter sufficiently in chapter eight.

From all of the explanation above, the point worth highlighting is that the interfaith gathering is the symbolic event expressing the communal identity intended to be preserved by the villagers. Hence, the interfaith gathering is the hermeneutic symbol in the film. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* represents the meeting as a significant socio-cultural practice in the village as it carries fundamental values as the Javanese individually and communally, respect and harmony. With such representation, the image produced is the Javanese who still try to cling on to their tradition in a transformative period of the post-1998 reform. Similar to the images projected on the previous films, this documentary's mental picture of Javanese-ness shows the heterogeneous and unstable image of being Javanese that is different from the aristocratic model of Javanese-ness promoted by the New Order regime. I will explain this image of Javanese-ness from *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* further in chapter eight.

## **5.2. Sagio, the Artisan: Symbolic Figure of Sincerity and *Dharma* in *Wayang Kulit*:**

### ***Shadow Theatre in Java***

In this part, the analysis of symbol examines Sagio, a *wayang kulit* (leather puppet) artisan, in *Wayang Kulit: Shadow Theatre in Java*. I contend that Sagio is the symbolic figure that embodies traditional Javanese values of sincerity and *dharma*

(Figure 20). These values become Sagio's values that motivate him to produce high quality of *wayang kulit* with devotion. Sagio does not regard profit everything, but he sees that a highly artistic product is more important than profit. He does not want to produce *wayang kulit* in a massive way and a short period. He creates *wayang kulit* characters that reflect his artisanship and love of *wayang kulit*. Sagio's devotion to the profession he has chosen as a *wayang kulit* artisan living in a simple life becomes a rare representation in the contemporary Java. The representation of Sagio's devotion to the profession may not be exclusively Javanese, but certainly, the Javanese worldview does encompass and regard devotion to profession very highly. In this respect, I view that Sagio's artisanship and devotion reflect two Javanese moral values known as *sepi ing pamrih* (sincerity) and *ramé ing gawé* (*dharma*, one's willingness and commitment to undergo his or her way of life as a contribution to the society). Before discussing this signification, the analysis needs to begin with a description of the aesthetic quality of the film.



Figure 20: Sagio, the Wayang Kulit Artisan (*Wayang Kulit*, 2005)

### 5.2.1. Form and Style of *Wayang Kulit*

*Wayang Kulit* is a documentary film produced in 2005 in Yogyakarta. The duration of the film is 18 minutes in English and Indonesian with English subtitles.

*Wayang Kulit* was filmed using a high definition video (HDV) format. The film was directed and produced by Chandra Tanzil.

*Wayang Kulit: Shadow Theatre in Java* is an individual and testimonial documentary. This film depicts an account of a Javanese artwork, *wayang kulit*, viewed from the portrayal of its artisan, Sagio. It makes him the central figure, the leading actor of the film. In *Wayang Kulit*, the documentary presents Sagio as the main informant to tell his own experience, expertise and views about *wayang kulit*. The documentary narrative is established from Sagio's vantage point. These features suggest that *Wayang Kulit* can be categorised as a documentary describing an individual profile of Sagio who is concerned with *wayang kulit*. An individual profile documentary is a type of documentary that recounts an individual's story of distinctiveness on a particular subject (Nichols, 2010, p. 153). I view that Sagio's story of his devotion to *wayang kulit* serves this concept of the individual profile documentary.

By genre, *Wayang Kulit* also shows qualities of an expository documentary. The film applies voice-over narration as their cinematic device to speak directly to the viewers. This documentary adopts some children as the supporting actors to perform the re-enactment of Sagio's childhood experiences. The setting takes place in several locations: Sagio's *wayang kulit* studio and neighbourhood in Bantul, the city of Yogyakarta and its Sultanate Palace.

The central idea of the film lies in the unique nature of *wayang kulit* and its production. The film mostly describes Sagio as a *wayang kulit* artisan. Based on this centrality on Sagio, the film argues that producing Javanese *wayang kulit* is an artistic work that demands not only the skill but also the personal values of the artisan. The purpose of the filmmaker is to present a fact that there is no coherence between artistry and wealth. It is partly because Sagio, the artisan, has some ethical values to believe and uphold. In this respect, the documentary shows Sagio's outlook that an artwork's



quality is more important than profits. Sagio admits that he takes his late master as his role model, a very simple man who created *wayang kulit* so passionately and conscientiously to make the best *wayang* he could regardless of profits. In this respect, Sagio shares the same attitudes as what his late teacher believed, to be passionate and dedicated in work. Therefore, I consider that Sagio is a representation, a symbol of the Javanese work ethics, *sepi ing pamrih* (sincerity) and *ramé ing gawé* (*dharma*). I will touch upon this further in the rhetorical and hermeneutic interpretation of this section.

The establishing shot of *Wayang Kulit* captures a wayang kulit performance with a *dalang* (puppeteer) playing his *wayang kulit* characters skilfully in a medium shot and low angle camera. The shot is also accompanied by synchronous sound of the puppeteer, a gamelan orchestra, a traditional Javanese orchestra, and tembang by *waranggana*, a female Javanese singer in gamelan orchestra.

The documentary builds its *wayang kulit*-themed narrative on the figure of Sagio. The documentary narrative sets out with a sketch of the shadow theatre world, its brief history and development in Java. Then, the story focuses on the figure of Sagio. The film shows Sagio's devotion to continue and develop the tradition of making *wayang kulit* as the Javanese cultural arts and legacy. His home in Bantul, near Yogyakarta, is also his studio. Sagio has successfully taught the delicate techniques of creating *wayang kulit* to the people of his neighbourhood. Sagio continues to produce *wayang kulit* of remarkable quality filling orders from *wayang kulit* collectors and puppeteers (*dhalangs*) with the help of his seven workers.

What Sagio holds and expresses in his *wayang kulit* characters matters in this documentary. Therefore, I view that Sagio's outlook on the idea of interconnection between *wayang kulit* and its maker is key to producing the most excellent quality of *wayang kulit*. He further tells the difference between an artisan who makes his *wayang*

passionately and that who merely makes *wayang* as a job to earn quick money. The products tell the significant difference between them. A *wayang kulit* character made by a devoted master is pure and perfect while that produced by a less passionate maker radiates no strong characteristics; therefore, it feels dull and flat. As Sagio tells these all as an off-screen narrator, the film describes the delicate process to make a *wayang kulit* character from daytime to the evening where Sagio with his spectacles still seriously works on it in his simple studio.

As the story evolves, *Wayang Kulit* narrates the sobriety of Sagio. This is represented in a scene where he preserves the ancient royal collections of *wayang kulit*. This scene begins with Sagio and his fellow king's servant (*abdi dalem*) riding a scooter, heading for the Sultanate Palace of Yogyakarta. In the palace, Sagio wearing his traditional outfit joins other king's servants to prepare their duties of the day. As they all finish reporting their presence ready for the service, they go to where they are assigned. Sagio is no exception. He goes to the inner court where his primary responsibility and duty is to preserve the court's old collections of *wayang kulit*. As the scene shows, the voice-of-God commentary explains Sagio's commitment.

His main duty is to take care of the most invaluable and ancient *wayang kulit* of the palace, repair the damaged ones, make the copies of the existing characters, and expose the *wayang kulit* collections to the air so that fungus will not damage them.

Sagio also testifies that he has learnt a great deal from his duty. He has copied and developed ancient techniques and motifs to design *wayang kulit* characters. As he gives his testimony, the scene shows Sagio exposing *wayang kulit* collections to the air in the palace. The scene also captures him observing and copying the ornamentation and style of some characters on a piece of paper. In the palace, Sagio learns the unusual design and techniques of *wayang kulit* and develop them in his studio.

The film reveals how Sagio feels grateful for being able to serve the palace,

conserve its ancient and unique *wayang kulit* collections, and develop his skill for the sake of preserving the tradition and his love of *wayang kulit*. The film also demonstrates how Sagio values his principles, quality and love, in producing *wayang kulit* more than the profits he could earn. Sagio testifies that such beliefs he holds are a legacy of his *wayang kulit* master (*guru*) from whom Sagio has learnt the delicate and artistic techniques of making *wayang kulit*.

The film is consistent on this track showing the modest life Sagio as an artist. As a result, the film images emanate simplicity, solemnity, passion, diligence and thoroughness. For example, in the scene of making *wayang kulit* at Sagio's studio, the film, in close-up, medium and full shots, shows how Sagio makes a *wayang kulit* character (Figure 21). He explains that to make a *wayang* character, one has to draw a pattern in the first place. This can be done by copying from the existing character, or by completely drawing a new pattern on a buffalo hide. After sketching is done, the next phase is to carve the sketch. In this carving phase, Sagio stresses that in carving a *wayang kulit* character, a combination of great skill, experience, patience and passion of an artisan all matter.

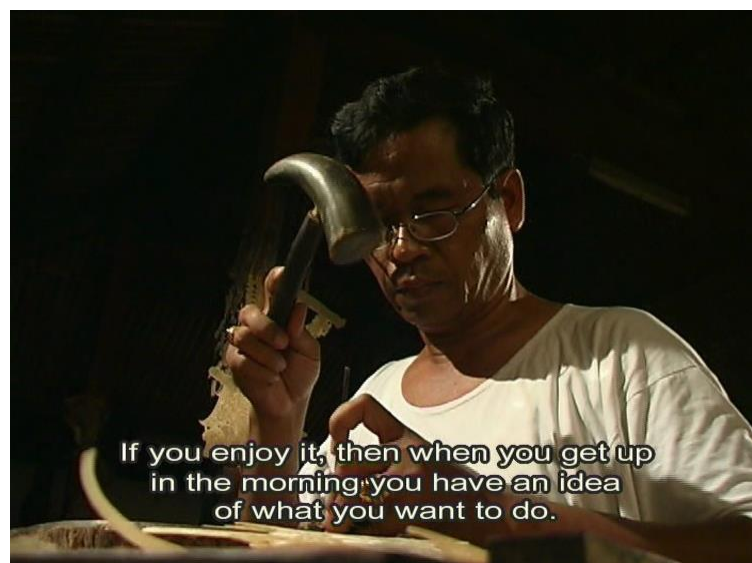
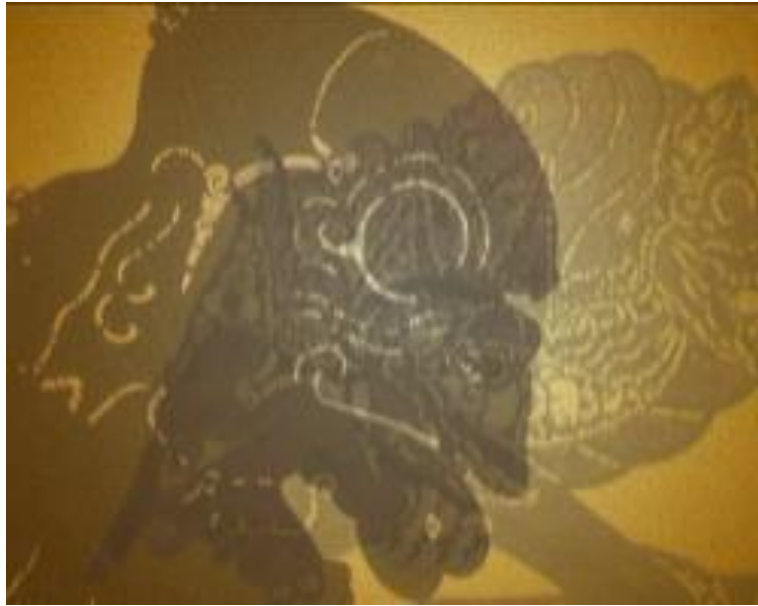


Figure 21: Sagio's Seriousness and Modesty (*Wayang Kulit*, 2005)

*Wayang Kulit* uses a voice-of-God commentary to guide and propel the film's

narrative. The documentary also employs different cinematic techniques. These include superimposed graphic of *wayang kulit* characters (Figure 22), fragments of a *wayang kulit* performance (Figure 23), the old photograph of *wayang kulit* history (Figure 24), and a technique of dramatisation of Sagio's childhood experience, with some children as the supporting actors (Figure 25).



*Figure 22: An Example of the Superimposed Wayang Kulit Characters (Wayang Kulit, 2005)*



*Figure 23: A Fragment of Wayang Kulit Performance (Wayang Kulit, 2005)*



Figure 24: An Old Photograph of Wayang Kulit History  
(Wayang Kulit, 2005)



Figure 25: A Re-enactment of Sagio's Childhood Experience (Wayang Kulit, 2005)

High contrast lighting and tonality are also used to give a stronger emotion focusing on the character or events represented. This, for instance, is the employment of *chiaroscuro*, a low-key lighting arrangement that shows a contrast between light and dark (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013, p. 129).

About Sagio as a symbol of *sepi ing pamrih* (sincerity) and *ramé ing gawé*

(*dharma*), chiaroscuro works in a scene where Sagio is enthusiastically immersed in his work, making a *wayang kulit* character in his studio (Figure 26). In this scene, Sagio tells the viewers that when making *wayang kulit*, an artisan should enjoy it, love it, and keep that enthusiasm as long as he can. Sagio testifies that when he is in the state of incredible happiness, and he has the idea how to imbue his *wayang kulit* with strong characteristics, he can overwork from the morning until late midnight. The effect of this chiaroscuro is to reinforce the sobriety and devotion of Sagio to his job, giving the impression that he is a hard-working person.

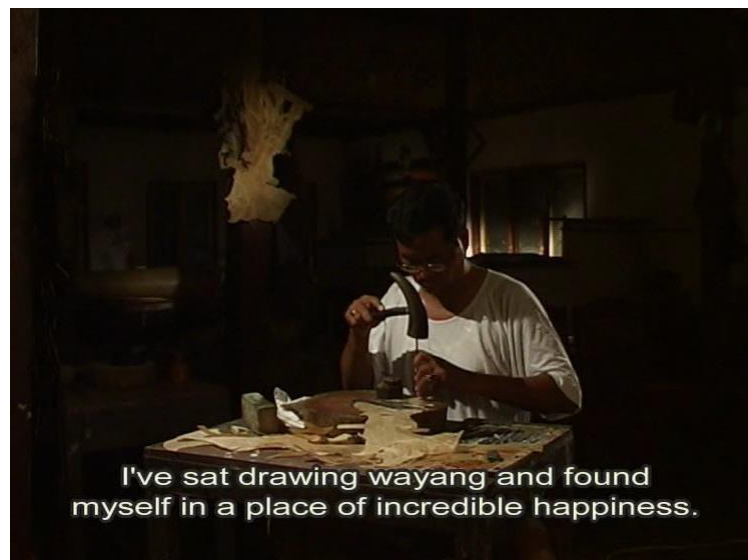


Figure 26: Chiaroscuro to heighten Sagio's enthusiasm and hard-working attitude (*Wayang Kulit*, 2005)

#### 5.2.2. Rhetorical and Hermeneutic Interpretation of *Wayang Kulit*

On the surface, the representation of Sagio informs us that he is a hard-working and devoted *wayang kulit* artisan. It is true as the film shows. Although the film's subject matter is about *wayang kulit*, the documentary's narrative focuses on Sagio. Sagio is the leading actor who explains the intricacy to produce a *wayang kulit* character. He gives his testimony about his work, experience and attitudes to make a *wayang kulit* character to a perfection.

Nevertheless, from the rhetorical and my hermeneutic understanding, the

representation of Sagio articulates deeper meaning than a hard-working person who becomes the main actor. As Ricoeur (1976) suggests, which is to relate hermeneutic reading with cultural values behind what appears on the surface (see also Ricoeur, 1969, 1974; Simms, 2016), Sagio represents a Javanese man who still highly values simplicity of life and devotion to his work. These ethics are known in Javanese worldview as *sepi ing pamrih* (sincerity) and *ramé ing gawé* (dharma). Sagio becomes the symbol of these values in the film because he represents the values. He makes the values manifested in the documentary from what the film shows, his works and attitudes.

As regards *sepi ing pamrih* and *ramé ing gawé*, Suseno (1996) mentions that *sepi ing pamrih* is about purifying, focusing, and controlling oneself (sincerity), while *ramé ing gawé* concerns willingness to fulfil one's duty (*dharma*) faithfully. The values do not demand particular outward attitudes to exhibit, but what is required from a Javanese man with these values is in the first place remembering what needs to be avoided. Then, he develops his inner or mental states, namely willingness and positive feelings (Suseno, 1996, p. 205).

*Sepi ing pamrih* suggests that one can have self-control; he or she should not be selfish, and therefore need to comply with things required for the common good. The traditional Javanese society perceives that when members of the society can prioritise the public interest for the common good, such a decision is regarded as an act of tolerance. This is, with no doubt, encouraged. *Ramé ing gawé* means that one has to be sincere to do good things, including to choose and to experience one's way of life. Putting sincerity in the way of life one has chosen becomes his or her contribution to the society. By sincerely doing the accepted way of life, one can contribute something to the society for the common good (Suseno, 1996, p. 206).

Meanwhile, Endraswara (2013b) considers that *sepi ing pamrih* cannot be

dissociated from *ramé ing gawé*. Such a paired-value expresses one's need to manage his or her ulterior motives (*pamrih*) (Endraswara, 2013b, p. 68). In traditional Javanese society, expressing ulterior motives are discouraged. The Javanese perceive that ulterior motives often mislead people as the motives can lead them to take things they are not entitled to possess. Therefore, in this sense, such a principle function as the ethical norm for people to control and manage their ulterior motives wisely. By monitoring and managing ulterior motives, people are asked to "purify" the motives. People cannot eliminate their ulterior motives, as the motives are always embedded in human desires. To eliminate *pamrih* is parallel to having no desire at all, a condition which is impossible to achieve so long as man lives (Endraswara, 2013b, p. 71).

However, none of this suggests that one's conscience is always sacrificed for the sake of shared interest, or that public interest is still superior to self-interest. Managing the balance between self-interest, self-conscience and collective interest is often perceived as a way out for society members in the contemporary Javanese society. Nonetheless, with a more pluralistic normative system of Javanese culture and complex problems encountered by its members, Javanese people, unfortunately, tend to abandon these values easily without applying them proportionally (Suseno, 1996, p. 205).

In the context of the film, Sagio is a representation of a Javanese man who internalises and expresses *sepi ing pamrih* and *ramé ing gawé* (Figure 27). In other words, these values are embodied in Sagio. With his ability to be focused and express his motive, faithfulness and love as he designs exquisite *wayang kulit* characters, Sagio becomes the embodiment of the values. Sagio affirms that although the *wayang kulit* characters he produces are sold in galleries and souvenir shops, he does not want to make them only for souvenirs. He sells his works primarily to collectors and puppeteers (*dhalang*) as he always does the best when producing *wayang kulit*. Thus, he



feels reluctant whenever he is asked to make *wayang kulit* for souvenir only. Sagio has this principle after his late master taught him to make *wayang kulit* professionally and intuitively, with passion as a Javanese.



Figure 27: An Expression of “*Sepi in pamrih, rame in gawe.*”  
(*Wayang Kulit*, 2005)

In addition to being a *wayang kulit* artisan, he is also a king’s servant (*abdi dalem*) whose special task is to look after all *wayang kulit* collection at the inner sanctum of the Sultanate of Palace of Yogyakarta. He reveals that he has served the court since 1978 with the purpose of studying the ancient and rare designs and ornamentation styles of *wayang kulit* in the palace. He learns from such collections to preserve them and develop new techniques and designs of *wayang kulit*. Although Sagio’s intention can be viewed as his ulterior motive, he can manage the purpose in line with his skill and occupation as a *wayang kulit* artisan. Material gain is not his priority as Sagio still highly values the feeling of satisfaction when designing a stunning work of art. In this respect, Sagio, to a certain degree, still represents Javanese values of *sepi ing pamrih* and *ramé ing gawé* in the contemporary Javanese society.

As restatement of my explanation above, Sagio is a symbolic figure of the Javanese values. He is the embodiment of sincerity (*sepi ing pamrih*) and dharma (*ramé*

ing gawé) in *Wayang Kulit*. His works and attitudes as the film shows indicates it. Because of this representation, the image we have on Sagio is indeed a Javanese man who still orient himself to the traditional Javanese values and who is influenced by the court. This is, to a certain degree, similar to the images established in *Ksatria Kerajaan*. I will explain this further in chapter six.

### **5.3. Semen Rama: Symbol of Ethical Centrality of Javanese Ruler in *Bathik: Bebet lan***

#### ***Bobot Lakuning Urip***

This section explores what *Semen Rama* means and why it becomes a symbol of Javaneseness in the film. In this respect, I maintain that *Semen Rama* is a symbol of the significance of ethics for a Javanese ruler. The ethic here concerns a classical Javanese leadership teaching known as *Asta Brata* or “The Eight Statesman’s Virtues” of Hindu origin (Moertono, 2009, p. 165). *Asta Brata* is the eight ideal principles that a Javanese king or queen should possess and apply to all of his or her subjects regardless of their classes. In the contemporary sense, *Asta Brata* is also known as the eight spiritual and mental exercises that someone needs to practise before holding a leadership or public position. *Asta* means “eight”, and *Brata* is “spiritual or mental attitudes and ways”.

In Javanese *wayang* mythology, these principles are handed down from a mythological story of King Rama, the incarnation of God Wisnu or *Vishnu* (life-protecting God) in Hindu's belief. The story revolves around the post-battle situation between the good forces led by King Rama against the evil forces led by King Rahwana of Alengka. After the decisive Battle of *Brubuh* (*Perang Brubuh*), King Rama meets Gunawan Wibisana, a prince of Alengka and the younger brother of the defeated King Rahwana. Knowing that Wibisana feels in despair over the future of Alengka, King Rama, then, enlightens him with *Asta Brata*. *Asta Brata* symbolically represents

divine characteristics of eight Hindu's Gods: *Chandra, Brama, Indra, Kuwera, Bayu, Baruna, Surya* and *Yama* (Moertono, 2009; Endraswara, 2013a).

As a symbol of *Asta Brata* for a Javanese ruler, *Semen Rama* reveals an ideal of how a Javanese ruler should be knowledgeable of *Asta Brata* before he or she can lead others. Hence, being a Javanese ruler, one is demanded to understand and apply *Asta Brata* for himself or herself before manifesting the principles to others. *Bathik* shows how *Semen Rama*, the batik motif, is depicted and signified in the film (Figure 28).



Figure 28: The Javanese Batik of Semen Rama (Bathik, 2008)

### 5.3.1. Form and Style of *Bathik*

*Bathik* is a documentary film produced in 2008 in Solo, Central Java, Indonesia. The duration of the film is 23 minutes. The documentary is narrated mainly in Indonesian although some scene uses Javanese language. *Bathik* was filmed using a high definition video (HDV) format. Maria Chrisna directed the film. Rafika Titi Ariyami is the producer of the film. *Bathik* is a film that discloses *Asta Brata* behind the motif of *Semen Rama*, an important batik motif of the *Sunanate* Palace of Solo in Central Java. Thus, the film's subject matter concerns the philosophical teachings of batik, a traditional fabric of some ethnic groups in Indonesia, including the Javanese.

There is no leading actor in *Bathik*, in the sense of the one who guides and

provides most of the information or who is mostly present throughout the film's narrative. However, the documentary tries to present a theatrical (dramatised) actor, a rural woman in traditional Javanese outfit, *kebaya*. She appears in the opening and concluding scenes. Her representation seems to introduce and emphasise the film's subject matter, *Semen Rama*. Other actors are Winarso Kalinggo, Prince Puger, and Sugiyatno. These male actors are also the witnesses giving their testimonies in the film. Also, at the concluding scenes, the film demonstrates a group of female batik artisan as the theatrical actors in their dramatised act. A voice-of-God commentary is used to tell and guide the film's narrative in combination with dramatised act in the opening and concluding scenes. Some locations such as a rural area near Solo, the Sunanate Palace of Solo, the Klewer Market, and the Kauman of Solo are used as the setting.

Similar to *Wayang Kulit* and *Ksatria Kerajaan*, *Bathik* can be considered a testimonial documentary marked by some social actors providing their explanations of *Semen Rama*, *Asta Brata* and a brief history of Surakarta Palace. Unlike *Wayang Kulit* and *Ksatria Kerajaan*, *Bathik* is not an individual profile. Instead, *Bathik* fits a documentary of advocacy. Advocacy documentary is a documentary film that conveys convincing and compelling evidence and examples of a particular subject matter. This is performed through an adoption of a specific viewpoint (Nichols, 2010, p. 149). I regard that *Bathik* employs a historical approach of *Semen Rama* as the film's specific viewpoint. *Bathik* tries to convey convincing and compelling evidence and examples of the philosophical significance of batik *Semen Rama*. The focus is on the film's subject matter, *Semen Rama*, imbued with *Asta Brata*. By genre, *Bathik* can also be classified as an expository documentary with the extensive use of voice-over narration.

*Bathik* shares a commonality with *Jamu* and *Wayang Kulit* in terms of using tangible materials of Javanese culture. *Bathik* is a documentary developed from a thesis

that Javanese *batik* in general and *Semen Rama* in particular have to be preserved and learnt by the Javanese in this unprecedented period of globalisation. The film's argument is based on the understanding that batik is not merely a piece of fabric designed elaborately with meaningless ornamentation and styles, but it is imbued with Javanese philosophical values. Because of this synthesis of art and philosophical values, the documentary tries to underscore that batik is worth learning and conserving.

The establishing shot of *Bathik* depicts sunrise, rice fields and trees captured in an extreme long shot. It is then followed by a representation of a misty morning scenery in a rural area with a farmer walking across rice fields where ranges of trees lay behind the fields. The narrative of *Bathik* opens with a scene dramatising a simple rural life in Java. The scene shows a rural woman in *kebaya* and batik, the theatrical actor, washing batik at a fountain by the rice fields. The scene moves to the rural woman going back to her house and drying the washed clothes. Next, the scene shifts to a traditional market known as *Pasar Klewer* in Solo. In this setting, the scene presents some shots capturing various activities of the market traffic, trading and its surrounding area.

From the market, the scene slides to a traditional royal festivity at the *Sunanate* Palace of Solo. In this scene onwards, the documentary starts to convey interviews with some actors concerning the palace and batik in Solo. The film, through the testimonies of the actors, carries a shared opinion that the development of batik in Solo cannot be excluded from the development and usage of batik in the Sunanate Palace. The history of the Sunanate Palace has also influenced the development of various batik motifs and their usage in the court traditions. Then, film demonstrates scenes that capture multiple kinds of batik motifs and their progress in Solo.

As the story unfolds, *Bathik* presents the historical background of *Semen Rama* and its designer, Paku Buwono IV. Afterwards, the documentary recounts the figure of Paku Buwono IV and the adoption of *Asta Brata* in *Semen Rama*. Following the

introduction of Paku Buwono IV and *Asta Brata*, the film illustrates a brief history of royal succession, the origin of *Asta Brata*, *Semen Rama* and its philosophical meanings. Also, the history of batik making and its development in Solo are represented. The scene then evolves into illustrating the need to disseminate Javanese values through batik motifs, including that of *Semen Rama*. In this part, the story also highlights the social transformation that happens in Solo. The film's narrative ends with a scene of batik making process in a home industry. The scene contains a dramatised conversation among some female artisans about *Semen Rama* and *Asta Brata*. With such a story, *Semen Rama* is the most recurrent object that appears *Bathik*, which makes it the motif of the film.

In presenting the film's argument, the tone of *Bathik* tends to glorify the past values, archaic, and somewhat apologetic. Nevertheless, the film seems to capture the spirit of the Indonesian government to elevate *batik* in the list of the world's intangible heritage in the first decade after the political reform in 1998 (IC-UNESCO, 2009, unpaginated). To manifest the film's tone, *Bathik* aesthetically employs stock footage of old photographs, old paintings, collections of books and museum artefacts.



Figure 29: The old Painting of Paku Buwono IV (1788-1820) (*Bathik*, 2008)

As a case in point, the documentary shows a scene portraying the old painting of Paku

Buwono IV (Figure 29) and some photographs the Sunanate Palace during the Dutch colonial period. The idea to demonstrate these archives is to validate the testimonies that Paku Buwono IV is genuinely the designer of *Semen Rama* for introducing *Asta Brata* and that the palace is the birthplace of *Semen Rama*.

Similar to *Jamu* and *Wayang Kulit*, *Bathik* also employs a dramatisation technique. The difference is that while the dramatisation in *Jamu* increases its satirical tone and the tone of experiential simplicity in *Wayang Kulit*, the dramatisation used in *Bathik* slightly expresses scepticism. This scepticism is emanated from the scene that depicts a group of female batik artisans involved in a dramatised conversation of *Asta Brata* (Figure 30). They talk about the meaning of *Asta Brata* as their customer named Gunawan is told to participate in a gubernatorial campaign. These artisans (theatrical actors) wish that Gunawan will understand *Asta Brata* so that he could be a good governor. The dramatised scene gives the impression that such the conversation among the batik artisans “truly” takes place in ordinary life. The use of this technique seems to validate the film’s argument. It also poses scepticism whether or not such a conversation might have genuinely occurred in the society. Despite this, the dramatisation undoubtedly enhances the film’s rhetoric.



Figure 30: The Dramatisation of the Female Batik Artisans at a Batik Workshop (*Bathik*, 2008)

Another aesthetic device that *Bathik* employs is chiaroscuro (Figure 31). This is evident, for example, in a scene that exclusively portrays *Semen Rama*. In this scene, the batik is depicted at the focus of the framing with a medium shot. Then, the scene gradually makes use of close-up and extreme close-up to highlight the *Semen Rama* motifs. This combination of visual composition and lighting technique heightens the centrality of *Semen Rama* and the quality of Javaneseness in the film.



Figure 31: *Semen Rama* in a Medium Shot and Chiaroscuro (*Bathik*, 2008)

### 5.3.2. The Rhetorical Qualities and the Hermeneutic Reading of *Bathik*

On the surface, *Bathik* depicts the historical link of *Semen Rama* and *Asta Brata*. This is crystal-clear. *Semen Rama* is a kind of batik, and *Asta Brata* is a Javanese leadership philosophy. *Semen Rama* is produced outside the palace wall, as there is a need to disseminate *Asta Brata*. However, from my hermeneutic reading of the film, *Semen Rama* articulates not only their connection but also symbolises the centrality of *Asta Brata* for a Javanese leader. *Semen Rama* is a symbol of the essence of *Asta Brata* for a sovereign in this documentary. As Ricoeur (1976) highlights, it is the meaning beyond what appears that mostly attracts a hermeneutic reading. However, the “secondary”, the “surplus signification”, or the “multiple meanings” are achieved via interpretation after we decipher the “semantic dimension” of what is stated on the



surface, the first literal or primary meaning (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 55).

As noted above, *Bathik* argues that a leader needs to have and show qualities of the eight virtues of *Asta Brata*. These virtues instruct a monarch to be forgiving as represented in *Chandra*. A ruler must be decisive, stout, and reasonable served as *Brama*. A sovereign has to be confident and benevolent symbolised as *Indra*. A ruler needs to be considerate exemplified by *Kuwera*. He or she is attentive typified by *Bayu*. A leader demonstrates prudence and thoughtfulness characterised as *Baruna*. A ruler needs to be inspirational and can be the example of others represented as *Surya*. Besides, a sovereign upholds justice, a sign of *Yama*. Never is in the traditional Javanese worldview being a ruler considered occupational as in the contemporary understanding of a public leader. The conventional Javanese worldview always sees that a ruler expresses divine characteristics on which his or her authority, the right to lead people and be the centre of the realm, is based (Bratastiswara, 2000; Moertono, 2009; Endraswara, 2013a).

I justify my interpretation on the centrality of a ruler in the Javanese worldview as shown in some scenes. The first justification is in the pre-credits sequence portraying a simple, peaceful and harmonious rural life of Java where people meeting in the fields smile and greet each other sincerely. In this scene, I view that the depiction articulates the significance of sustaining harmony and balance, a core belief in the Javanese worldview and culture. Besides demonstrating a friendly and happy theatrical actor (the rural woman in *kebaya* and batik), I argue that the presence of a traditional Javanese song (*sekar* or *tembang*) entitled *Pangkur* is audible as the non-diegetic sound accompanying the scene. The song underscores this picturesque harmony of the rural Javanese life.

*Pangkur* is the fourth canto of the thirteen *cantos* in *Wulang Reh*, a long sung-poem composed by Paku Buwono IV. The *Pangkur* heard here is only the first couplet

of the seventeen couplets in the canto. The lyrics highlight the significant idea of self-awareness, a capability of a human being to differentiate the virtuous and the vile attitudes and behaviours. The lyrics further conveys that such knowledge is the basic understanding of a ruler and all people of good will to have moral ethics (Abimanyu, 2014, p. 146). With the *Pangkur* lyrics, *Wulang Reh* and Paku Buwono IV at the background, the documentary has given hints for the centrality of *Asta Brata* for a leader. Again, *Semen Rama* is a symbol of the great importance of these leadership virtues.

Second, the centrality of a Javanese ruler is also highlighted when Prince Puger reveals his opinion about the permission given by the court to the public outside the palace wall to reproduce *Semen Rama*. Prince Puger states that it is the final goal of Paku Buwono IV, and then continued by Paku Buwono V to make the public understand *Asta Brata* through *Semen Rama*. Paku Buwono IV, as stated by Prince Puger, thought that what a sovereign believed and contemplated was also worth sharing to the subjects. This was intended so that the relation between a ruler and the ruled would be much more harmonious, understanding and supporting based on their obligations (*dharma*). A sovereign managed the state while the ruled supported the existence of the state. Prince Puger testifies that the argument became the reasoning of Paku Buwono IV to permit the public outside the palace was to reproduce and wear *Semen Rama*. Beforehand, the ordinary Javanese people had worn simple fabric called *tenun iket* for their garment, instead of batik.

The above reasoning at a glance confirms a notion for democratising *Semen Rama*. However, it also implies and underlines an interpretation that things from the court as the seat of power tend to be frequently regarded as invaluable for the general masses. This interpretation emphasises the significance of *Asta Brata* in the film. My deduction is not without argument as *Bathik* reveals its rhetoric through

the coherence between the voice-of-God commentary and the dramatised scene of the female artisans at the workshop. The commentary says:

The glorious name and dignity of a nation lie in its culture. Will such a wise quote of Paku Buwono X (1893-1939) be meaningless? Preserving culture does not solely mean keeping its tangible products intact, but it also suggests that the comprehension of the meanings behind them proves to be equally significant.

The above statement naturally communicates the film's message exemplified by the philosophical values of *Asta Brata* in *Semen Rama*. This is further intensified in the dramatised scene of the female batik artisans. They converse over the meaning of *Asta Brata* in *Semen Rama* as if such a thing occurred in the actual reality. Interestingly, with their actions that give an impression of "lacking knowledge" of *Semen Rama*, one of the artisans understands *Asta Brata*. This actor is the same person who appeared in the pre-credit sequence of the film, the rural woman in *kebaya* and batik doing the washing. She considers that *Asta Brata* is a moral guidance for a leader to use his authority wisely so that he will not treat people abusively. By being knowledgeable and applying *Asta Brata*, she thinks that a leader could make the country stronger and more prosperous. I regard that this dramatised scene and the opinion of the rural woman amplify the film's argument, the significance of *Asta Brata*.

In *Bathik*, testimonies of Winarso Kalinggo, Prince Puger, and Sugiyanto are not the only rhetorical device to explain *Semen Rama* and *Asta Brata*. The film also adopts a fragment of *wayang kulit* performance to help recount the origin of *Asta Brata* (Figure 32). The fragment tells the story of the meeting between King Rama and Gunawan Wibisana as was mentioned earlier. Since this is the case, *Semen Rama*, in my reading, is indeed a symbol in the film. It is a symbol of the ethical centrality of a ruler. I contend that such a symbolism serves and justifies the film's message, the significance of *Asta Brata*. The exhibition of *Semen Rama* is a Javanese batik motif with distinct patterns on the surface, but in a broader cultural level, *Semen Rama* expresses the essence of

these values, *Asta Brata*, for a leader. *Semen Rama* becomes a symbol because the film shows that it functions as a reminder, a cultural artefact, for those who behold and wear *Semen Rama* of the great significance of the ethical virtues of a leader.



Figure 32: The Origin of Asta Brata in a Wayang Kulit Performance (Bathik, 2008)

Many foreign cultures have historically taken part in shaping the contemporary Javanese cultures and beliefs. Java is well-known for the home of vibrant syncretism throughout its history (Beatty, 2003, p. 1). Therefore, what the documentary offers here is *Asta Brata* of Hindu origin. *Asta Brata* exclusively places weight on the centrality of a ruler to be the most determining factor in governing and managing world affairs. The ruler is expected to show behaviours reflective of his or her godly qualities so that ordinary people can trust him or her to lead them. In classical Hindu political theory, a ruler is the personification of God. Therefore, a sovereign is attributed with a functional identity between the behaviours of a ruler and the divine qualities of "*aṣṭadikpālaka*, Guardians of the Eight Quarters of the Sky" (Weatherbee, 1994, p. 414) as pointed out previously: *Chandra, Brama, Indra, Kuwera, Bayu, Baruna, Surya* and *Yama*.

These divine characteristics are not a matter of lineage or being passed down

through the bloodline. To acquire the divine qualities is through a process of seeking for *wahyu*. It is achieved through ascetic ways, such as self-contemplation, meditation and fasting. In this respect, *wahyu* is understood as the “heavenly mandate”. This mandate seeks the right person that it sees worthy of receiving the mandate, the trust. When the mandate considers a person of virtuous qualities, it will embody in that person, so that he or she deserves to rule his or her realm. *Wahyu* is not permanently embodied in the chosen one. It is temporary. *Wahyu* can move and manifest in other human beings if the chosen ruler becomes tyrannical to his subjects and the world. This is the traditional Javanese belief in reading of the change of power and authority of a ruler (Moertono, 1974; Moedjanto, 1986; Suseno, 1996; Hadisiswaya, 2009).

From all of the explanation in this section, I would like to foreground that Semen Rama is a symbol of the centrality of *Asta Brata* for a Javanese leader. *Bathik* demonstrates more than the historical link of *Semen Rama* and *Asta Brata*. The documentary reveals that *Semen Rama* batik articulates the significance of the ethical norms (*Asta Brata*) to guide a leader. The image established from this film is an ideal Javanese man who is expected to embrace traditional philosophy to guide him or her to the virtue. This image, to some extent, shares its concerns on the sympathy with the traditional Javanese and court-related values as expressed in *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Wayang Kulit*. This image, again, verifies the diversity of how Javanese-ness itself is represented.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

As with the conclusion of chapter four, the analysis of symbols in *Nyadran à La Sorowajan*, *Wayang Kulit* and *Bathik* support my argument where I consider that the manifestations of the films’ subject matters, based on my reading, are the symbols of Javanese-ness. The symbols here are the visual representations of a socio-cultural

and religious activity (the interfaith gathering of Sorowajan), of a figure portrait (Sagio) and a cultural material (batik *Semen Rama*). Their representations are important entities as they express beliefs and values of the Javanese world. These expressions of beliefs and values do not merely provide the cultural background of the films, but they are also crucial part of the films' themes, narratives, and arguments. The ways the symbols are aesthetically and rhetorically highlighted, expressed and placed in the stories of the documentaries enhance the cultural interpretation of their presence and significance.

Some films demonstrate a shared concern in their symbolism as shown between the artisan of *wayang kulit* of *Wayang Kulit*, the *Semen Rama* of *Bathik* and the traditional herbal medicine of *Jamu* in the previous chapter. These documentary films demonstrate their common concern of the interpretation (and question) of Javanese moral ethics' in their subject matters. However, this similarity does not establish the same image of Javanese. Their mental pictures for being Javanese are different. I perceive that this heterogeneity and complexity needs to be explored, in relation to the socio-political and cultural contexts of the first decade of the reform era.

Moreover, the films' arguments indicate their links with the era expressed in both the films' settings and narratives. Therefore, the following chapters will discuss the different imaginations of Javanese pertinent to the films' socio-political and cultural contexts. These diverse representations of Javanese will begin with the examination of Javanese from three documentary films *Wayang Kulit*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Bathik*.

**CHAPTER VI**  
**REVIVAL OF JAVANESE TRADITIONAL VALUES**

As mentioned in the preceding chapters, the images of Javanese culture represented in the documentary films examined are diverse. This chapter focuses on the representations of Javanese cultural identity that express a revival of the traditional Javanese values. The discussion of such observations is of crucial importance to justify the fact that the depictions of Javanese culture are plural. The portrayals of Javanese culture are not governed by a single image induced by the interpretation of the state's elite, as one practiced by the New Order regime. As mentioned in chapter one, Javanese culture "preferred" by the New Order regime was that of aristocratic, moralistic, progressive and capitalistic one. It was the hegemonic and normative projection of being Javanese. Since I consider that the examined films show different images of Javanese culture, the documentaries suggest that the understandings of what it means to be a Javanese are also various. In this chapter, the knowledge of Javanese culture is viewed from the manifestations of the films' subject matters imbued with the traditional Javanese values. This combination is expressed through the symbols depicted in the examined films. Therefore, the connection between this chapter, my overall argument and the symbol analysis of chapter three and four is indivisible.

The representations of Javanese cultural identity orientated towards the traditional Javanese values in this chapter denote a specific understanding of what it means to be a Javanese. I call this kind of representation as the first model of Javanese culture in this thesis. The traditional Javanese values discussed here are *sepi ing pamrih* (sincerity), *ramé ing gawé* (commitment to the profession), *ngalab berkah* (king's blessing myth-induced humility, loyalty and simplicity of life), and *Asta Brata* (the eight virtues of Javanese leadership). Three documentary films substantiate these values. They are *Wayang Kulit: Shadow Theatre in Java*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Bathik: Bebet lan Bobot Lakuning Urip*. I argue that in these films the specific understanding of



Javanese values offered is one that still shows appreciation and attachment to the traditional values. These values, *sepi ing pamrih* (sincerity), *ramé ing gawé* (commitment to the profession), *ngalab berkah* (king's blessing), and *Asta Brata* (the eight virtues of Javanese leadership), are represented to have a certain degree of connection with the Javanese courts setting. Javanese values expressed in the films is an image of being the Javanese lingering on the court-related traditional values as its operating frame.

The revival of traditional Javanese values is evident both in the films themselves and in the social reality. I perceive that the socio-political and cultural explanation in the first decade of the reform may help us to understand such a motive indicated in the films. In the first decade of the Indonesian reform period, the populace distrusted and heavily criticised people's representative bodies and government institutions. Such a condition occurred as the formal political structures still struggled to find their agreeable power constellation and amendments from the impacts of the collapse of the New Order's hegemonic governance structure. Not only did the elite politicians and government officials express the political uncertainty and their conflicts of interests, but also practices of corruption. Conflicts of interests, polemics and practices of corruption even became more blatant than such things practised during the New Order regime (Bresnan, 2005; Beittinger-Lee, 2009; Bünte, 2009).

In such a situation, what emerged was the issue of public trust to those formal structures pertinent to their leadership and moral ethics. The public trust and esteem for the formal structures grew weary. On the contrary, their trust and esteem for socio-cultural structures became stronger. Javanese courts are among these socio-cultural structures. From this angle, I perceive that the filmmakers of *Wayang Kulit*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Bathik* provide their indirect fascination of the traditional Javanese values through the subject matters of their films. Further, their interest also

articulates their reading of the uncertain socio-political condition at that time. The documentaries seem to communicate that the values mentioned above are still relevant.

To explain my analysis, I structure the chapter into four sections. In the first section, I investigate the nature of this first model, clarifying what is meant by the imagination of Javanese-ness based on the traditional values. My analysis of this section is concerned with the significance of the traditional Javanese values ascribed to the films' subject matters. From describing this model of Javanese-ness, my analysis further assesses the representational methods of reviving the traditional values in the documentaries.

In the second section, the analysis deals with the credibility of the cultural contents of the examined documentaries to revive the traditional values as the documentary films indicate. This section explores the nature of the cultural materials filmed from an ideological standpoint. The standpoint expresses the regime of truth operating in the cultural representations of the documentaries.

In the third section, I contextualise this first model of Javanese-ness to the socio-political and cultural conditions of the early reform era in Indonesia. This section provides my interpretation that the traditional value-oriented images produced by the three documentaries captures the socio-political and cultural conditions of the time. The arrangement of the above sections, from the analysis within the films' scope going beyond the works, reflects the nature of my investigation. I start everything from, and within the documentary films, that is what the documentaries show. The last section concludes the whole analysis of this chapter.

### **6.1. Idealised Representation of Javanese-ness using the Traditional Values**

As noted above, Javanese-ness here expresses a revival of the traditional

Javanese values. It denotes the understanding of Javanese values reflected from what the social actors say and do in the films. The social actors are still aware of and willing to revisit and hold on to their traditional values. The traditional values above address the ethics of sincerity and professionalism (*sepi ing pamrih, ramé ing gawé*), humility, sacrifice and modesty (*ngalab berkah*), as well as the principles of leadership (*Asta Brata*). I contend that the imagination of Javanese values in this first model is, by nature, an idealised representation of Javanese values using past Javanese cultural values. Such an image of Javanese values, as the three documentaries show, indicates the need to revisit the traditional values. Examining the first model of Javanese values is vital as this traditional value-based imagination explains the diverse understandings and representations of Javanese values that become the focus of my thesis.

#### 6.1.1. Articulation of *Sepi ing Pamrih, Ramé ing Gawé*

*Wayang Kulit* effectively describes the Javanese work ethic, *sepi ing pamrih, ramé ing gawé*. *Sepi ing pamrih* suggests one's attitude of bearing no ulterior motive when one is doing a work, except for the work itself and to help those in need of assistance. Meanwhile, *ramé ing gawé* demonstrates one's awareness and willingness to be committed to whatever he or she is doing, notably his or her job (Suseno, 1996; Endraswara, 2013b). Sagio, as the film illustrates, is the symbol of the manifestation of these values. Sagio's symbolism expresses the qualities of *sepi ing pamrih* and *ramé ing gawé*. He is devoted and sincere to his profession as a *wayang kulit* artisan. Sagio always pursues his artisanship to the perfection and undergoes his life humbly. He is not materialistic in the sense of enriching himself financially by sacrificing his work ethic and the quality of his *wayang kulit*. Sagio gives his testimony that the attitude and the work ethic he holds are the legacies of his late master.

Creating *wayang kulit* for souvenirs and the collectors are distinctly different. As for me, if one asks me to make *wayang* merely as souvenirs, just for the sake

of profit, it makes me feel genuinely uneasy. I do not want to do it. It indeed bothers me. It would be better for me to produce a few number of *wayang kulit* than to make them massively for a quick profit. I have to sacrifice the feeling of personal satisfaction in creating a gorgeous work of art. Not all *wayang* makers agree with my opinion. However, I share the same attitude as my late teacher. He was a pure artist and not a rich one. However, he indeed gave me the example and inspiration how to behave modestly but make beautiful *wayang* sincerely. He would not sell anything but only high-quality puppets

The scene representing the above testimony shows Sagio in a white shirt working in his studio while being interviewed. Sagio's testimony is interspersed with a scene of a backpacked foreign tourist bargaining a *wayang kulit* in a souvenir shop. Another scene follows this souvenir shop scene. This scene demonstrates a humble old man on a bicycle bringing a *wayang kulit* character. The souvenir shop and the old man scenes heighten the attitude of Sagio for prioritising the quality over the profit.

Besides the testimony above, the refined and complex demonstration of the making of *wayang kulit* in Sagio's studio also conveys the representation of *sepi ing pamrih* and *ramé ing gawé*. In this scene, Sagio explains how to make *wayang kulit* technically, from the drawing to the finishing steps. The first step is creating a pattern. It can be done by copying from the pre-existing model or by drawing a new design on a piece of buffalo hide. Sagio thinks that this early phase must be executed in detail. Afterwards, the process is continued to the carving stage. In this phase, Sagio tells the viewers that the artistry of carving is significant. He states that the artisan's carving technique will show the difference between the products of an artisan who passionately makes *wayang* and those of an artisan who merely makes *wayang* as a job to earn money. As an experienced artisan, Sagio knows the difference.

Sagio further mentions that a *wayang* made by a passionate artisan reflects purity, perfection and distinctive qualities. On the contrary, a *wayang* produced by a passionateless artisan expresses weak and unattractive qualities. He contends that the most challenging part when making *wayang* is creating the face. In the Javanese

puppet making, creating the facial expression of a *wayang* is called *mbedhah wondo*. *Wondo* is the expressive quality of a *wayang* character.

After the carving, the plating and the colouring phases show, followed by the finishing step. In this scene, Sagio brings the carved *wayang* to his worker. The worker plates the *wayang* with gold powder. Sagio observes his worker doing the plating and scrutinises it. Then, the worker brings the plated *wayang* to another worker who does the colouring. The worker with the colouring task applies different colours to the carved *wayang* using a small brush. It is also an intricate process demanding a great patience and accuracy of the artisan. The assorted colours applied substantiate the expressive qualities of the *wayang* intended. As with the plating process, Sagio has to examine the colouring process and gives directions to his worker who does the colouring. The last phase is the finishing. When the coloured *wayang* is dry, a different worker begins to prepare a buffalo horn. The horn clamps the *wayang*, so that puppeteer (*dhalang*) can manipulate the *wayang* in the performance.

As Sagio narrates the whole process, the scene captures his involvement and actions in every phase. In the drawing period, Sagio is recorded to take a piece of buffalo hide. He places the leather on the floor and then applies a pre-existing pattern of *wayang* on to the hide to be copied using white chalk. In the carving phase, Sagio takes a hammer and a needle-like cutting chisel to carve the pattern on the leather. In the plating, colouring and finishing steps, Sagio is captured to direct his workers, observe and evaluate their tasks. In this respect, I regard the whole representation of the intricacy and complexity in creating a *wayang kulit* performed by Sagio and his workers express the quality of devotion, sincerity as well as the professionalism of Sagio in his work. It strongly represents *sepi ing pamrih* and *ramé ing gawé* in the film.

Javaneseness depicted in *Wayang Kulit* accords with the articulation of these two values. Similar articulation can also be found throughout the film. The

documentary argues that creating Javanese *wayang kulit* is an artistically refined and sophisticated work. Such a job entails not only artistry but also reflects the personal views and beliefs of the artisan. In this regard, the film also claims that the quality of an artwork comes before profit. I view that *sepi ing pamrih* and *ramé ing gawé* are the philosophical values that the documentary tries to communicate. This is achieved using the portrayal of Sagio and his life as a renowned *wayang kulit* artisan in Yogyakarta.

#### 6.1.2. Manifestation of the Javanese Folk-Belief *Ngalab Berkah* (the King's Blessing)

In *Ksatria Kerajaan*, the represented value is about the nature of the relationship between the Javanese subjects and their king. This relationship of subjects and king expresses loyalty, perseverance, and acceptance of a modest life. The film conveys these all induced by the myth of *ngalab berkah*. This folk-belief is based on a view that by serving the palace and the king one may feel peaceful and blessed. The folk-belief works with the Javanese helping the palace known as *abdi dalem* (king's servant), including the palace guard as represented by Pardi. These Javanese signify their connection with a Javanese king from a personal angle. As a result, they have a high expectation from the king (see also Moertono, 1974, 2009; Endraswara, 2013a). Those who believe in this myth understand that embracing *ngalab berkah* generates loyalty, perseverance, and acceptance of a simple life. The film illustrates that Pardi is the symbol, the manifestation of this folk-belief. As noted in chapter three, Pardi's symbolism of loyalty, perseverance, and acceptance to a modest life suggests his self-attachment and self-identity to the palace and the king.

The loyalty of Pardi can be witnessed in his commitment to participate in the cultural events organised by the palace. As an illustration, the film shows a scene how he joins in the parade drills as a member of the palace guards. Here, the documentary

depicts how Pardi with a long spear in his hand obediently follows the instructions given to move and halt in different formations. Another scene also conveys his sense of loyalty as he enthusiastically participates in the old cultural festivity of *Garebeg Sekaten*. This festivity was also orchestrated by the court. Here, the scene depicts how Pardi, with the help of his wife, prepares his uniform, *keris* (traditional Javanese dagger) and paraphernalia to make him ready for the *Garebeg Sekaten*. As the scene shows Pardi's preparation for the *Garebeg Sekaten*, he gives a testimony via his voice-over.

At four thirty in the morning, I usually go to the grand square, as I do not want to be late. Therefore, I leave home early. I go on foot to my post in the early morning. When meeting the passers-by, they sometimes say, "Wow, the royal guard goes to work so early". [Pardi laughs] There is no one in the square usually at that time. It is just me. Then, we start our *Garebeg* festivity later on.

The testimony above is also followed by a scene of Pardi who enthusiastically walks out of his house before the dawn in his red and white uniform. He is heading for the *Sekaten* at the northern esplanade of the palace. Pardi looks happy as the scene shows his smile as he walks. Some passers-by are also captured in the scene as Pardi is going to the site where the festivity is going to be held. I view that these scenes articulate his obedience to his task.

As for the perseverance and simplicity of Pardi's life, a scene demonstrates how he earns money to support his family by selling the traditional Javanese drink, *dawet*. The images of this scene show Pardi preparing his *dawet* cart, pushing it by the street and serving the buyers. As the scene demonstrates these images, Pardi and his wife, Menik, provide their testimonies in voice-over. Pardi mentions that he had already been a street vendor selling *dawet* before he became a palace guard. It was a difficult time for him to get profit around IDR 15,000 or even only IDR 13,000 per day. After working in the palace, his profit has gradually increased. Menik confirms this. She testifies that before serving the palace, she thought that life was bleak for them. It was difficult to earn money, and they felt that they were always pressed for money.

However, the adversity changes since her husband began to serve the court and they are granted a little space within one of the royal family member's residential compound for their family to live.

In a scene that follows, the film shows Pardi and Menik sitting on an old couch outside their house, giving their testimonies. Both Pardi and Menik said that though they live in a small building and earn money from being a street vendor, they live happily. They feel peaceful and blessed. Besides their continuous struggle to fulfil their daily needs, Pardi and Menik perceive that their capability to be grateful increases. They think that such a change of attitude is because they believe in *ngalab berkah*. Pardi and Menik consider that by serving the king and the palace and expecting a simple and peaceful life expressed through *ngalab berkah*, they can improve their gratitude and gradually change and undergo their life happily.

I consider that all of these depictions suggest the kind of Javanese-ness imagined in the film. The Javanese-ness depicted in the documentary has its mythological view on the connection and reliance between the traditional Javanese subjects and their king through *ngalab berkah*. This sense of attachment and identity demonstrates a Javanese who is loyal, hardworking, and humble. This is the kind of Javanese-ness represented in *Ksatria Kerajaan*. Concerning my thesis, this representation enriches the diverse understandings of Javanese-ness.

### 6.1.3. *Asta Brata*-based Javanese-ness

Unlike the two previous documentaries, *Bathik* is more direct to convey the significance of the traditional Javanese values. The film addresses *Asta Brata*'s leadership qualities or the eight public official's virtues. *Asta Brata* demonstrates the ideal nature of a Javanese leader that should reflect divine attributes. These qualities are of *Chandra*: forgiving, of *Brama*: decisive, stout and reasonable, of *Indra*: confident



and benevolent, of *Kuwera*: considerate, of *Bayu*: attentive, of *Baruna*: careful and insightful, of *Surya*: inspirational and exemplary, and of *Yama*: just (Moertono, 2009; Endraswara, 2013a). With this philosophical message behind the film's subject matter, I see that *Bathik* establishes its argument on the idea that the traditional Javanese fabric of *batik*, including *Semen Rama*, is worth learning and preserving for its philosophical contents.

In this respect, I consider that the imagination of Javaneseness of *Bathik* takes *Asta Brata* as its springboard. It suggests that the Javaneseness projected here is an ideal Javanese man endowed with the qualities above. The film does not explicitly refer to a definite personage as an example of this representation of Javaneseness. The documentary only reveals the creator of *Semen Rama* that is imbued with *Asta Brata*. This goes to the departed king of the Surakarta court, Paku Buwono IV. However, the film does not explicitly suggest Paku Buwono IV as the past figure who had completely attained these *Asta Brata* qualities. *Bathik* only exposes the ideal condition wherein an ideal Javanese leader should bear *Asta Brata* as suggested by Paku Buwono IV, through his creation of batik *Semen Rama*.

The film applies three methods to project *Asta Brata*-based Javaneseness. The first method is the *wayang kulit* performance with its voice-over narration. The second method is through the testimonies of the social actors. The third method is via illustrations of *Semen Rama* patterns along with the use of the voice-over narration. In the first method, through the *wayang kulit* performance, the voice-over narration explains the origin of *Asta Brata* as follows:

The teaching of *Asta Brata* in the old Javanese manuscript is inspired by the story of *Kakawin Ramayana*. The story began when Prabu (King) Ramawijaya was giving some advice to Raden (Sir) Gunawan Wibisana, the youngest brother of the defeated giant Prabu Dasamuka (King of Alengka) before Gunawan Wibisana was crowned to succeed Dasamuka. Then, such an advice is known as *Asta Brata*.

As the voice-over narration reads the quote above, the scene shows the *wayang kulit*

performance with a *gunungan* (a mountain-like puppet), and two characters representing King Rama giving some advice to Gunawan Wibisana. The camera from behind the translucent white screen (*kelir*) of the performance captures this illustration so that by some light the viewers can only see the characters' shadow on the screen. This scene recounts the mythical origin of *Asta Brata* from the Hindu's perspectives in the Javanese *wayang* world as I explained in chapter four.

In the second method of expressing *Asta Brata*-based Javanese-ness, the film makes use of the testimonies of the social actors. As a case in point, Sugiyatno, the batik expert, gives his testimony on *Asta Brata* in an interview. He states that *Asta Brata* speaks of the Javanese principles of leadership by using metaphors. The metaphors relate to natural phenomena. Sugiyatno explains that *Hambeg ing Chandra* represents the characteristics of the Moon. *Hambeg ing Surya* is the qualities of the Sun. *Hambeg ing Dahana* is the nature of Thunder or Fire. *Hambeg ing Maruto* denotes the characteristics of Wind. *Hambeg ing Siti* refers to the nature of the Earth, and so forth. Sugiyatno understands this metaphorical teaching as the philosophy of how a ruler behaves, similar to the qualities shown by Mother Nature.

Sugiyatno further gives an example of the characteristics of the Sun. He points out that the Sun rises in the east and sets in the west. A daily circular movement of the Earth prompts such phenomena to happen regardless of the cloudy or rainy weather. Sugiyatno interprets this stability of the Sun as the personification of the Sun that always keeps its promise, to rise and set regularly. The Sun never breaks its promise even once to shine on the Earth. Sugiyatno concludes that the message behind this is that humans should keep their promises and never breaks them. As he explains *Asta Brata*, the interview scene is interspersed with some images of batik *Semen Rama* and some collections of *keris* (the traditional Javanese dagger). I think these images amplify the significance of *Asta Brata* explained by Sugiyatno. *Semen Rama* and the *keris* heighten

the association of *Asta Brata* with a ruler as batik and *keris* are always part of royal fashion (Ngatinah, 2008, p. 194).

The third method for demonstrating *Asta Brata*-based Javaneseness is through the illustrations of the *Semen Rama* patterns accompanied by the voice-over narration.

The contents of *Asta Brata* teaching expressed in the motif of *Semen Rama* comprise several modes. *Indra Brata [Indra]* is a teaching to do good deeds for advancing prosperity and conserving the environment. It is symbolised with images or patterns of plants, trees or leaves. Images of mountains and clouds are named *Yama Brata [Yama]*. It is a teaching about justice to others as well as upholding human dignity. As *Surya Brata [Surya]* is a teaching of human perseverance means that a human being is like the sun that always shines upon the earth no matter what happens. It is symbolised by the wings of eagles. The images of animals in *Semen Rama* motifs bear the meaning of human enlightenment. These animal images are called *Sasi Brata [Chandra]*. Bird-like images symbolise *Bayu Brata [Bayu]*, the teaching for one to achieve self-respect and social esteem without relying on physical powers. *Dana brata or Kwera Brata [Kuwera]* means that a leader should give appreciation and reward to his/her subjects, just like a God-given gift. It is symbolised by sedan chairs. *Banu Brata or Pasa Brata [Baruna]* is expressed by the dragon, boat, or any things related to the water world. It means that a human being should have endless mercy, just like the infinite water of an ocean. The images of flame represent the teaching of *Aghni Brata [Brama]*. It bears the meaning of power and superiority to defeat evil and to protect the weak.

While the narrator is explaining these patterns of *Semen Rama*, images of the decorative designs of the batik appear accordingly in close-up and extreme close-up shots. I consider that these images are established to demonstrate the factual motifs of *Semen Rama* and to make the viewers follow and understand the narration.

I regard that the *Asta Brata*-based Javaneseness in *Bathik* is more abstract than those in *Wayang Kulit* and *Ksatria Kerajaan*. *Wayang Kulit* and *Ksatria Kerajaan* employ living persons as their manifested representations of Javaneseness. Meanwhile, Javaneseness in *Bathik* is established from the inanimate object, *Semen Rama*. I guess this difference may prompt the viewers to grasp the imagination of Javaneseness in *Wayang Kulit* and *Ksatria Kerajaan* more effectively than that in *Bathik*. However, this difference does not deny the projection of the ideal Javanesene articulated in *Bathik*.

From the three films discussed in this chapter, I would like to reiterate that the first model of Javanese-ness is an ideal representation of the Javanese using past traditional values. In this respect, I view that the filmmakers have addressed and signified these traditional values as the frame of reference for what it means to be a Javanese. The filmmakers perceive the values as something representative of Javanese-ness. Therefore, they can imbue them in their films' subject matters, namely leather puppet, palace guard and batik.

At this point, it is also useful to refer to Anderson's imagined community, as Javanese-ness has become an imaginary construct in the documentaries. Its imaginariness resides in the fact that members of Javanese societies never exactly know, meet and recognise each other, and therefore they need to create their mental picture of the so-called Javanese ethnic group to identify themselves (Anderson, 2006, p. 7). This existent mental projecting of Javanese-ness in the documentaries is formed by the combination of the visual qualities (the puppet, the social actors, the courts, the batik, the artisan, the palace guards, etc.) and the non-visual qualities (the film theme and values) as explained above. All of them work simultaneously to confirm the Javanese-ness as an imagined ethnic entity. Again, this is, of course, ideational but perceivable in the films.

## **6.2. Essentialist Regime of Representation in *Wayang Kulit*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Bathik***

In this second section, the analysis is concerned with the credibility of the cultural contents of *Wayang Kulit*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Bathik*. Examining the reliability of the cultural contents of the films cannot be isolated from identifying the nature of the cultural materials described. It relates to how the cultural representations ideologically articulate the regime of truths from what is represented. In this regard, I apply Siapera's typology of the regime of cultural representation in describing the nature of the film's

subject matter. The specific regime of representation employed in the documentaries enables such a traditional value-based Javanese-ness to be projected from the films. This is important to explain the cultural contents of the documentaries projecting images of Javanese-ness. In other words, the films' regime of representation also helps subjective and heterogeneous understandings of Javanese-ness manifested in the documentaries.

Concerning the regime of representation of the cultural contents from the three films, I contend that the films' cultural representations demonstrate a shared regime of representation, the essentialist regime. The essentialist regime is an ideologically cultural representation that celebrates a specific interpretation or understanding of history and authentic community identity based on the valid and established representations of that community. This includes value and belief systems of that community (Siapera, 2010, p. 150).

In *Wayang Kulit*, the film addresses the established Javanese traditional work ethic of sincerity or bearing no ulterior motive (*sepi ing pamrih*) and professionalism (*ramé ing gawé*). The documentary depicts Sagio who explains his devotion to *wayang kulit* because of love and commitment to work ethics, the simplicity of life as well as professionalism and totality of work. *Wayang Kulit* celebrates the representations of these Javanese work ethics converged into creating *wayang kulit*. The image of Sagio as the *wayang kulit* artisan manifests these values. He is the manifestation of *sepi in pamrih, ramé ing gawé*.

From the cultural representation vantage point, this demonstration of *sepi ing pamrih* and *ramé ing gawé* reflects the essentialist regime. The celebration of these established values in the film confirms that both *Sagio* and *wayang kulit* is part of the Javanese world. It becomes more obvious as the narrator comments: "*Wayang kulit* still lives in the heart of the Javanese. Live performances continue. But as testimony

to the popularity and importance of *wayang* in Java, local television stations, now carry performances for appreciative Javanese audiences”.

Along with this voice-over narration, the re-enacted scene of the schoolchildren playing the coconut leaf-made *wayang kulit* near the rice fields also reappears. The visual representation of this scene and the voice-over narration articulate the dimension of continuity and authenticity of *wayang kulit* and the values shown as part of the Javanese identity. The art and the values remain unchanged.

In *Ksatria Kerajaan*, the regime of representation that works is also an essentialist one. The documentary explores and celebrates the unique socio-cultural phenomenon based on an individual-cult, the myth of king's blessing (*ngalab berkah*) at the Sultanate court of Yogyakarta. The exploration and celebration of the myth encompass both communal and personal dimensions in the documentary. What I mean by “communal” here suggests that the attitude is held by those serving and working in the court. As to being “personal”, it refers to the documentary narrative seen from Pardi's life. The film shows Pardi's attitude toward serving the court, which is to gain simple, but peaceful and happy life, because of the myth.

As explained in chapter four, the centrality of the king (the Sultan) is what matters to those serving the palace and the king as the king's servants (*abdi dalem*). They believe that by serving the court and the king their life becomes significant and meaningful. In this respect, I view that their justification reflects a convergence of their self and communal orientations that results in serving the court. This happens because the devotion to their king and the court is what they need to express their cultural attachment to the court and to undergo their life. Personal life, including family life, becomes part of this process as represented in Pardi's family. His family expresses the sincere gratitude to be part of serving the court as explained in section one.

All of these representations overwhelmingly communicate subservient and pride qualities of a Javanese (Pardi) who clings to the traditional myth (*ngalab berkah*). I guess that his attitude can be difficult to understand from a modern perspective. Pardi's subservience and pride are manifested in the scene of *Garebeg Sekaten* festivity. Besides the *Garebeg* scene, Pardi's subservience and pride are also expressed in a coloured photograph of the palace guards where he is also captured. This photograph of Pardi and his colleagues in the palace guard uniform follows the *Garebeg* scene. In conjunction with this articulation of subservience and pride, the film implies its fascination to the palace guards. It is expressed in the intertitles that read: "*Puluhan orang menunggu kesempatan untuk mengabdikan di Kerajaan. Sementara 550 orang Abdi Dalem Prajurit Kraton kini mengabdikan tanpa mengenal pension, menjadi Ksatria Kerajaan yang tak lagi maju ke medan perang, namun menjaga kebudayaan Indonesia*" [Tens of applicants are on the waiting list to serve the court while five hundred and fifty palace guards are still active on duty without having and thinking of a pension scheme. They become no longer the paladins going for wars, but the guardians of the Indonesian cultures].

The essentialist regime also applies in *Bathik*. Compared to *Wayang Kulit* and *Ksatria Kerajaan*, *Bathik* externalises a stronger quality of essentialism. The images of batik, the Sunanate court, some rituals and festivities, as well as the social actors' testimonies emphasise the importance of returning to Javanese identity and *Asta Brata* (the eight moral virtues of a Javanese ruler). This motive is achieved through comprehending the meaning of batik *Semen Rama*. I think the shared views of the social actors about the significance of *Asta Brata* are not coincidental considering their backgrounds: a royal family member (Prince Puger), a Javanese expert who is also a Sunanate courtier (Winarso Kalinggo), and a batik expert (Sugiyatno).

From such backgrounds, it is not surprising that they may express similar concern

on the issue of batik, Javanese identity and *Asta Brata*. Sugiyatno, for instance, thinks that the Javanese, especially the youths, need or even ought to know the meanings of batik, such as *Semen Rama*. Notably, they should understand the meaning of a kind of batik called *jarit*, which contains the descriptions of human life phases. He assumes that it is one of the reasons the Javanese now are experiencing the decline of the cultural appreciation towards old traditions. Sugiyatno considers that the decline is due to the youths' disinterest and lack of knowledge about the philosophical meanings represented in batik. The youths' may wear *batik*, but they do not know what they wear it for, except for its functionality as a formal clothing. They are utterly uninterested in the meanings behind the fabric they wear.

In addition to the notion of returning to the tradition, the narrator amplifies such an attitude. It is evident as shown at the batik workshop. When introducing the scene, the narrator says (in translation) as follows:

The glorious name and dignity of a nation lie in its culture. Will such a wise quote of Paku Buwono X (1893-1939) be meaningless? Preserving culture does not solely mean keeping its tangible products intact, but it also suggests that the comprehension of the meanings behind them proves to be equally significant.

This commentary provides an essentialist embellishment that the film demonstrates. Using the quote of the departed Sunanate king, Paku Buwono X, the film intends to validate its important voice. As a result, the film's subject matter appears to be urgent, and therefore it needs attention. This is to say that the film supports the sentiment in the above quote without being critical of it.

### **6.3. Socio-Political and Cultural Contexts of the Re-emerging Javanese**

In this third section, I contextualise the traditional value-based Javanese to the socio-political and cultural conditions of the early reform era in Indonesia. As mentioned at the outset, the political uncertainty and the dishonest practices at that time demonstrated nothing but lack of leadership and moral ethics. What the films



offer is a cultural review as a response to what happened at that time. I argue that the documentaries have already expressed the filmmakers' motives to convey the emergence for profound values of leadership and moral ethics through the films' themes, the symbols and the ways the films address the traditional values.

In this socio-political and cultural contextualization, an examination of the presence of the Javanese courts – the Sultanate of Yogyakarta and the Sunanate of Surakarta – in the films is essential. This examination here is concerned with the socio-cultural significance the Javanese courts. I limit the discussion of the socio-cultural importance of the court to the public esteem for the courts and the role of the courts. The reason why I limit the examination to these two aspects is that the courts no longer hold any real political authority over their realms. What remains is the public esteem for the courts and the role of the courts in their societies. The general appreciation that I suggest here is the public view on the significance of the courts. As for the role, it is connected to the courts' actual function as the centre of Javanese culture.

My aim by interrelating this public esteem and the courts' role in the films is to provide better knowledge of the centrality of the courts in the films' setting. By linking them, we can figure out that their incorporation in the films is understood to heighten the representation of the traditional value-based Javanese. With this, we can draw a reasoning behind the re-emergence of traditional value-oriented Javanese, the socio-political conditions of the early reform era, and the presence of the courts in the films.

### 6.3.1. The Films' Javanese: A Critique of the Socio-Political and Cultural Conditions

This part supplies my interpretation that the articulation of the traditional value-based Javanese in the films expresses a response to the socio-political and cultural

conditions of the time. This filmic presentation indeed opposes the political uncertainty and practices of corruption of the time. With what they argue, the documentaries have implied their concern for the socio-political situation. These films are forms of the civic documentary practice in the post-New Order era indicating the filmmakers' concern over the socio-political condition of the time. Culturally speaking, the emergence for profound values of leadership and moral ethics went hand-in-hand with the revival of traditions (*adat*), customary laws (*istiadat*), as well as ethnic and religious movements in post-Suharto Indonesia (Davidson and Henley, 2007; Moniaga, 2007; Reuter, 2009).

The traditional Javanese values expressed in the three documentaries can be identified by their direct and indirect representations in the documentary narratives. *Wayang Kulit* addresses the Javanese work ethics of sincerity and professionalism (*sepi ing pamrih, rame ing gawe*) through promoting *wayang kulit* as the film's subject matter. *Ksatria Kerajaan* communicates the myth of the king's blessing (*ngalab berkah*) through the portrayal of the palace guard, Pardi. *Bathik* highlights the eight leadership virtues (*Asta Brata*) through batik *Semen Rama*. The matter is not merely about revealing the traditional values. It also deals with why the filmmakers bring the traditional values to light.

I consider the documentaries themselves have already implied a response and criticism of the filmmakers towards the uncertain socio-political and cultural conditions of the time as outlined at the outset of this chapter. The social and political upheaval in Indonesia at the end of the twentieth century prolonged to the first decade of the reform era engendered ethnic group movements in Indonesia to reorientate themselves to traditional values. The movements to the traditional values were also rendered by the fast transformation that happened following the reform (Davidson and Henley, 2007; Moniaga, 2007; Reuter, 2009).

By articulating the traditional value-based Javanese-ness, the films do not indicate that the imagination becomes a dominant mental view as that established by the New Order with the regime's aristocratic Javanese-ness. Three reasons support my argument. First, the traditional value-based Javanese-ness of the three films only implies another possible interpretive outlook of what it means to be a Javanese. Second, a wide range of other interpretations of Javanese-ness is also present in the first decade of the reform era as indicated in chapter six and seven. Models of Javanese-ness in chapters six and seven do not show their links to Javanese courts as the Javanese cultural centres. They suggest Javanese-ness out of their traditional values despite any possible commonality with those of the court-based one discussed in this chapter. Third, the state's interference as the New Order did by establishing the particular ideal of Javanised-Indonesian society to be complied with has been ceased since the 1998's reform. Instead, decentralisation and the growing importance of ethnic and local politics have taken over the Javanistic, centralistic, licensing, and dogmatic cultural paradigm of the New Order (Jones, 2013, pp. 184–185).

The first model of Javanese-ness here should not necessarily be construed as a dominant mental ideology. The court-related traditional values do not make the representation of Javanese-ness here is as top-down as that of the New Order. The presence of Javanese courts in the films' setting may direct viewers to think that they are authoritative, in the sense of validating the films' themes. *Wayang Kulit* and *Ksatria Kerajaan* conspicuously show the relationship between their social actors and the Sultanate court of Yogyakarta. *Bathik* deliberately takes its setting and recounts the involvement of the Sunanate court of Solo in its subject matter, *Semen Rama*.

I do not see that these courts validate the films' subject matters. The presence of the courts suggests that *sepi ing pamrih* (sincerity), *ramé ing gawé* (commitment to the profession), *ngalab berkah* (king's blessing myth-induced humility, sacrifice and

simplicity), and *Asta Brata* (the eight virtues of Javanese leadership) have the degree of connection with the courts. In other words, the presence of the courts in the documentaries is not to be understood as making the films' arguments the most accurate view of Javaneseness. I perceive that the degree of connection with the courts demonstrates how some people, including the filmmakers, still acknowledge the importance of the courts as a Javanese cultural centre *per se* to gain information. However, the courts' presence is not necessarily authoritative, in the sense of providing the "only right version" of Javaneseness.

In the case of the Sultanate and the Sunanate courts represented in the films, their existence is generally considered the essential centres of Javanese cultures (Koentjaraningrat, 1989; Pemberton, 1994). In these two courts, Javanese traditional art forms and literature are particularly well practised and developed. It is through these courts as well that ordinary people, and even tourists nowadays can learn such traditional art forms and literature. Thus, this situation invokes people's appreciation of the courts' existence. Of the populace's recognition of the Javanese courts, the Sultanate court of Yogyakarta is legendary.

### 6.3.2. *Wayang Kulit*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and the Sultanate Court of Yogyakarta

My aim in this part is to assert that both *Wayang Kulit* and *Ksatria Kerajaan* indeed echo the public esteem of Yogyakarta for the Sultanate court of Yogyakarta. The Javaneseness that both documentaries articulate is framed within this public esteem. To frame the film in this context, I would like to explain the court's history and the deep trust and appreciation of the citizens of Yogyakarta for the Sultanate court. This information helps us to understand the image of Javaneseness represented by the film.

Many ethnic-based kingdoms of the archipelago simply vanished or integrated themselves to the newly born Republic of Indonesia following its independence on 17

August 1945. The Javanese courts of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta and the Sunanate of Surakarta also did the integration. Yogyakarta is the capital of the Special Region of Yogyakarta, one of the thirty-four provinces in Indonesia. Surakarta or Solo is an old city in the Province of Central Java, around seventy kilometres northeast of Yogyakarta. They are both the successors of the 16<sup>th</sup> century of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom of Java. The Sultanate and the Sunanate courts were among the early supporters of the republic.

By law, all Javanese courts have a function as a cultural heritage complex, a museum and a centre for the preservation of Javanese traditional culture in Indonesia. This function is regulated by the Act of Cultural Heritage (DPR and Presiden, 2010). However, the discussion of the public esteem and the role here goes beyond what the law assigns on paper. To understand the general esteem for, and the role of the Javanese courts, the Sultanate and the Sunanate, it is necessary to touch upon their history and socio-political contribution to Indonesia in the revolutionary times. The point is to show the positive image or the public esteem for the courts that result from their historical contributions. I view that their positive image also reflects their significance in the films. With this, my discussion brings us to focus on the realities the documentaries show, illuminating the public esteem for and the role of the courts from the revolutionary to the reform era of Indonesia.

The Sultanate court of Yogyakarta through its king, Hamengku Buwono IX (1940-1988), historically played a key role in safeguarding the independence of Indonesia on 17 August 1945. Hamengku Buwono IX's moral and material supports to Indonesia encountering the war of the independence from 1945 to 1949 are legendary. His contributions as one of the leading statesmen continued to the post-independence era (Roem *et al.*, 2011, p. 42). With such a combination of historical role, achievements and personal charisma of Hamengku Buwono IX, the Sultanate Court of Yogyakarta has

gained public trust, support, and sympathy that even go beyond the province.

On the death of Hamengku Buwono IX, his elder son, Herjuno Darpito or Prince Mangkubumi, succeeded him on 7 March 1989 as Sultan Hamengku Buwono X. He has become the Governor of Yogyakarta from 1998 to the present time. Hamengku Buwono X may not be considered as heroic as his father was in the revolutionary sense because of the time gap between them. Nevertheless, he is renowned for his involvement in the people's power movement in the 1998's reform. Hamengku Buwono X was one of the leading reformists who shared the empathy with the grassroots on the authoritarian approach and injustice of the New Order regime. He clearly stated his opposition to President Suharto and the president's cronies urging them all to step down. It occurred in the People's Great Assembly (*Pisowanan Agung*) at the northern esplanade of the Sultanate court where an estimate of more than a million people from the whole corners of the province and the surrounding regions of Yogyakarta gathered in the city (HRD, 1998; Margantoro, 1999; Baskoro, 2009).

In the dawn of the reform era, the opposition of Hamengku Buwono X to the New Order regime was demonstrated in the Great Assembly (*Pisowanan Agung*) on 20 May 1998, a day before the fall of the New Order regime. The Great Assembly is the example of a public petition to the Sultanate over the injustice, corruption, collusion, nepotism and authoritarianism committed by the New Order regime. Such a petition was carried out especially when political power structures were unable to accommodate public aspirations (Margantoro, 1999, pp. 38–48). A public petition to the Sultanate itself is not something novel because it has its root in the court rite known as *laku pepe*<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> *Laku pepe* is a rite of the Sultanate's subjects to make a petition to their king over issues related to their lives. In the ritual of *laku pepe*, people, in a white fabric as a symbol of purity, sat cross-legged exposing themselves under the sun at the northern palatial esplanade. They silently and motionlessly sat in between two-fenced old trees at the centre of the esplanade. They faced southward to the Sultanate palace waiting for the willingness of the sultan to respond their petition directly or through a messenger. This became the medium for the sultan and his subjects to listen to each other and communicate problems and adversities they encountered, with the hope to find solutions. Thus, this

These all represent that the public esteem for the Sultanate court of Yogyakarta is high.

As for the Sultanate's role, the people of Yogyakarta and the surrounding regions describe the court as a Javanese cultural centre where they can refer to and learn well-preserved Javanese traditional art forms and philosophies. It sounds parallel with the 2010's Act of Cultural Heritage mentioned earlier. My point is that such public understanding has long preceded the legalisation of the court's role in the post-independence era. The role of the Sultanate court as a cultural centre in the modern sense, namely a place to learn cultural forms, has been started at least since the dawn of the twentieth century where commoners were allowed to learn some court dances and music in *Kridha Beksa Wirama*. It was the first Javanese dance association. It was established at the Sultanate court in 1918 for ordinary people to learn the court dances, dance drama (*wayang wong*) and court music (Sudarsono, 1984, p. 101).

Such a role by the Sultanate was further performed when the transformation of the court from a feudal power centre to a centre for education and tourism after Indonesian independence occurred (Wardani, 2012, p. 57). The past involvements of the Sultanate court of Yogyakarta in the history of Indonesia and the role it plays make it gain a positive image from the public. This explains why the Sultanate court of Yogyakarta is seen positively from the perspectives of the social actors in *Wayang Kulit* and *Ksatria Kerajaan*.

In *Wayang Kulit*, the positive image of the Sultanate is reflected from the attitude shown by Sagio, the artisan, towards the court. Sagio feels fortunate and honoured to be entrusted with maintaining the court's old collections of *wayang kulit* (leather puppet). This goes in line with his intention to learn the court puppets' motifs and styles in there. He perceives the court still preserves highly artistic and historic puppet

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position played by the Sultanate is not something new, but it becomes more observable in the post-New Order regime (Woodward, 2011, pp. 234–235).

collections.

Sagio's view above suggests two things: first, Sagio's trust and respect to the court and second, the fact that the Sultanate of Yogyakarta, in his perspective, still runs its responsibility to preserve and maintain its art collections. It is evident in the scene illustrating Sagio's duty in the court. In close-up and extreme close-up shots combined with low angle camera, the scene portrays Sagio and his other fellow king's servant maintaining the court's puppet collections. They do it by repairing the damaged, by making the copies of the existent ones, and by airing them so that they will not be stained by humidity and fungus. Such compositional features of framing and angling make Sagio, and his actions of maintaining the court collections convey his intention. It becomes more evident as Sagio, in his voice-over narration, reveals that his motive to serve the court is to develop his artistry and to care for the court's old traditions. In this context, Sagio's attitude confirms his trust to the Sultanate court where he cultivates his *wayang kulit* artisanship. Sagio's expertise in the shadow puppet brings him to value non-materialistic gain over financial profits.

In *Ksatria Kerajaan*, the Sultanate's positive image is expressed by the willingness of Pardi, the palace guard, to serve the court with a meagre stipend. Pardi is willing to do this because there is a quality of the court that attracts him to help in there, and that meets his motivation. This quality is pertinent to the myth of king's blessing (*ngalab berkah*) as explained in the previous chapter. This myth operating in Pardi is dependent on how far Pardi trusts in it. Since Pardi shows his acceptance of the myth, then the myth still applies to him. Pardi's acceptance of the myth is prompted by his motivation to have a peaceful life and search for identity.

Besides, the figure of the king himself is another causal factor. The documentary shows this key figure of the court through shots representing an old profile painting of the Sultans in close-up shot and tilting camera movement. These shots expose the



portraits of the past and the present kings. The shots are part of the scene that depicts Prince Yudhaningrat explaining the general motivation of the *abdi dalem* to serve the court. Their motivation is due to their love and respect to the court. Also, it is motivated by their dream of a peaceful life. According to Yudhaningrat, such a motivation explains their loyalty regardless of the meagre stipend they receive from the court. The meagre stipend is a form of appreciation but not a salary as that in a formal working environment. This all suggests that by becoming a palace guard, Pardi has put his trust in the court so that he can attain self-identity and peace in his life.

### 6.3.3. *Bathik* and the Sunanate Court of Surakarta

My aim in this part is to show that *Bathik* illuminates the only remaining socio-cultural role of the Sunanate court. To frame *Bathik* in such a context, this sub-section needs to describe the function of the court and the degree of public esteem for the court briefly. The Sunanate of Surakarta, by law, serves a similar role as that of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta. It is a cultural heritage complex, a museum and a centre for the preservation of Javanese traditional culture in Indonesia. Nevertheless, the degree of popularity and public esteem for the Sunanate court is relatively different from that of the Sultanate court. Although the Sunanate also historically claimed to support Indonesian independence (Samroni, 2010: 295), the historical contributions of the Sunanate court to Indonesian societies were less echoed and highlighted. It does not mean that they do not have contributions at all.

Unfortunately, the court is often exposed by its negativities. The anti-monarchist and communist movements attacked the court during the revolutionary times from 1942 to 1950 destabilising the region of Surakarta (Larson, 1987; Aman, 2008; Huda, 2013). After the Indonesian independence, a great fire burnt down seventy per cent of the court buildings in 1985 (Nusantara, 2010, unpaginated). After the 1998's reform, the

negativities still befell the court. Some aristocrats were under the investigation of the police regarding royal artefacts robbery. The missing artefacts were statues and some court heirlooms such as lances and *keris* from Radya Pustaka Museum (Son, 2008, unpaginated). The king's sex scandal also humiliated the court. The king, Paku Buwono XIII, who was still Prince Hangabehi (the appointed crown prince) at that time, had tricked and impregnated a high school girl in Solo (Sulistyawati, 2012, unpaginated). The negativity got worse as the royal family conflicts between Prince Hangabehi and his younger brother, Prince Tedjowulan, over the crown took place (Suprpto and Sodiq, 2013, unpaginated). Thus, the public esteem for the court grew weary. TEMPO, a weekly Indonesian national magazine, even already described the condition of the court in 1978 as an inevitable decline, in terms of its image and structural conditions (Majalah TEMPO, 2010, unpaginated). However, the Javanese still regard the Sunanate as one of the Javanese cultural centres to preserve its traditions.

In such a context, I perceive *Bathik* as a documentary echoing the image of the court's socio-cultural role to preserve its traditions. It is indicated by the direct portrayal of its material culture, batik *Semen Rama*. By "direct" in this respect, I mean that *Semen Rama* is illustrated without being accompanied by the centrality of living social actor that wears *Semen Rama* to be shown on screen, and that gives his or her perspective about it. A female social actor performing a rural Javanese woman in her washing action does wear batik but not *Semen Rama* near the beginning of the film. The film also conveys her understanding of *Asta Brata* in *Semen Rama* only from a *wayang kulit* performance on the radio as she confesses to other female batik artisans in the workshop.

*Bathik* highlights the centrality of Paku Buwono IV, the deceased king of the Sunanate court. Paku Buwono IV was the historical figure who created the *Semen Rama* motif. Then, he imbued the *Semen Rama* motif with his interpretation of the eight

statesman's virtues (*Asta Brata*) on it. Winarso Kalingga, one of the social actors, mentions it in his testimonial.

In the reign of Paku Buwono IV, from 1788 to 1820, the king indeed adopted the old Hinduistic teachings of leadership to prepare the crown prince as his successor to be a decent ruler. He believed in the teaching of *Asta Brata*, as he understood that a good king should not only be capable to protect and make his subjects and their families prosperous but also to have an awareness of the cultural and environmental sustainability.

The voice-over narration follows the scene of Kalingga giving his testimony. The narrator further gives commentary that the royal families wore batik as the casual garment at that time. Batik, especially *Semen Rama*, was construed as an effective medium to remind the royal families about the solemnity of *Asta Brata*. The royal families were expected to remember their responsibilities to the general populace, being kind, supportive and just. As the voice-over narrates this, the film shows *Semen Rama* motif in a close-up shot.

Also, Prince Puger, another actor, emphasises on the significant contribution of Paku Buwono IV to imbue *Asta Brata* in the *Semen Rama* motif so that the teachings could be well remembered and understood by his successors. It is revealed when Puger explains Paku Buwono V as the successor of Paku Buwono IV as follows:

Paku Buwono V (1820-1823) succeeded his father, Paku Buwono IV after the former died. Before the succession, Paku Buwono V had already been well trained and educated by his father with all leadership teachings and skills necessitated for the crown prince. One of them was *Asta Brata*.

However, the centrality of the deceased figure is mostly represented in oral testimonies combined with some visual images of the old paintings of the king. These all are meant to support this sense of historicity. Unfortunately, the film only presents a few visual images representing some people and guards of the Sunanate wearing traditional Javanese batik in a court festivity and parade. However, we do not witness the usage of *Semen Rama* in this scene. The rural Javanese woman, the social actor who appears in the pre-credit sequence, does not wear *Semen Rama* either while washing

cloth nor in the dramatised scene at the batik workshop. In the dramatisation of the female batik artisan as explained in chapter four, the scene only depicts their conversation about *Semen Rama* and *Asta Brata* as they are making the batik.

The situation is different from *Wayang Kulit* and *Ksatria Kerajaan* as they both represent the centrality of their social actors to the subject matters, Sagio to *wayang kulit* and Pardi to the palace guards on screen. From these films, the viewers may recognise the social actors' direct involvement and manifestations with the objects, *wayang kulit* and the palace guards. In *Wayang Kulit*, Sagio demonstrates and explains his professional attitude and artistry. He also shows his service to the Sultanate Palace of Yogyakarta as a king's servant who lives modestly. Parallel to Sagio, Pardi shows his manifestation and attitude for being a royal guard in *Ksatria Kerajaan*. He reveals his belief in the king's blessing and bears his testimony to the myth. *Ksatria Kerajaan* vividly presents the visual images of Pardi as a palace guard in his uniform.

The absence of a living social actor directly engaging with *Asta Brata* in *Bathik* should not be undermined by the fact that the film's subject matter is about the material culture, *Semen Rama*. This needs interlinking with the inability of the film to present an exemplary figure of the Sunanate court itself. *Bathik* introduces any social actors explaining the use of *Semen Rama* and not just telling the meanings and the historical background of *Semen Rama*. The documentary's lack of showing a living social actor visually wearing and demonstrating the making of *Semen Rama* technically and not a dramatisation.

This inadequacy makes the representation of Javanese-ness more abstract than that of *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Wayang Kulit*. The film seems to be more abstract to offer what kind of a Javanese man presented visually. It gets more complex as the documentary also advances some suppositions. The first supposition addresses the inability of the Javanese youths to understand the philosophical meaning of batik as

explained in Sugiyatno's testimony. Sugiyatno's assumption of the disinterest of the youths to be aware of the philosophical meanings of batik as explained in the second section of this chapter reveals his personal view. He criticises the situation where the Javanese youths are more alienated from their own culture. With this exposition, I think the abstract quality of the film's Javanese-ness requires greater efforts of the viewers to grasp.

The second supposition is reflected in the dramatisation scene near the end of the film. The dramatisation is captured in a long take, the sequence shot, which portray five female artisans drawing batik patterns in a batik workshop. This dramatisation articulates the film's message of the importance of *Asta Brata* for anyone running for an official public position. This message is visually manifested in the batik workshop scene where the dramatisation of a supposed "factual conversation" among batik artisans takes place. "A" stands for artisan; the conversation in translation goes as follows:

A1: Sriwiji, for whom are you making batik?

A2: Mr Gunawan

A1: Ah. Again?

A3: Eh, me too.

A1: How come?

A3: I was also asked to make seven pieces of *batik*, all *Semen Rama*. And they are on Mr Gunawan's.

A1: Ah...It does make sense as I heard that he is one of the candidates for the municipal or a gubernatorial election if I am not mistaken.

A3: No... I heard that he is even running for the presidency.

A1: Ah...it's true then. Parmi, do you know why Mr. Gunawan ordered *Semen Rama*?

A4: No...

A1: No, you don't. It is because *Semen Rama* illustrates the advice of King Rama Wijaya to Gunawan Wibisana.

A3: Hey...it suits him then.

A1: It does indeed. Yes... [*Other female artisans responded*]

A1: King Rama, Gunawan...Mr. Gunawan, right?

A3: Right, then.

A1: Parmi...do you know the moral message of *Semen Rama*? It is about *Asta Brata*.

A3: What is *Asta Brata*?

A1: It is the eight moral principles for those wishing to be leaders. So... if Mr Gunawan wants to be a mayor, a governor or even a president. He must understand *Asta Brata*.

A3: What does it say?

A1: Huh, it seemed I fell asleep when listening to the *wayang* performance on the radio last night.

A3: I guess it must be a proper guidance for leaders to use their authority so that they will not mistreat their people or misuse their power, and build their country stronger and more prosperous.

The dramatisation above indicates a need to alert those in power to use their authority wisely. This message relates to the fact that the documentary was produced by the end of 2008 as Indonesia was about to hold the presidential election in the middle of 2009. The political atmosphere was quite dynamic at that time with the tight mass campaign schedule from 11 June -14 July 2009 of several candidates (KPU, 2009, unpaginated). I regard the employment of the above scene in the film can be viewed as the film's social criticism of the need of the moral guidance for the political condition at that time. With this convergence, batik, especially *Semen Rama*, is a reasonable subject matter to be filmed. In this respect, I read *Bathik* as a filmic and cultural attempt to reconfirm the (only) role of the Sunanate court as one of the centres of traditional Javanese culture that can offer leadership ethic to follow via its material culture, *Semen Rama*.

#### **6.4. Conclusion**

The specific image and understanding of what it means to be a Javanese in the reform era of Indonesia is the one that still willingly respects and adheres to the traditional values, especially values that relate to the Javanese courts. In other words, the image of Javaneseness offered in the films is one that uses traditional values as its operating frame. *Wayang Kulit* provides an image of being a Javanese attributed with professionalism, sincerity, and humility. *Ksatria Kerajaan* projects Javaneseness endowed with qualities of humility, loyalty sacrifice, and simplicity of life. *Bathik* highlights the imagination of a Javanese leader demonstrating qualities of being forgiving (*Chandra*); decisive, stout and reasonable (*Brama*); confident and benevolent

(*Indra*); considerate (*Kuwera*); attentive (*Bayu*); careful and insightful (*Baruna*); inspirational and exemplary (*Surya*); as well as just (*Yama*).

Such constructs of Javanese-ness can be read as the films' social critiques of the political dynamism and blatant practices of corruptions in the first decade of the reform, using the Javanese ethical vantage point. I regard such a cultural addressing as an alternative attempt to reconfirm the need for the moral qualities expressed in the traditional Javanese values of *sepi ing pamrih* (sincerity), *ramé ing gawé* (commitment to the profession), *ngalab berkah* (king's blessing myth-induced humility, loyalty and simplicity of life), and *Asta Brata* (the eight virtues of Javanese leadership). The inclusion of the Javanese courts intersected with these values is also significant. Not only does the presence of the courts relate to the films' subject matters but their presence also reflects the degree of public trust and acceptance of such Javanese institutions.

By employing qualities of the essentialist regime of representation, the three documentaries offer their different depictions of Javanese-ness using the traditional values. Although this traditional value-based Javanese-ness intrinsically bears the essentialist regime of representation, I do not perceive it as a politically powerful conception in the socio-political and cultural realities. Such an essentialist representation does not have the power to be politically hegemonic or become the dominant state culture as once exercised by the New Order regime. This is because an establishment of a hegemonic state culture using qualities of a particular ethnic group in Indonesia is no longer favoured and accepted after the 1998's reform. I conclude that such a traditional-based representation only expresses one of the possible endless understandings of Javanese-ness. It can be indicated by other readings in chapters seven and eight that follow.

The following chapter seven deals with a representation of Javanese-ness different from the traditionally value-based and court-related Javanese-ness. The second model

of Javaneseness that I will describe in chapter seven may still spring from some Javanese traditional values and beliefs. However, the ways the films employ these values combined with the films' themes and arguments make the image of Javaneseness in chapter six utterly different from the one described in this chapter.



**CHAPTER VII**  
**MARGINALISED JAVANESENESS**

This chapter provides marginalised images of Javanese from two documentary films, *Jamu* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami*. Unlike *Wayang Kulit*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Bathik* that envisage Javanese from revisiting the mainstream traditional Javanese values, *Jamu* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami* project a distinct image of being a Javanese that deviates from the traditional mainstream values. As explained in chapter four, *Jamu* is a documentary that engages with the social reality and beliefs related to the practice of drinking jamu (traditional medicine) and sex practices in Jakarta. *Jamu* argues that the broad social perception of the Indonesians and the Javanese that “We are a moralised society” needs questioning. *Kulo Ndiko Sami* is a documentary that addresses the cultural struggle of the Sikep community to get their traditional faith, Religion of Adam, acknowledged by the government of Indonesia. *Kulo Ndiko Sami* argues that the Sikep should not be discriminated against because of their traditional religion. The Sikep are equal to other Indonesian citizens deserve justice and protection. The Indonesian government needs to consider the Sikep’s religion as a traditional or local faith (*aliran kepercayaan*) guaranteed by the Indonesian laws. Also, the systemic manipulation of their religion needs ending.

These two documentaries offer a marginalised representation of Javanese. The marginalised Javanese, in my view, expresses a portrayal of Javanese from the angles of sexuality in *Jamu* and the neglected Javanese community in *Kulo Ndiko Sami*. Interlinking Javanese with sexuality and the Sikep community was scarcely explored in documentary films during the New Order regime. The regime regarded sexuality and the Sikep were not a decent representation of the Javanese people and culture. As mentioned in chapter one, the New Order’s understanding of Javanese is highly abstract and Javanese aristocratic-minded. The New Order’s concept of Javanese projects an ideal Java-centric figure who is educated, refined in language and behaviour, moralistic, and capitalistic. The regime’s Javanese alludes to the

Javanese aristocratic court culture (*priyayi*) as well as Javanese philosophies and mysticism (*kebatinan*) (Foulcher, 1990; Pemberton, 1994; Jones, 2012).

*Jamu* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami* envisage Javaneseness that depicts ordinariness, openness or vulgarity, provocation, and less-economic orientation. I call such a representation the second model of Javaneseness in this thesis. Such imagination of Javaneseness is more down-to-earth, more concerned with daily life and more realistic to the viewers than that of the New Order. I do not account this down-to-earth representation of Javaneseness negatively, but positively with an understanding that members of society, including the filmmakers, have the freedom to express their interpretations of Javaneseness, especially after the reform era Indonesia.

Representing ordinary people and their daily life problems such as sex in *Jamu* and identity in *Kulo Ndiko Sami* does not necessarily indicate less educated (lowbrow) topics. More open or vulgar topic of sexuality is not equivalent to being pornographic minded. Provocative depictions of nightlife in *Jamu* and communal struggle in *Kulo Ndiko Sami* are not similar to being non-compliant and rebellious as often understood in the New Order's exaggerated moralistic and political paradigms. The New Order's Javaneseness was designed and engineered from selected abstract models, top-down. Conversely, the two documentaries supply the viewers with an incremental, bottom-up imagination of Javanese society from the social realities fabricated as cinematic works. The different representations of Javaneseness of the films with that of the New Order are critical to disclose. Such different representations communicate the filmmakers' alternative view and freedom to engage with Javaneseness in the socio-political and cultural contexts of the post-New Order regime.

I structure this chapter into four sections. Section one highlights the nature of the second model of Javaneseness. This marginalised Javaneseness is different from the great accentuation of the traditional value-based Javaneseness described in

chapter six. Explaining the second model of Javanese-ness is essential. It will give the viewers knowledge of the difference between this marginalised model and the New Order's image of Javanese-ness. Section two concerns the films' regime of representation that is contributory to make the marginalised image of Javanese-ness more articulated. Section three examines whether or not this second model is justifiable in the context of the period. In other words, the analysis focuses on the extent the representations of Javanese-ness depict the socio-political and cultural conditions of the time. In this regard, I consider that the marginalised Javanese-ness expresses the euphoric celebration of the post-New Order period.

### **7.1. Other Javanese Representations than the New Order's Construct**

As noted in chapter three, *Jamu* argues that the public view of a moralised society imbued in the traditional herbal medicine needs to be revised as the socio-cultural purpose of consuming *jamu* and the free-sex trend in Jakarta's urban life show the opposite of the view, "We are a moralised society". *Kulo Ndiko Sami* argues that the Indonesian authorities need to treat *Sikep* people justly, including in the aspect of giving an acknowledgement of the *Sikep*'s traditional faith. The imagined Javanese-ness of the two documentaries supplies different representations from the abstract and solemn image of the New Order's Javanese-ness, being educated, refined in language and manner, moralistic, and capitalistic. To begin with, I would like to start with the representation of Javanese-ness in *Jamu*.

#### **7.1.1. Liberal, Sexually Driven, and Secretive Javanese**

In *Jamu*, Javanese-ness is symbolically represented through traditional medicine, a Javanese cultural legacy attributed to some functions: medicine, health-care, beauty-care, tonic and beverage, body protection and endurance (Soedarsono and Roemantyo,

2002, p. 1). With such functions, jamu, as shown in the film, is composed of ingredients from herbal, mineral and some animal products (Elfahmi, Woerdenbag and Kayser, 2014, p. 52). Then, the representation of jamu in the documentary is allied with the theme of sexuality and the public moral view, “We are a moralised society”. The imagination of Javanese-ness is materialised out of the convergence of sexuality and this public moral belief.

With such a combination, the representation of Javanese-ness in this film centres on an image of the Javanese who are liberal, sexually driven and secretive. Not only do these three strong characteristics illustrated in the documentary express the overturning of the New Order’s construct, but also an attempt to view Javanese-ness using a different angle. By representing liberal, sexually driven and secretive qualities of the Javanese people, Javanese-ness and its refined and moralistic values are no longer seen to be the hegemonic view of the state as practised by the New Order. Again, I would like to reiterate that jamu is functioned as the symbol in the film. It becomes the entry point that articulates the opposing stance of the public moral view using the social realities captured and fabricated in the film.

The liberal quality of *Jamu’s* Javanese-ness is articulated in the scene of the motel bedroom sex. As described in chapter three, the scene portraying the fictionalised sex between the filmmakers indicates a phenomenon of a more liberal man-woman relationship than in the times of the New Order. This liberal relation includes free-sex (pre and extramarital sex) practices in the Post-New Order urban life in many big cities in Indonesia (Francoeur and Noonan, 2004, p. 538). The scene signifies the overturning of the New Order’s moralistic Javanese-ness. This portrayal communicates a challenge to the view of the public moral view and values of sexuality, especially Javanese marriage values. Why Javanese? *Jamu* has already framed the film’s theme and cultural background within the Java-centric culture as expressed in the

scenes precluding the dramatised motel bedroom sex.

Two scenes are laying out the film's reference to sexuality and marriage values in the context of Javanese culture before the dramatised sex scene. They are the energy-boosting drink, *Kuku Bima TL* scene and the *Loro Blonyo* statuettes scene. The *Kuku Bima TL* scene presents the narrator rhetorically stating that sex is understood as an intimate relationship between husband and wife. The *Kuku Bima TL* scene captures this narrator's address to the viewers, and the figure of a Javanese mythological character, *Bima*, as the jamu's brand image of manhood. *Loro Blonyo* scene reemphasises the notion of sex as the husband and wife's consummation. The scene portrays the narrator holding a pair of *Loro Blonyo* statuettes and jocularly playing them on her lap while making the explanation to the viewers. This scene suggests that Javanese cultural setting is indeed employed in this documentary.

With such scenes precluding the motel bedroom sex, the dramatised sex of the motel bedroom scene expresses the liberal, sexually driven, and secretive facets of an imagined Javanese. Such a representation articulates a deviation from the values of sexuality and marriage traditionally held by the Javanese society. The scene suggests a liberal idea because by norms sex is usually understood as an act of consummation within a legal and justified boundary that is marriage, in Javanese society (Suseno, 1996; Malhotra, 1997; Endraswara, 2013c).

The sex scene presents the narrator and the cinematographer, Erick, half-naked on the bed. They act as if they are about to have sex. The scene rhetorically shows the endearment of the narrator to the cinematographer. It is vividly manifested as the narrator satirically addresses to the viewers saying, "To maintain the sexual intimacy between husband and wife, some married couple makes love here, after office hour or during lunch break, like me and my "husband", Erik. Come, honey...". Aesthetically, such representation employs some techniques. The camera movement is a steady rock with

a high camera angle. The framing is a long shot capturing both the cinematographer and the narrator on the bed with an intimate gesture as if they were about to have sex. The mid-key lighting and deep focus shot are also employed. The scene ends with the diegetic sounds of the narrator and the cinematographer saying together, “We welcome you to Jakarta. Goodbye...” The combination of these techniques produces a realistic image of the scene.

By performing the dramatised sex alluding to the free-sex phenomenon in Jakarta, the motel bedroom scene signifies that such a fictionalised sexual practice challenges the public moral view and the traditional marriage values held by the Javanese. The fictionality of the scene does not dilute the film’s rhetorical message. As mentioned at the outset, *Jamu* argues that such a broad social belief, “We are a moralised society”, needs questioning. Again, the scene does not reduce the film’s rhetorical message. On the contrary, this fabricated action articulates that the film satirically and humorously plays with the idea of jamu, sex, existing moral and cultural values in Indonesia. With these all, Javaneseness represented precisely opposes the New Order’s solemn and moralistic representation of the Javanese people.

The sexually driven quality of the scene is self-evident particularly when it is related to jamu, the traditional medicine. The filmmakers exploit jamu by connecting it with sex and prostitution as introduced by the narrator. It makes jamu the symbol of irony to the moral view, “We are a moralised society”. In the introductory scene of the film, the narrator rhetorically declares:

Jakarta, together with Bali and Yogyakarta, are three major tourist destinations in Asia because of their rich culture. But, we are not like Bangkok that is famous for the Amsterdam of Asia. We are not like that, you know. “We are a moralised society”. Our motto is Jakarta *Teguh Beriman*, or Jakarta - strong in faith.

This scene is aesthetically filmed using a hand-held camera movement with an eye-level camera angle, a medium shot, natural lighting, and shallow focus. The scene

presents the narrator near the national monument in Jakarta as explained in chapter three. The combination of these techniques emphasises the importance of the narrator as the central figure in the scene. It goes along with the scene's introductory function to present the rhetorical claim of the narrator based on the public moral view.

With such rhetorical declaration above, *Jamu* is understood as a documentary with a reconstructionist style illustrating a fabricated personal observation of the filmmakers. The film discloses the irony and ambivalence of the public moral view conveyed through the fictionality of the documentary by using recorded social realities. This personal observation leads the filmmakers to reveal the cultural practice of drinking jamu mixed with its aphrodisiac myth. The filmmakers visit the former prostitution area of Kramat Tunggak, the nightlife and sex practices in Jakarta. This all suggests an attempt of the filmmakers to play with the public moral view.

The signification of the film is established from how jamu is introduced, investigated and finally intersected with the free-sex dramatisation of the motel bedroom scene. Such an arrangement evokes a perception as if the traditional medicine is contributory to making sex practices (the free-sex phenomenon) widespread in Jakarta. With its myth of aphrodisiac content, the traditional medicine seems to be illustrated as the entry point where virility and sex become significant issues in the film. The documentary has aesthetically communicated its satiric tone to the public moral view. The satiric tone is manifested from the way the narrator expresses it in the introductory scene. By the time, she claims the moralised society, her facial expressions and hand gestures radiate some mockery of the public moral view. The narrator mockingly smiles as her right index finger is raised in front of her chest to make a denial gesture by moving the finger repeatedly. In other words, the narrator humorously doubts the public moral view.

The secretive quality of the Javaneseness that the film represents is also



manifested in the motel bedroom scene. The scene humorously depicts a sex practice between the narrator and the cameraman. Besides undermining the public moral view, this fictionalised sex scene also articulates a mockery to the free-sex trend. The fictionalised free-sex is committed secretly under the pretext of maintaining the 'husband and wife' sexual relationship as indicated below.

This is the end of our city tour. I am now in a motel room. There are many motels in Jakarta. Why? Because Jakarta is very crowded. Its population during the day is more than twelve million. Millions of people live in the satellite cities. They commute every day, and it takes a long journey, and they might already get tired and exhausted when they get home. To maintain the sexual intimacy between husband and wife, some married couple makes love here, after office hour or during lunch break, like me and my 'husband' [the narrator does say quote-unquote to imply that the man is not her 'husband' at this moment], Erik. Come, honey... We welcome you to Jakarta. Goodbye...

At this point, the scene demonstrates the film's comic ridicule of a fictionalised adultery, the free-sex phenomenon in Jakarta. The reasons for distance, fatigue, and maintaining the "husband and wife" sexual relation are made up to satirise such a secretive sex practice trend. The ways the narrator and the cinematographer perform their sex in the motel bedroom as described previously convey their satire and mock of the imagined phenomenon. Before the consummation between "husband and wife" is imagined to proceed, the cinematographer, Erik, appears on the screen. He takes off his T-shirt and jeans. Then, the scene highlights his underpants reading "*Jangan lupa pakai kondom* [Don't forget to wear condom]" on the back of the underpants. This comic ridicule amplifies the satiric tone of the film. By showing this fictionalised secretive act of adultery in the motel bedroom, the abstract ideal of New Order's Javanese-ness is jocularly contested.

#### 7.1.2. Obedient and yet Determined Javanese

As explained in chapter four, *Kulo Ndiko Sami* is a documentary film with a combination of socio-political and cultural issues. It tells the cultural struggle of the

Sikep communities to obtain the government's acknowledgement of their traditional faith on the Sikep's identity cards. They fail to get it. I consider that the film communicates the theme of identity. *Kulo Ndiko Sami* whose socio-political dimension is strongly vivid cannot be comprehensively understood without correlating it with the cultural stigma used to be attributed to the Sikep.

The New Order regime had stigmatised the Sikep people as “backward” and “abnormal” peasantry from the mainstream Javanese. Therefore, the Sikep were encouraged and repressed to “leave their Samin teachings and be normal” (Widodo, 1997, p. 261). The New Order's stigma to the Sikep for being “backwards” and “abnormal” Javanese is of course against the regime's ideal construct of the Javanese who is refined in language, moralistic in behaviour, developmental and capitalistic in attitude and orientation.

This kind of stigmatisation was inherited from the Dutch colonial government's view. The view was based on the assessment conducted by Jasper. Jasper was the assistant resident of Tuban who regarded the Sikep as a group of Javanese with “mental deviance”. Jasper's report concluded that the Sikep with their Religion of Adam appeared as the result of an enormous social change in Java. The cultivation system of the Dutch Ethical Policy imposed from the end of the nineteenth century to the dawn of the twentieth century rendered a great social transformation. The policy imposed by the colonial government had impacted the way of life of some traditional peasants who used to be independent (Widodo, 1997, p. 267). Because these independent traditional peasants denied the cultivation and the corvée (unpaid labour peasants) system, they launched their resistance to the colonial government and the Javanese aristocrats. This marked the birth of the Sikep communities. They were adamant. They created their own belief system (Religion of Adam), refused to pay tax, disobeyed village communal duties, and spoke to the aristocrats with the Javanese

common language (*ngoko*) instead of the refined one (*kromo*) as commonly practiced (Korver, 1976; King, 1977; Nurudin, Sudarwo and Faturrohman, 2003). Consequently, they are considered “the other” by the mainstream Javanese (Widodo, 1997, p. 272).

Unlike the New Order’s and the Dutch colonial government’s stigma to the Sikep, *Kulo Ndiko Sami* portrays the Sikep as a marginalised Javanese who is obedient to the government’s law and determined to preserve their faith and tradition. The film represents the Sikep as such, irrespective of their failure to obtain the government’s acknowledgement of their Religion of Adam. All testimonies of the Sikep depict their obedience to the government’s law pertinent to possessing an identity card. As a case in point is the testimony of Turlan. The testimony shows Turlan, a Sikep member and a villager of Galuran accompanied by his wife during the interview. He expresses his disappointment to the civil servant who has processed his identity card application in the sub-district office of Sukolilo, Pati. Turlan wished that his Sikep’s traditional belief would be stated on the identity card.

The interview scene shows Turlan who holds his identity cards while giving the testimony. It is captured using the combination of eye level, low and high angle camera as well as close-up and extreme close. He strongly wishes that his Sikep’s belief will be officially imprinted on his identity card, or that it will be just left unstated. When Turlan receives his identity card, it is not as he expects. He finds out that Buddhism is imprinted on his identity card as his religion. The film shows a close-up shot of his identity cards. The cards are put on a table in an upward position exposing the data of his old and new identity cards. The old card shows that his religion is Islam, but the new card is Buddhism. Thus, none of Turlan’s identity cards expresses his Religion of Adam. It proves that what Turlan wished is not accommodated by the system.

The interview scene with Turlan was interspersed by a shot of a computer screen and a civil servant working on the computer in the district office. This shot, using a fly-

on-the-wall technique, depicts a moment when Gunritno, a Sikep and the film's narrator, asked the civil servant to clarify the reason why the Sikep's traditional faith could not be expressed on their identity cards. Feeling annoyed by the question, the civil servant shared Gunritno the experience he had with Turlan. The civil servant told Gunritno that he had asked Turlan to input Turlan's data on the computer by himself. Such was the response of the civil servant to refute Turlan's assumption that there was a manipulation in the process. The civil servant argued that things had been automatically set in the computer program. Then, the framing returns to the interview scene of Turlan where Turlan holds his identity cards in a close-up shot. From close-up framing, the cards are zoomed out in a high angle and over the shoulder camera. This all signifies the acceptance of the Sikep to the situation, the indicated manipulation of the official process to apply for an identity card.

Although *Kulo Ndiko Sami* describes the Sikep as obedient Javanese, the documentary also represents the Sikep's determination to adhere to their traditional faith and principles. The film shows this in a series of scenes. The scenes demonstrate how the Sikep strive to find a solution to the problem they encounter. These scenes show Gunritno and his family members, yearns for Sikep's aspiration to the district, regional government offices and legislature. The scenes, which are recorded using the fly-on-the-wall technique, capture the struggle of Gunritno's band to communicate what all Sikep plead for. They wish that the Indonesian government officially recognised their traditional faith. However, their attempt, as the scenes demonstrate, fail. This failure and the refutation of the officials portrays the Sikep as the marginalised Javanese sub-ethnic. The documentary also delineates an image of the Sikep community that is determined in their struggle. This marginalised and yet determined image of the Sikep community provides a different representation of Javanese-ness than that of the aristocratic image of being Javanese by the New Order. This corresponds to my

overall argument that the film expresses a more democratised and personal representation of Javanese-ness.

The scene begins with Gunritno and his band heading for the district office of Sukolilo, Pati. There they meet the head of the district, Sutriyono, to clarify the reason why Sikep's traditional belief cannot be expressed on their identity cards. Sutriyono accompanied by his staff carefully explains the situation regarding the process of applying for an identity card to the Sikep. Sutriyono argues that as the head of the district he cannot fulfil the Sikep's aspiration. The Indonesian government, according to Sutriyono's understanding of the law, only acknowledges five religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Therefore, Sutriyono admits that he always instructs his subordinates to categorise the applicants' religions based on the five religions above. As Sutriyono explains this, the scene shows him at the centre of the frame in a low angle shot, heightening a sense of unquestioned authority and centrality he has over the Sikep.

Gunritno, as the speaker of his band, keeps on persuading Sutriyono to find a solution to the problem. Gunritno, also captured in a low angle camera, offers an alternative if it is possible for the government to leave the Sikep's religion unstated on their identity cards. Sutriyono refuses the idea, as he is persistent that each citizen's religion, by law, must be stated and imprinted on the identity card. The camera angle shifts to eye level as Sutriyono advises the Sikep to go to the regional registrar office of Pati if the Sikep is determined with their wish. The change in camera angle seems to help the change of mood of Sutriyono from being firm to being slightly soft. Gunritno and his band, then, go to the registrar office as suggested.

The scene portraying Gunritno and his band in the registrar office starts with the Sikep getting off their motorcycles. They go inside the office. Gunritno looks for someone in some rooms. He looks confused, as he finds no one to ask. Then, he asks

some civil servants for an opportunity to meet the head of the registrar office. They lead Gunritno to the room of the head of the office. There, what happens between Gunritno and the officials is not captured because the filmmaker is not allowed to record their meeting. As the closed meeting is taking place, the scene in close-up and medium shots shows Gunritno's family members patiently waiting about for Gunritno to come out. The scene, in a medium shot and eye-level angle, also captures a civil servant showing his disgruntled face with the unexpected visit of the Sikep and the filmmaker. Again, this scene also demonstrates how the Sikep community is stereotyped and marginalised as indicated by the treatment of the civil servants. The scene implies that problems concerning the Sikep community needs to be handled off-the-record.

As Gunritno appears, the scene in tracking shot follows the Sikep's departure to the legislative body of Pati. Having arrived in the office, a legislature member receives Gunritno's band. Unlike what happened in the district and the registrar offices, the atmosphere of their meeting here is more light-hearted. The scene shows how the legislature member politely and warmly explains that the application program of the identity card is set and determined by the central government in Jakarta. The legislature member argues that the regional administrators only follow what has been programmed via a computerised system by the central government. He reaffirms that the government of Indonesia in the meantime officially recognises five religions only.

About this, the legislature member cannot do anything to assist the Sikep. He will bring the Sikep's issue to the regional legislative assembly. He seems to give a hope that the assembly may further discuss the Sikep's wish to the House of Representatives at the national level. During the meeting, the scene in eye-level angle and medium shot shows the legislature holding a cigar while explaining to Gunritno and his band. Gunritno and his wife are also filmed in eye-level angle and medium shot. An over-shoulder shot

capturing a drama-like program on television intercepts this scene. The shot presents two men where one of them make a hand gesture, begging to the other man. The result of the meeting with the legislature member remains fruitless.

All of these scenes convey the Sikep's determination to materialise their wish, the government's acknowledgement of their religion. This marginalised, obedient and yet determined image of the Sikep community is different from the image of calm, well-mannered, and aristocratic Javanese idealised by the New Order. The Sikep do not hesitate to meet and ask anyone who he or she thinks capable of assisting and solving the situation. Without any prior agreement, they seek for an audience with the officials from the district to the regional levels. They finally realise that the officials cannot provide a solution to the problem that they do not initially incur. They stand to keep on struggling for their religious recognition remains.

The cultural struggle of the Sikep philosophically reflects some principles that have characterised Sikep's way of life. These principles are rooted in their traditional belief (Benda and Castles, 1969; King, 1973; Korver, 1976; Sulistiono, 2011). From their Religion of Adam, the principles of benevolence, patience, honesty, and non-violence are strictly adhered to and implemented in their two main orders: establishing family life through marriage and living as farmers (Shiraishi, 1990; Nurudin, Sudarwo and Faturrohman, 2003; Ba'asyin and Ba'asyin, 2014). The Sikep never yields up these two orders and principles as the film demonstrates. All witnesses of the Sikep and their environments are of the farming world. The complication of gaining identity card encountered by the Sikep comes along with the film's rhetorical message of the government's recognition of cultural and religious diversity. *Kulo Ndiko Sami* tacitly addresses this issue. The film questions the government's commitment to protect and respect cultural and religious diversity. *Kulo Ndiko Sami* demonstrates a representation of Javanese people (the Sikep) that is not as what historically, politically

and culturally stigmatised for being “backwards” and “abnormal” by the New Order. The film does not represent them for being refined, modern and progressive. They have their values and tradition that need recognising in the system.

## **7.2. Alternative Regime of Representation in *Jamu* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami***

As was noted in the previous chapter, the ways the documentary films demonstrate their cultural contents are related to the nature of the cultural materials portrayed. The representations of the cultural contents of *Jamu* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami* express the regime of cultural representation employed in the films. Through examining the cultural representations of both films, we have a better understanding why the Javanese-ness envisaged in the documentaries is distinctive from that of the documentaries in chapter four, *Wayang Kulit*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Bathik*.

From the viewpoint of the cultural representation, the cultural contents of the films articulate the alternative regime of representation. As explained in chapter two, Siapera argues that the alternative regime of representation, “allows for the expression and reconstruction of cultural difference in ways that leave room for all its ambiguities to emerge” (Siapera, 2010, p. 132). The alternative regime of representation is the antithesis of the essentialist regime. This alternative regime celebrates panoply of voices on its representations. The effect is that contested voices are often produced through images and discourses which invite discussions, debates, critiques and rejection (Siapera, 2010, p. 158).

Siapera (2010) explains that an alternative regime of representation enables the presented images and themes to be questioned as their contents of identity and difference are put into ambiguity and ambivalence. The alternative regime, as Siapera argues, “contributes to continuous reflection on identity and difference; questions the simplistic morality of good-bad found in other regimes [racist, domesticated,



commodification and essentialist]; creates new political possibilities” (Siapera, 2010, p. 163). The key themes of this regime are characterised by a multiplicity of voices, contested perspectives, reflection on identity and difference, a challenge against a simplistic, moralistic and dominant view, and an alternative view to offer. In this regard, *Jamu* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami*, to a certain degree, demonstrate the qualities of the alternative regime of representation. With such attributes, the marginalised images of the Javanese of both films, which are opposed to the idealised construct of the New Order, are further envisaged. *Jamu* represents the Javanese who are liberal, sexually driven and secretive, as *Kulo Ndiko Sami* projects the Javanese who are obedient and yet determined.

In *Jamu*, there are many scenes demonstrating qualities of the alternative regime of representation, for example, reflection on identity and difference, the multiplicity of voices, contested perspectives, and a challenge against a simplistic, moralistic and dominant view. In this documentary, these alternative qualities are pertinent to the film’s theme of sexuality. In connection with reflection on identity and difference, for instance, the narrator’ claim of the public moral view echoes a broad social perception in Indonesia about sex. Sex, as explained in chapter three, should not be part of public discourse for the sake of decency. This social perception becomes the hegemonic voice of the public morality in Indonesia.

But, we are not like Bangkok that is famous for the Amsterdam of Asia. We are not like that, you know. We are a moralised society. Our motto is Jakarta *Teguh Beriman*, or Jakarta - strong in faith.

The scene articulates reflection on identity and difference as suggested by the stress and the reiteration of “we” in the whole context of the claim. The comparison that the narrator declares affirms the idea of being Indonesian (and Javanese) versus foreigners (the Thai and the Dutch – Bangkok and Amsterdam). This is satirically an example of cultural juxtaposition and stereotypes in the film.

About the multiplicity of voices, the testimonial scenes about the myth of “dry vagina” and the aphrodisiac myth of jamu, as described in chapter four, demonstrate this multiplicity of voices. *Jamu* captures the different and opposing views in the society about sex and jamu, and manipulate them. In this scene, the filmmakers deliberately present their contradictory views and manage them to bridge jamu and sex. I consider that this scene also articulates the contested perspectives of the alternative regime of representation.

The dramatisation of the motel bedroom sex as often quoted in this thesis once again proves its significance. The scene satirically communicates a challenge to the broad and dominant social perception of “We are a moralised society”. Through this manipulation and fictionalisation of free sex practice, of an adultery, the scene demonstrates its oppositional voice from the public moral view to the viewers. I regard that such a fictional expression questions the value of marriage as precluded by *Kuku Bima TL* and *Loro Blonyo* scenes as explained in chapter four. *Jamu* plays with free sex trend that has been indicated to be an obtrusive social phenomenon since the fall of the New Order regime (see also Francoeur and Noonan, 2004; Bennett and Davies, 2014). The incorporation of sexuality in the Javanese cultural frame of the documentary offers an entirely different image of the Javanese from the moralistic and aristocratic ideal of the New Order’s Javanese-ness. This supports my overall hypothesis on the subjectivity of the representations of Javanese people in the examined films.

With the claim “to maintain the sexual intimacy between husband and wife”, the motel bedroom scene satirises the public moral view. The filmmakers manipulate this general belief to suit their argument. The film argues that such a public moral view needs doubting. The filmmakers of *Jamu* wittily intertwine all of these social realities and perceptions with their reasoning. They, then, place jamu, the traditional medicine, in

a grey area of reality and fictionality, of a satiric contrast between the public moral view and the personal imagination of the filmmakers (the dramatised sex). The filmmakers make use of jamu as the entry point. The alternative qualities represented in this film, at the bottom line, reside in the film's exposition of the different perspectives, the social phenomenon and the common values behind them. As a result, Javanese-ness envisaged undermines an image of the Javanese who celebrates moralistic attitudes and behaviours as once hegemonically narrated by the New Order regime.

In *Kulo Ndiko Sami*, some scenes express the qualities of the alternative regime of representation. The scenes depicting the history of the Sikep and their principles of life signify reflection on identity and difference. In these scenes, the film informs the viewers about the Sikep people, their traditional belief, their environment, and the relations they have with other Javanese. Here, reflection on identity and difference concerns how the depictions prompt the viewers to discover information about the Sikep, their similarity and contrasts with the mainstream Javanese. The scene shows the agricultural life of the Sikep, their views and values as well as their treatment to other Javanese. It is demonstrated by the involvement of the Sikep at the social event of the village explained previously.

*Kulo Ndiko Sami* also represents the multiplicity of voices. The multiplicity of voices in this film comes from the Sikep's negotiated options offered by this community to get their traditional belief respected and recognised by the government. The Sikep hold two views. First, they wish the government would officially recognise their Religion of Adam on their identity cards. Second, if such a wish is denied, the Sikep prefer leaving their religious affiliation unstated on the identity cards to being manipulated by the system. The scene of Gunawan, a Sikep youth, giving his testimony confirms these two views. The scene conveys Gunawan's

unpleasant experience to get his identity card from the local authorities. Framed in close-up with low angle camera, he testifies that he wants his faith to be stated on the identity card. He appeals to the staff of the district office to leave his religion unstated on the card if the government, by law, does not acknowledge his traditional belief. When he receives his identity card, but he unexpectedly discovers that Islam is stated as his religion on the identity card. Other witnesses of the Sikep throughout the film also share this negotiated views of the Sikep, stated or left their religion unstated.

*Kulo Ndiko Sami* vividly demonstrates the contested perspectives. The contested perspectives here oppose the views of the Sikep and that of the government officials. The Sikep want their religion to be officially stated and unstated on their identity cards while the officials reject it. The film, in the beginning, has conveyed a clue of the identity card problem encountered by the Sikep. The scene expressing this clue demonstrates Gunritno introducing the problem. The close-up shot captures him saying, "The government regulation says that everybody who rides a motorcycle must have a driving license.

Meanwhile, if you want to have a driving license, you need to have a national identity card". This scene augurs what is going to happen with the Sikep's identity cards. Then, all scenes that follow accentuate how the Sikep strive to get their religion stated on the identity cards. The contested perspectives between the Sikep and the government officials become more evident as the film shows the indication of systemic manipulation practised upon the Sikep.

*Kulo Ndiko Sami* shows this all through the testimonies of some Sikep using a 'fly-on-the-wall' technique. With these devices, the documentary prompts the viewer to notice the efforts of the Sikep represented by Gunritno and his family members encountering the government officials and the legislature member. In the end, no

solution has been satisfactorily provided for the Sikep. They cannot have their traditional faith stated and left it unstated on their identity cards. They have to accept to whatever religion imprinted on their identity cards by the authorities. Despite this discrimination and manipulation, the film shows the Sikep's determination to aspire to get their faith acknowledged by the government. Gunritno's impromptu visits to the government offices and the internal consolidation of the Sikep to decide the future step to take, indicate their determination.

*Kulo Ndiko Sami* also demonstrates a challenge to a dominant view of the government officials who perceive that the Sikep's traditional religion cannot even be considered as a traditional faith (*aliran kepercayaan*) guaranteed by the Indonesian laws. The scene represents this challenge where the Sikep internally holds a meeting and discusses the problem. The scene records the Sikep sharing their unpleasant experiences that deal with the identity card. It is captured in medium and close-up shots with eye level and low angle camera. Men and women in black garments sit with cross-legged on a bamboo hut floor discussing their issue attentively. The men seriously address the complication and try to find a solution while the women carefully listen to their talk. Some men are captured smoking while following the discussion, and some others continue to exchange their perspectives. The Sikep conclude that they still need to keep their efforts to appeal to the central government in Jakarta. In spite of the problem and possible hindrances in the future, they think that their decision is worth struggling. The scene expresses a challenge to the dominant view in that it shows the attitude of the Sikep to break the status quo imposed on them.

### **7.3. *Jamu* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami*'s Socio-Political and Cultural Contexts**

With the representation of liberal, sexually driven, secretive, obedient, and determined Javanese, the examination now moves to whether or not the films'

arguments are justifiable in the first decade of the reform era. This section discusses the extent the films' arguments relevant and valid to the social, political and cultural conditions of the time. I view that the films' arguments, the Javanese represented and the social, political and cultural conditions of the time are correlated. With this, the gap between the Javanese described in the films, and the Javanese of the New Order's construct can be intelligible.

### 7.3.1. Socio-Political Contextualisation

Socio-politically, after the 1998 reform, the priority of the People's Consultative Assembly of Indonesia (MPR) was to advocate distribution of power, from a heavily concentrated executive power of the New Order to a more balanced power among the executive, judicative, and legislative bodies. To achieve this power balance, the People's Consultative Assembly amended the Indonesian 1945 Constitution four times, in 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002. It was all motivated by the spirit of denying the authoritative and hegemonic power of the New Order's executive, the presidency, which was considered too dominant (Ziegenhain, 2009, p. 34). In addition, regional autonomy was also applied enabling each province, region and city to manage and administer their own affairs and assets, except on the six fields: national defence, security, foreign affairs, justice system, monetary and fiscal system, as well as policies on religion (DPR and Presiden, 2004, Art.10, Par.3). With this balance of power between the judicative, executive and legislative bodies as well as the decentralised system, the authoritarian style and corrupt practices of the New Order could be eliminated.

Unfortunately, the balance of power and the decentralisation have not diminished the practices of corruption, collusion and nepotism as once committed by the New Order regime. The decentralisation has indeed brought up the emergence

and celebration of local and ethno-politics (Erb, Sulistiyanto and Faucher, 2005; Davidson and Henley, 2007). Corruption, collusion and nepotism were still practised as a pretext for the regional autonomy policy. Such a situation fostered decentralised corruption and vested interests in the power game at the local level (Bünthe, 2009, p. 119). This situation suggests that though the spirit of reform is noble when the old practices remain unchanged, the so-called "reform" is eventually in question. Verena Beittinger-Lee (2009), an Indonesian politic analyst, describes the situation as follows:

What we witnessed in Indonesia after the regime change in 1998 was a fracturing of the old political power coalitions and a deconstructing of the authoritarian regime that had sustained them for so long. Although this process carried the potential for a fundamental reordering of political and social power relations, a decade after the fall of Suharto it has become clear increasingly that, despite many democratic reforms, the expected fundamental changes did not take place (Beittinger-Lee, 2009, pp. 209–210).

Socio-politically, the practices of dishonesty and manipulation (corruption, collusion and nepotism) in the first decade of the reform era remained flourished. The discrepancy between the ideal, which is reform spirit for reordering the country away from the old practices, and the real, namely the dishonesty and manipulation covering up the misdeeds, of the post-authoritarian politics was parallel with attempts to hold a public moral view. In the case of *Jamu*, the argument of the film is concerned with the public moral view, intersected with jamu and sex practices. *Jamu* tries to question this general belief started with disclosing the myths behind the traditions of drinking jamu, vitality and virility. It is then deliberately linked with sex practice by visiting and exposing places, artefacts, and even foods and drinks having sexual connotations. They are all fabricated leading to a fictionalised sex satirically dramatised to counter the public moral view.

In addition to the claim declared by the narrator at the introductory scene, several scenes depict the manifestation of such a social perception. The film illustrates the transformation of the former Jakarta's red-light district of Kramat

Tunggak into the Jakarta Islamic Centre. This scene shows the on-going progress of the Islamic centre with its huge mosque and minarets while the narrator explains that the location used to be the Jakarta's prostitution area. Also, *Jamu* demonstrates a public sign reading "*Jakarta Teguh Beriman*", the city's motto, in the Old Town Batavia. This all purports to show that "We are a moralised society" is not a mere illusion but manifested and realistic. However, the film also shows the sex motivation of drinking jamu and the sex practices of the Jakarta's nightlife. The convergence jamu, sex and the dramatisation of motel bedroom sex signify that the public moral view needs reviewing. Therefore, the film satirically unmask the public opinion of the danger of a social and moral hypocrisy.

With the representations of jamu, sex liberty and the manipulation of the public moral view as an apology, which cover jamu and sex, I perceive that the film's satirical attack on social and moral hypocrisy is a reflection of the social and political condition of the time, the dishonesty and manipulation. Thus, what is believed or idealised on the surface, "We are a moralised society", camouflaged for the real phenomena underneath it. With this, I do not intend to reduce the matter into a view that there is always a potential gap between the ideal and the real. The different representations of the public moral view and jamu and sex in the film suggests that in such a fragmented, dynamic and highly changeable socio-political condition of the reform era, application of moral values become significantly loosen and relative. Moralistic expressions and idioms are often employed to mask and deny the real paradox. In this regard, I read that *Jamu* implies the situation.

The representation of politically power-related objects hints the socio-political contextualisation of the film itself. They are the Indonesian state palace, the national emblem, flag and anthem. At first, these objects seem to have a vague relation with jamu and sex. When we paradigmatically link them with other scenes, such as the



public moral view and jamu as a national cultural legacy, the socio-political demonstration of jamu and then sex liberty in the film becomes traceable. “We are a moralised society” articulates the dimension of the identity of the film and jamu as a cultural legacy affirms the subject matter as a local product. The representation of the Indonesian state palace, the national emblem, flag and anthem seem to introduce and frame jamu and sex depicted in the film happen in the Indonesian context. This framing in the Indonesian context with the film’s satirical criticism of social and moral hypocrisy is parallel to the gap between the ideal and the real of the Indonesian politics at that time. The film does not blatantly address the dishonesty and manipulation practices of the Indonesian politics at the period, but *Jamu* makes use of those power-related symbols intermingled with jamu and sex to frame voices of its own, social and moral hypocrisy. Such an incorporation of politically power-related objects in the film implies a message that the filming also takes place in such a hypocritical politics.

In *Kulo Ndiko Sami*, the socio-political contextualisation of the documentary is more visible than that of *Jamu*. The film itself is strongly political because it captures the struggle of the Sikep to make their traditional faith recognised by the government. The film shows the discriminatory public service practice coerced by the officials upon the Sikep. The film conveys the opposing parties with their arguments. Hence, socio-politically, the documentary demonstrates the indication that the local bureaucracy has manipulated the Sikep’s traditional faith.

The film thesis is established on the idea that the Sikep with their unique customs, tradition, and worldview deserve to be treated justly. What the film unearths is the continuing practice of data manipulation a la the New Order’s bureaucrats. This is meant to marginalise the Sikep socially and culturally. Also, it is committed to denying their traditional faith on the identity card, on the pretext of beyond the six major

religions recognised by the government.

The question now is why the discrimination against the Sikep still postdates the New Order era. On the surface, *Kulo Ndiko Sami* highlights the problem between the Sikep and the government officials, religious discrimination. Socio-politically, the core of the problem lies in two points. First is the ignorance of the government bureaucrats to comprehend and to execute the laws of religious freedom. Second is their lack of consideration to accommodate the Sikep's traditional belief under the pretext of unchangeable "system". By the 1945 Constitution, the state guarantees religious freedom of all Indonesian nationals. It is declared in the paragraphs that read:

- (1) Everyone shall be free to embrace their religions and to worship according to their religions, choose education and teaching, occupation, nationality, residence in the state territory and leave the same, and return.
- (2) Everyone shall be entitled to the freedom to be convinced of their beliefs, express their opinions and attitudes, by their conscience (Assembly, 2002, Art.28, Par.E).

The protection and guarantee of the state for its citizens entitling their rights to embrace a religion is due to historical and cultural factors. It is pertinent to the relation between religion and state in the formation of modern Indonesia. The founding fathers were fully aware of the diverse ethnic groups, languages, religions, traditions and beliefs embraced by the Indonesian population for centuries. The nation-state that the founding fathers institutionalised was not meant to dissipate this diversity. It was designed to integrate such diversity under an imagined Indonesian-ness. Indonesia is envisaged to be neither theocratic nor secular state, but a pluralistic and democratic state that recognises religions, that protects them, and that limitedly facilitates the inter-religious affairs. In other words, religions were incorporated to be the spirit or moral force in running the statecraft (Dahlan, 2014; Hilmi, 2015).

On paper, it is true that all religions and faiths existing in Indonesia are protected and guaranteed by the constitution. Lukman Hakim Saifuddin (Minister of Religious

Affairs) said that the government never formally declares six major religions – Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and (now) Confucianism – to be the official religions in Indonesia. The fact that they are the most embraced ones is undeniable, but it does not mean that other religions and beliefs such as traditional faiths (*aliran kepercayaan*) are not recognised, protected, and guaranteed. Traditional faiths are allowed to exist so long as their members and activities do not breach any laws. The minister underscored that no one has the right to force a belief on others (Lestari, 2014, unpaginated). The 1965 Act of Blasphemy Prevention also does not forbid traditional faiths (*aliran kepercayaan*) to exist. The activities of traditional faiths and their followers should not express any contempt for other religions, especially the six most embraced religions. Their activities and members should neither violate any laws that may trigger catastrophic effects, such as public disorder and disunity of the country (Republik Indonesia, 1965, Art.2-3).

However, the ideal situation above is not expressed in the film. There is discrimination against the Sikep. *Kulo Ndiko Sami* shows the bureaucratic attempts to exclude their traditional belief on the pretext of beyond the system and just for the sake of administrative requirements. This is demonstrated in the statement of Sutriyono, the head of the district of Sukolilo when he receives the Sikep in his office.

He says:

Processing an identity card in district level is executed by using a fully set specific software, including the floppy disk applied. As it is programmed, I always give a directive to my staff to write either Islam or others [of the six religions] ... I am afraid of accommodating your request, especially when this is concerned with beliefs and religions ... Please, don't bear misunderstanding of this situation into discrediting my reputation. We did it only for completing administration.

Sutriyono's rejection to fulfil the wish of the Sikep was not only due to the sensitivity of the religious issue. It also suggests a bureaucratic implication he could receive from his superior officials if he fulfils the Sikep's wish. Sutriyono admits that he has instructed

his staff to “play safe” by referring only to the five “official” religions that he knows. He simplifies the matter by stating that manipulating Sikep’s traditional belief to other religion(s) is only for administrative affairs, on papers. At a glance, the action seems practical to assist the Sikep in getting their identity cards. It is what precisely has triggered the problem and exposed the manipulation.

The film conveys the tacit fear of breaching the law from the central government as indicated in the scenes where the Sikep are recommended to consult the officials of different offices having higher authorities. The scenes that demonstrate a gradation of place, from the district office to regional legislature, implies a higher degree of responsibility and power that the offices have. The implicit fear of the bureaucrats itself expresses the remaining trail of the New Order’s hegemonic structural power over the civil servants. The Suharto’s administration demanded rigid conformity and total commitment of all civil servants and state apparatus to the central government’s policies instead of the state laws. This creates a mentality of the civil servants with unquestioned obedience and an emphasis on self-control, but they lack courage and initiative-seeking (Vatikiotis, 2003, p. 109). Together with lack of legal understanding, and insensitiveness to public aspirations, this civil servant mentality was still hard to be diminished in the first decade of the reform era. Such a mindset still had its grip on the bureaucrats’ psyche of the early regional autonomy era. It is evident in the film as the district officials direct Gunritno and his *Sikep*’s family members to go to the regional registrar office of Pati for further instruction. It is because the designated office has higher authority over the identity card matters than that of the district.

### 7.3.2. Cultural Contextualisation

Culturally, the reform spirit to reject the New Order’s practices and beliefs also

spread across the nation after 1998. Nearly anything closely connected to the New Order regime was subject to condemnation and scrutiny. Anything that represented and used cultural mentality of the New Order regime, including Javaneseness, was suspected. On the contrary, anything that contradicted and undermined the old practices and beliefs was more welcomed. The fast-growing documentary film in the first decade of the reform era captured this euphoria. Cinematic themes repressed during Suharto's administration such as inter-ethnic relations, inter-religious relations, regional and centre relations, sexuality, and group identities were celebrated in the reform era (Hanan, 2010; Heeren, 2012; Paramaditha, 2012; Nugroho and Herlina S., 2015).

*Jamu* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami* echo this celebrated discourse. Concerning the theme, these documentaries contradict the New Order's Javaneseness that is the aristocratic model mixed with moral values and capitalism to maintain the status quo, New Order's power (Foulcher, 1990; Pemberton, 1994; Jones, 2013). *Jamu* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami* respectively distance themselves from the old stigmatising views of the New Order that is morally "taboo" in bringing up sexuality as a public discourse (Paramaditha, 2012) and the "inferior" Javanese in representing the Sikep (Sulistiono, 2011; Ba'asyin and Ba'asyin, 2014). The cultural relevance and validity rest on the films' themes and arguments to express the reform spirit of the period. As mentioned at the outset, *Jamu's* theme is about sexuality, and the film argues that the broad moral view of the Indonesians and the Javanese that the public moral view needs questioning. *Kulo Ndiko Sami's* theme is about the Sikep, and the film argues that the Sikep should not be discriminated against because of their traditional religion.

*Jamu*, for instance, "We are a moralised society" seen through and from the Javanese angle is challenged. The truthfulness of the once-Java-centric based public morality of the New Order is doubted in a satirical manner. This does not necessarily mean that the traditional Javanese ethics of sex and marriage have lost their

significance for an individual view and common values. As state-promoted views as once incorporated by the New Order regime, they significantly diminished and became a vague public belief and power in the early reform periods. *Jamu* envisages and questions that such a powerful moral view remains. Ayu Utami herself in an extra-filmic interview claims: “Through *Jamu*, I’d like to explain the difference between parody and masochism in relation to a value-based power. Masochism transfers violence into eroticism while parody satirises power to be humorous” (Benny, 2003, unpaginated).

From the idea of satirising value-based power, my thesis further reveals how the employment of the Java-centric values of sex and marriage culturally implies a shift of understanding from the state-guided interpretation of Javanese-ness to a more private one. They are used to support the playfulness quality of the film. Philosophical teachings of sex and marriage expressed in *Bima* and *Loro Blonyo* that are not aimed for profane jokes in traditional Javanese society (Udasmoro, 1999; Aryandini S and Sriwibawa, 2000; Endraswara, 2013c) are used to manifest the satiric quality of the film. This incorporation echoes the reform spirit aforementioned that tends to deconstruct established values to make socio-political and cultural experiments.

*Kulo Ndiko Sami* echoes the historical and cultural stigma attributed to the Sikep as explained in the first section. The relevance and validity of the film’s theme and argument to the reform spirit lay in the power of the documentary to tell the viewers that there is another Javanese suffering from manipulation and discrimination. The Sikep suffer from this injustice only for the reason that they are different from the mainstream Javanese and that the Sikep have their own traditional belief. I consider that this documentary endeavour by ordinary people (non-state initiative) to represent otherness of Javanese culture and society is a breakthrough in the post-New Order era. It happens because the mainstream representation of refined, aristocratic and

moralistic Javanese-ness had been strongly encouraged by the New Order regime for years. This is crucial mainly because the documentary itself, to a certain extent, is a form of self-representation of the Sikep. The film depicts what the Sikep are different from; what they are similar to the mainstream Javanese; and what they have been through in such a situation, the discrimination. With the fall of the New Order regime, such a filming found its momentum to materialise. The first decade of the reform era was full of cultural attempts, including cinematic self-representation to project diversity and plurality in Indonesia (Heeren, 2012; Nugroho and Herlina S., 2015).

#### **7.4. Conclusion**

From the analysis above, it is therefore understandable why the imagined Javanese-ness of *Wayang Kulit*, *Ksatria Kerajaan*, and *Bathik* in chapter six is distinctive from what is projected in *Jamu* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami* in this chapter. The former is based on the attempts to revisit and reinterpret the mainstream traditional Javanese values and the court-based ones contextually. The latter takes its point of departure from deviating the traditional values in *Jamu*, and from introducing other angles of Javanese-ness in *Kulo Ndiko Sami* that is different from the mainstream and the court-based ones. This suggests that there are expressions and interpretations of Javanese-ness other than the prevalent one. Furthermore, it also explains why to project Javanese-ness that is different from the New Order's construct, the filmmakers of both documentaries rhetorically need to employ alternative representational regime that supports the films' marginalised depictions of being Javanese.

The following chapter eight describes a different representation of Javanese-ness. The documentary examined is *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*. This film describes Javanese-ness from the vantage point of a village tradition, *nyadran*. The tradition has experienced a transformation. The change of *nyadran* articulates a collective acceptance of the socio-

political and historical change in Indonesia. In addition, the film communicates the villagers' need to maintain their socio-cultural values, the legacy of the past. I view that the villager's need and the historical change rendering the transformation result in a representation of negotiated Javaneseeness.



**CHAPTER VIII**  
**NEGOTIATED JAVANESENESS**

In chapter six, we had the representation of Javanese cultural identity that was heavily based on the traditional Javanese values. In chapter seven, we had the image of the marginalised Javanese that did not celebrate the mainstream traditional Javanese values. Further, to verify my overall hypothesis wherein images of Javanese cultural identity are not single, but heterogeneous, amorphous, and transient, this chapter examines a different representation of Javanese cultural identity. Javanese portrayed in this chapter is based on the convergence of a Javanese socio-cultural tradition, *nyadran*, and the effect of the political shift in Indonesia in 1967. This political change encouraged the transformation of the *nyadran* tradition. I call such a representation the third model of Javanese.

*Nyadran à la Sorowajan* expresses this kind of image. This documentary portrays the image of being a Javanese that emerges from a Javanese village socio-cultural tradition called *nyadran*. *Nyadran* is a derivative of a funerary rite of Hindu origin. The villagers of Sorowajan have transformed one of the rituals in the tradition, from the old village-cleansing ritual (*merti desa*) into the interfaith gathering. The film conveys that this transformed manifestation is a form of adjustment to the political situation during the New Order regime. I consider that the transformation implies a meeting point, a negotiation, between the villagers' need to maintain socio-cultural values and their unavoidable acquiescence to the regime change in 1967.

I divide this chapter into four sections. Section one describes the nature of the third model of Javanese. This part also discusses the extent the political shift in 1967 transformed *nyadran*. In other words, I would like to focus on why the 1967's regime change, from the Old Order regime to the New Order regime, was the primary causative factor rendering the transformation of the *nyadran* tradition in Sorowajan. From this socio-cultural and political vantage point, the altered form of *nyadran* represents negotiated Javanese. This image of being a Javanese articulates the need

of the Sorowajan villagers to retain the past values and belief of the *nyadran* tradition, respect and harmony, which are expressed in a new form, the interfaith gathering, because of the political constraints in 1967. Section two discusses the film's regime of cultural representation. Section three assesses the relevance of the film's argument to the contexts of the early reform period. In other words, the significance of *nyadran* to the Javanese rural societies in the initial phases of the reform era Indonesia is also an essential point of departure in this analysis. The last section is the conclusion of the analysis.

### **8.1. Javaneseeness à la Sorowajan: Synthesising the Past and the Present**

*Nyadran à la Sorowajan* represents Javaneseeness in its distinct way compared to the images delineated in the previous two models. The difference suggests that Javaneseeness, as underlined in this thesis, is a matter of perceiving what it means to be a Javanese. Moreover, the way to express Javaneseeness in this film is through *nyadran* tradition. I have explained in chapter four that *nyadran* with its interfaith gathering is a socio-cultural expression to perpetuate Javanese identity. The perpetuation of identity communicates a sense of connection to and continuity with the past. The preservation of the values, namely harmony (*rukun*) and respect (*hormat*), as well as the belief that is respecting the dead, as explained in chapter five, vocalises this perpetuation of Javanese identity.

#### **8.1.1. Old Spirit in the Contemporary Manifestation**

*Nyadran à la Sorowajan* gives expression to Javaneseeness as a construct shaped by two interests. As mentioned above, the Sorowajan villagers need to preserve their past values and belief of the *nyadran* tradition. They also had to modify the old form of their *nyadran* tradition affected by the 1967's political change. When the New Order

of Suharto replaced the Old Order regime of Sukarno, the New Order issued a policy that regulated the Indonesian citizens to embrace religions formally. The New Order regime executed this policy through a decree issued by the People's Consultative Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia in 1967. The five religions "officially" acknowledged by the state, Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Basri, one of the film's social actors, conveys this in a testimony presented in a close-up shot to heighten the significance of his explanation. He testifies that in the *post-coup d'état* period, social chaos and public disorder still pervaded the nation. This situation made the general public of Indonesia disoriented and suspicious of one another. Then, the new regime immediately took some actions. One of them was to pressure the commoners to seek a religion officially permitted by the government. Therefore, the commoners chose one that suited them. The commoners did it partly to avoid the suspicion of the New Order regime if by any chance the commoners were considered related to the communist party, which had been involved in the coup.

Daniel Dhakidae, a senior journalist and cultural activist in Indonesia, mentions that with this law, the New Order regime used the identity cards of the citizens to monitor them administratively. The New Order regime did this to identify those from any potential threats of non-cooperative and subversive ideologies, such as Communism and Marxism. These ideologies, in the New Order's viewpoint, could destabilise the regime's developmental policy. The New Order regime manipulated the decree of the People's Consultative Assembly above as the regime's strategy was to incorporate religions as an ideological discourse of the state. The purpose was to sustain the New Order regime's power. The state's hegemony here encompassed a wide range of fields in law, politic, economic as well as social and cultural lives. This made the New Order regime as the only regime of truth at the time to justify almost all

aspects of life (Dhakidae, 2003, p. 514).

*Nyadran à la Sorowajan* through its voice-over narration indicates the effect of the decree and the New Order's developmental policy towards the old form of the *nyadran* tradition in Sorowajan. The result is the marginalisation of irrational customs and traditions as conveyed below.

Bloody *coup d'état* in 1965 significantly altered many aspects of life in Indonesian societies. The political shift occurred. The New Order regime replaced the Old Order. This new regime exclusively prioritised economic development. However, it required political stability as the first step. One of the methods was by managing and monitoring socio-cultural dimensions, among which was religion, and by developing education. As a result, all 'irrational' traditions were at stake as they were marginalised and diminished. Then, efficient and productive activities were encouraged and promulgated to support economic and developmental policy. The government and its apparatus became the most determinant agent in this social transformation

Because of the political and social transformation quoted above, traditions were adjusted to the decree and the developmental policy of the regime. I regard that this adjustment is a form of negotiation. It suggests that there has been alteration or modification in *nyadran* where entrenched elements of Javanese mysticism, such as incantations of old prayers and *mantrams* (chants) are discontinued. The villagers no longer express them communally but privately. By privately here, the film shows that the villagers do them individually or at least in the familial circle, but not in the official communal circle. It does not mean that they do them secretly. Some villagers still perform the old prayers and *mantrams* in a limited circle or a private setting.

The main emphasis of *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* is to show the magnitude and the peculiarity of the interfaith gathering at the tradition of *nyadran* in Sorowajan. The film also portrays a glimpse of the past ritual expressions of *nyadran*. At this point, the filmmakers come with the idea to illustrate the old prayers and *mantrams* of Javanism, namely Javanese mysticism (*kebatinan* or *kejawen*). The film show this in two scenes. The first scene is the scene of the cleaning of ancestors' graves ritual (*ruwahan*).

The second scene is that of *Qunut* prayer.

In the ancestors' graves cleaning rite, some shots show the old practice of Javanism. They demonstrate people individually or as a family cleaning their ancestors' graves. When the film shows these images, the voice-over narrates:

*Nyadran* is a tradition of the Javanese in accordance with the cult of veneration of the ancestors by visiting their graves to venerate them. It is also called *ruwahan* or *arwah* (deceased soul) held a month before the fasting month by Java-Arabic calendar. Cleaning the graves, sprinkling them with flowers, and praying for the ancestors are the essential expressions of this ritual. In the Javanese cosmology, this ritual is a bridge that connects micro-cosmos and macro-cosmos, the physical and the spiritual worlds. This is a harmonious rite of the universe with all of its dimensions, which becomes the spiritual centre of ancient Javanism.

The last shots of the scene depict an incense-burning rite by a grave covered in petals of white and red roses. While the film shows this, a voice of a man, reciting the old Javanese *mantram* is audible. This description suggests that the old practices with incense-burning and reciting *mantram* still linger in the private domain, but not a communal one, as illustrated in the *ruwahan* ritual.

In the *Qunut* prayer scene, the documentary also shows the illustration of the persistent practice of Javanism at the private level. The film demonstrates a villager, Dullah Kamari, who is reciting a *Qunut* prayer in his Javanese way. *Qunut* is an Arabic term denoting a supplication performed in a standing up position at the end of the formal Islamic prayer (Islamwebenglish, 2003, unpaginated). It is also considered as an informal prayer within the formal one (Gulevich, 2004, p. 151). The scene here portrays Kamari sitting cross-legged in a meditative pose with his palms on his lap facing upward. The scene shows red and white petals of roses, as well as buds of *melati* (jasmine) and *kenanga*<sup>13</sup>. It is framed in close-up and long shots. Most Javanese use these flowers in traditional Javanese ceremonies, including the ancestors' grave cleaning ritual. They

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<sup>13</sup> *Kenanga* is a tropical fragrant greenish-yellow flower whose oil is used in making perfumes also known as ylang-ylang flower

are placed on a piece of banana leaf lying between Kamari, who is wearing an old grey shirt and green-chequered sarong, and a burning candle in front of him. This representation of *Qunut* prayer performed by Kamari culturally confirms a syncretic form of Islamic faith and expressions of Javanese traditional belief and gesture.

Javaneseness illustrated in the film encapsulates an image of Javanese society who is still connected with its past. The villagers try to preserve its local tradition and values. At the same time, what the villagers perform through the interfaith gathering also expresses trails of the New Order's hegemony over religious matter. However, the documentary shows that villagers do not make these mixed interests into a conflict. Therefore, I call this image of Javanese society "negotiated Javaneseness". The ability of the Sorowajan villagers to modify the *nyadran* tradition shows their capacity to synthesise and accommodate diverse beliefs and interests within a cultural expression, the interfaith gathering. It is their consensus. Such capacity and attitude to modify a tradition and to embrace different interests by the Javanese is called "the cultural and ethical relativism of the Javanese" (Suseno, 1996; Beatty, 2002; Stange, 2009). Zoetmulder and Ricklefs (1995), experts of Javanese *wayang* and philosophy as well as the history of Java, maintain that this relativism exists because of a pantheistic quality in *kejawen* (Javanese religion or *kebatinan*). The pantheistic nature in *kejawen* regards heaven and earth are not eschatologically two separate worlds, but the presence of the former is reflected in the well-maintained environment of the latter (Zoetmulder and Ricklefs, 1995, p. 2). The interfaith gathering of the *nyadran* tradition in Sorowajan is a contemporary expression of this pantheistic trail.

As regards *kejawen*, Koentjaraningrat, a Javanese anthropologist, perceives that *kejawen* or *agami Jawi* (Javanese religion or Javanism) is a complex amalgamated set of traditional beliefs that are heavily in convergence with the Hindu-Buddhist mythical concepts (Koentjaraningrat, 1989, p. 312). He further asserts that the

cornerstones of Javanism teach Javanese people in a belief that divine powers are operating in the universe manifested in some concepts about life and death, spiritualism (the belief that living people can communicate with those who have died), animism, and dynamism. In Javanese traditional society, these beliefs are expressed in folklore, folk-belief, traditions and literature, and they are passed down from generation to generation (Koentjaraningrat, 1989, p. 319). In contemporary Indonesian movies, these beliefs are also expressed, such as in *Roro Mendut* (Priono, 1982), *Saur Sepuh* (Tantowi, 1988) (Heider, 1991; Said, Mcglynn and Boileau, 1991), *Opera Jawa/Requiem for Java* (Nugroho and Arturo, 2006) and *Setan Jawa* (Nugroho, 2016).

The documentary shows that *nyadran* tradition, in the cultural sense, is, without a doubt, the manifestation of Javanism. In the religious sense, it bridges the old Javanese concepts of life-death and spiritualism, and the different (foreign) religious teachings promoted by Islam and Christianity, for instance. We can see this in the interfaith gathering ritual held after the ancestors' grave cleaning rite. The ancestor's grave cleaning ritual and the interfaith gathering suggest a division in the tradition of *nyadran* in Sorowajan. While the ancestors' graves cleaning ritual becomes the space for the villagers to express Javanism with *mantram* and incense burning privately, the interfaith gathering with its alternate prayers of the Catholics, the Hindus, and the Muslims is the event to manifest the villagers' socio-political observance to the New Order's religious policy communally. This observant attitude is manifested by two things: the involvement of the village head of Sorowajan as the government's representative who delivers the opening remarks and the presence of village dignitaries representing different faiths 'acknowledged' by the government to lead the new rite.

*Assalaamu'alaikum wr.wb.* [Islamic greetings, May peace be upon you], Dear Mr Wasyi Akhir representing my fellow brothers and sisters of the Hindus, Mr Muhammad Badroni of the Muslim, and Mr Pujo Susanto of the Catholics. Let us praise to the Almighty God for His bounty so that we may gather here to



do what our ancestors, through our tradition, *nyadran*, have taught to us. Today's *nyadran*, by the Islamic and Javanese calendar, exactly falls on the 20th of *Ruwah* or *Sakhban* Month, or, by the international calendar, on the 18th of November.

*Nyadran à la Sorowajan* does not emphasise the contrast between the remaining practice of Javanism and the new ritual, the interfaith gathering. The documentary deliberately intends to show that these two practices co-exist harmoniously. What the film questions are the sustainability of these practices to face the on-going realities of the early reform era. The political, economic and social dynamism of the period was still unstable and uncertain for a better or worse Indonesia. The film brings up *nyadran* in this precarious condition. The voice-over rhetorically raises this question at the end of the film.

The villagers of Sorowajan seem to have been easily metamorphosed their spiritual life. Once they used to be harmonious with nature. Their harmonious-oriented life is now directed to establish inter-religious tolerance. They are diverse, and yet will it make them all united to encounter the difficulties of life they face, and at the same time enhance their humanity through a communal gathering they have done? It indeed is a challenge for the villagers of Sorowajan who have experimented with their inter-religious communal prayer to face hardships and uncertainty in the future.

From the quote above, the film does not question the contradiction of the old and the new practices. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* raises a doubt whether the co-existence of these practices could support the togetherness of the villagers to live harmoniously.

The documentary spotlights the harmonious co-existence of practices of Javanism and the contemporary religions as shown in the different attitudes of the villagers performed in the ancestors' graves cleaning ritual and the interfaith gathering. I tend to perceive that the film represents the attitudes as a cultural appreciation in expressing Javaneseness rather than a cultural ambivalence of the villagers. Attempts to preserve the socio-cultural values of harmony and respect and the belief in venerating the deceased souls in *nyadran* are the legacy of the past. These values and beliefs have

found their symbiosis with the mainstream religions of Hinduism, Islam and Catholicism in the village, an example of acculturation.

However, with the regime change in 1967, the acculturation appears to have shown the modern face of *nyadran* through its interfaith gathering. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* articulates that Javanese-ness, by the motive. It deals with preservation of values and belief that still endures. By the expression, Javanese-ness is no longer similar as practices of Javanism is no longer dominant. Javanese-ness demonstrated in the film results from a negotiation of the need to continue the socio-cultural legacy and the adjustment to the effect of the political change in 1967. The villagers adapted to the decree of the New Order regime to oversee religions and to the regime's developmental policy. The film shows that cultural form or expression is dissimilar to the past form, while the motive is unchanged. The interfaith gathering has become a convention, a contemporary rite, in the series of rituals of *nyadran* tradition as the film shows.

#### 8.1.2. Regime Change and Marginalisation of Irrational Traditions

The change of the regime in 1967 had significantly taken part in the transformation of *nyadran* tradition among other common factors such as the worse economic condition of the Old Sukarno's regime and the increasing social mobility from the rural to the urban areas. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* strongly indicates the impact of this regime change in some scenes. For example, the film presents a testimony of a witness who ever experienced the old village cleansing ritual (*merti desa* or *sedekah bumi*) in the *nyadran* tradition. He is Muhadi. He wears batik and sits in front of a *wayang kulit* character in the background scene while giving his testimony. Muhadi mentions he experienced the celebration of the old ritual from 1955 to 1967. In those years, the rite of the village cleansing was held after the ancestors' graves cleaning

ritual that marked the commencement of *nyadran* in Sorowajan.

In the village cleansing ritual, the accentuation of Javanese mystic rite and shadow puppet (*wayang kulit*) performance were obligatory in the old tradition. Muhadi said that at those times, a local leather company always sponsored the shadow puppet performance. The form of the sponsorship was to finance the puppeteer and his crew while the responsibility to provide refreshments for them lay in the hands of the villagers. Muhadi also adds that the story performed was *Sri Mulih* (the Return of the Crop Goddess) as it suited their farming environments. Through the performance, the villagers symbolically expected that their crops would be successful and abundant in the harvest times.

The scene describing the fate of the village cleansing ritual (*merti desa*) in the rise of the New Order regime also suggests the impact of the regime change that rendered the transformation of the tradition. While the sequence starts with shots illustrating various religious building constructions in *Sorowajan*, the voice-over narrator confirms how the political transformation engendered the socio-cultural change. The narrator gives commentary that non-productive and irrational traditions were left unappreciated in favour of the economically productive and rational ones. The New Order initiated this developmental policy by establishing the political stability, and this was achieved through several methods. One of them was through setting up relations between religion and the state. Religion was no longer purely a private and individual domain, but the government interfered in it. Such a condition is mentioned in the intertitles following the narration above.

In 1967, two years after the [1965] *coup d'état*, the New Order government through the People's Consultative Assembly issued a political decision that strongly endorsed each citizen to adhere to a religion and preferably choose one of the five "official" religions, Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The policy then enabled the religions to recruit new adherents intensively and directed them as desired by the government.

The intertitles above reveal the regime's design to diminish irrational traditions heavily contained by traditional beliefs and non-productive activities. This is to say that the policy politically situated the commoners, in this case, Sorowajan villagers, to leave their old beliefs and to follow one of the acknowledged religions above.

The film shows Basri, an informant of the Sorowajan Hindu community, who wears white garment speaking with soft and calm manners about the past, which is framed in close-up shot. This close-up shot conveys the significance of his testimony. As was explained in the first subsection, Basri affirms the interference of the New Order government in its citizens' religious affairs. The political history of Indonesia describes that one of the attitudes of the communist party was to be anti-religion. The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) recruited rural peasants, labours, and the urban poor as its main supporters although there were also some middle and upper classes, intellectuals and military personnel. In total, members of the Indonesian Communist Party reached three million in 1965 (Hunter, 2007, p. 110). *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* points out that the political transformation in 1967 crucially accelerated the transformation of *nyadran* itself in Sorowajan.

From the socio-cultural and political vantage point, the rise of the New Order regime was a momentous event in Indonesia. It was the moment when the regime strongly emphasised its own state culture. State culture here refers to what Fachry Ali, an Indonesian cultural historian and socio-political analyst, defines as "a set or a fabric of meanings through which the state elite take control of the development of people's ideas, and particularly of their notion of how the state should be organised" (Ali, 1997, p. 186). Ali further mentions that to implement this state culture, the New Order, therefore, needed to have "elements of beliefs, expressive symbols, and a set of particular values" (Ali, 1997, p. 187).

About this, the New Order introduced the imagined Java-centric model of

Indonesian society. Then, imposing state culture became a crucial task for the regime. The central elites in Jakarta believed that be effectively hegemonic in society, they needed to emphasise their system of ideas and beliefs. This effective hegemony was pivotal to create political stability and security as the basis for economic and societal developments (see also Langenberg, 1990; S. E. Wieringa, 2003). The regime only applied a single approach to impose its state culture, the imperative command culture (Foulcher, 1990; Antlöv and Cederroth, 1994; Pemberton, 1994; Ali, 1997; Jones, 2013). Then, this Java-centric model (aristocrat) with its imperative command culture became the face of the New Order's state culture.

As mentioned above *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*, through its voice-over, expresses the marginalisation of irrational and non-productive traditions by the New Order regime. This marginalisation accords with the creed of the regime. The New Order regime believed that an economic development was the only mean to transform society. The elite of the regime thought that state culture also had its foothold in the economic development and social transformation. Ali reveals this as, "the implementation of economic development fits its cultural calculations" of the regime (Ali, 1997, p. 193). In this regard, I need to reiterate what Ali Moertopo<sup>14</sup> posited about the economic-oriented cultural developments of the New Order as mentioned in chapter one.

The New Order must be able to execute cultural tasks that are important, executing cultural borrowing (acculturation) in the passage of world history both now and in the future. This is the cultural nucleus that we must formulate now. This includes thoughts and planning connected to scientific and technological progress, economic development, and the development of social systems [...] progress in language and the arts and development connected with religion (Moertopo, 1978 in Jones, 2013, p. 122).

This New Order strategy seemed to be promising to bring Indonesian society to

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<sup>14</sup> Suharto's chief advisor and personal assistant

modernity. Ironically, Pemberton in his *On the Subject of Java* indicates that some elites of the New Order themselves secretly practised some rituals of Javanism in some places in Java considered “sacred” (Pemberton, 1994, p. 288). It is contradictory to the regime’s developmental creed. The regime’s economic-oriented cultural development was executed in the imperative command culture with Java-centric mindset. To guarantee the success of the command culture and to prevent any potential opposition that would jeopardise political stability and economic development, the New Order regime recruited loyal military officers of middle and high ranks for key positions in the government hierarchies. Many scholars have written this that the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI), especially the Army (*Angkatan Darat*) played a key role in both the inception and the sustainability of the New Order regime. It is noticeable that the New Order’s governance style tended to be authoritarian, feudal and militaristic (S. Wieringa, 2003; Vatikiotis, 2003).

*Nyadran à la Sorowajan* metaphorically represents this militaristic style of the regime in the early scene of the sequence addressing the fate of the old ritual *merti desa* in the New Order regime. The scene shows a figure wearing green paramilitary trousers with black combat boots stamping on some chickens. The figure grabs a chicken’s neck with his right hand making the chicken helplessly strangled after it cries. This illustration suggests the authoritarian power exercised by the regime. The scene metaphorically justifies the representation of the New Order as “the boots” and the people of Indonesia as “the stamped and strangled chicken”. This is a rhetorical strategy used in the film. Also, the representation signifies power relations and the reason for me to contextualise the political aspect contributing to the old ritual transformation in this thesis. As mentioned previously, the New Order’s policy in 1967 through the People’s Consultative Assembly obliged every Indonesian citizen to assume one of the five “official” religions. The chicken-boots scene conveys the hegemonic and

imperative state culture of the New Order regime. The scene further indicates the centrality of the regime change that rendered the transformation of *nyadran*.

## **8.2. Domesticated Regime of Representation in *Nyadran à la Sorowajan***

As outlined at the outset, this section explains the regime of cultural representation of *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*. Unlike the essentialist and the alternative regimes of cultural representation, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*, by its socio-cultural theme, reveals the characteristics of the domesticated regime of representation. The documentary shows the interfaith gathering in the *nyadran* tradition in Sorowajan as a contemporary socio-cultural practice. This contemporary form articulates the domestication of the old *merti desa* ritual by the New Order, the domesticating regime. Siapera (2010) argues that domesticated regime of representation conceives and seems to accommodate differences as well as a possible hybridity from the characteristics of a dominant view or culture. The operation of this domesticated regime can be summed up as follows.

The main themes within this regime include, firstly the stripping of difference of any threatening qualities by highlighting its folkloric dimensions; secondly, an emphasis on sameness to the detriment of any actual engagement with difference; thirdly, a kind of hybridity, a mixture of races/cultures/ethnicities, which insists on the ultimate subordination of difference (Siapera, 2010, p. 140).

With such a mechanism, the main objective of the domesticated regime of representation is to homogenise and negate differences. The representation is achieved by over-emphasising similarities and by removing dangerous elements. As a result, any differences would be marginalised and then overlooked. Also, they are slowly diminished, and ultimately, the differences will perish.

*Nyadran à la Sorowajan* conveys these features in the scenes describing the significance of social harmony through the interfaith gathering in the *nyadran* tradition. On the surface, the film depicts the religious and the social harmony in

Sorowajan. However, when I observe the film more closely from the socio-cultural and political vantage point, the documentary also manifests the characteristics of the domesticated regime. This is concerned with how Javanese-ness itself is represented through the film. The way the film depicts the old *merti desa* ritual through flashback and links it with the current condition through testimonies provides the access for an interpretation of Javanese-ness. I perceive such representation of Javanese-ness as the result of a representation from the domesticating regime, the New Order. The New Order regime did not necessarily prohibit *nyadran* tradition, but the tradition was adjusted to meet the ideological discourse of truth of the state at that time.

As mentioned in section one, the New Order regime legitimised the five religions to justify the right of the state in meddling with religious aspects of any cultural practices in Indonesia (Dhakidae, 2003; Picard and Madinier, 2011). The employment of the flashback and the testimonies provide a way for reading the film that the New Order regime had significantly contributed to accelerating the transformation of the tradition. The testimonies of Muhadi and Basri, the voice-over commentary, and the intertitles indicate the contribution of the regime in the transformation as explained in section one. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* suggests that the irrational qualities of the tradition, in the face of the formal religions co-opted by the New Order regime, are regarded as a threat to the regime's policies on political stability, economic development and modernisation.

The film shows that the irrational qualities of *nyadran* here correspond with the old practices of Javanism, bearing no significant contribution to Javanese society in general. In the documentary, the old practices of Javanism refer to the representations of *mantram* incantation and incense-burning well as the eradication of the old *merti desa* ritual in *nyadran* tradition. The old *merti desa* ritual is entrenched with Javanism. The New Order regime considered these sorts of Javanism practices "uncivilised" and



hindered state-engineered development and modernity (Jones, 2013, p. 122). The illustrations of Javanese *mantram*, incense burning, and the flashback of the villagers' tradition and life were often regarded detrimental in the face of the formal religions. The New Order regime treated *nyadran* more in its folkloric dimension wherein the tradition was viewed more as a symbolic cultural legacy of the Javanese than as a religious expression of the formal religions. The strategy of how the representational regime operates indicates this attitude, "the stripping of the difference of any threatening qualities by highlighting its folkloric dimensions" (Siapera, 2010, p. 140).

*Nyadran à la Sorowajan* also demonstrates other evidence of the domesticated regime of cultural representation. Siapera mentions that the second strategy of the domesticated representation lies in, "an emphasis on sameness to the detriment of any actual engagement with the difference" (Siapera, 2010, p. 140). The film stresses the cornerstone of social harmony. The interfaith gathering itself demonstrates this quality. In other words, the interfaith gathering reflects the interest of the New Order regime for both political and societal stabilisation. The event describes a shared outcome in that social conflicts can be avoided. The "sameness" of socio-cultural expression is achieved, and therefore the status quo is preserved. The gathering evokes commonality and togetherness as a contemporary Javanese society. The interfaith gathering was established as the developmental policy that the New Order imposed also included the state monitoring and guiding of religions and belief-systems. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* demonstrates the emphasis on the shared end goal, namely social stability, through a form of ritual acknowledged by the authority.

The ritual of interfaith gathering to a certain degree reflects a method of the New Order regime to bridge differences among religions at the theological and dogmatic level. This method brings values of humanity and fraternity to fore as its common ground. Such a method seems to be very optimistic and positive as a product of the state

interference of religion as a private domain. However, managing the differences of belief-system has been a common attitude deeply ingrained in Javanese society. Javanism itself is a product of hybridity (Mulder, 1983; Brakel, 2004; Ricklefs, 2006).

With this, we come to the third strategy in identifying the domesticated representation. Siapera conveys that the third strategy to present a domesticated regime of representation is by showing “a kind of hybridity, a mixture of races/cultures/ethnicities, which insists on the ultimate subordination of difference” (Siapera, 2010, p. 140). In this regard, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* bespeaks how old expressions of Javanism are domesticated by the political factor. They were transformed into a new manifestation, the interfaith gathering. This interfaith gathering, then, found its justification. However, the film through its voice-over commentary expresses its challenging tone to the practice of the interfaith gathering in the *nyadran* tradition. As noted previously, the voice-over questions whether or not the interfaith gathering will endure in the future. The film does not lament for the transformation but raises an anxiety of its sustainability. Thus, this cultural content of the film, from the cinematic standpoint, is established using the visual narration that is purely “observational”. As the voice-over commentary is the means by which the film’s argument is conveyed.

As the political domestication was the case, the villagers of Sorowajan, then, modified *nyadran* tradition. They did this partly to meet the desire of the New Order regime for stability, development and modernity heavily measured from the regime’s economic vantage point. The interfaith gathering can be read as the presence of the state authority at the communal level. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* also suggests a bargaining position of the villagers to preserve their old values and belief in the accepted form. The documentary shows that a few people still practice the old ways of Javanism at the individual level. Such representation articulates that the degree of

neutrality, a non-judgemental voice to the enduring practices of Javanism. The film describes the lingering presence of Javanese cosmology in Sorowajan. Although the film remains neutral, the voice-over commentary still reflects its appreciative sense of the Javanese cosmology by using the word "harmonious" in describing it.

*Nyadran* is a tradition of the Javanese to visit the graves of the dead to pray and sprinkle them with flowers. It is also known as *ruwahan* or *arwah* month before the fasting month by Arabic and Javanese calendar. Cleaning graves, and sprinkle them with flowers and pay homage to the ancestors are the very essence of this tradition. In the Javanese cosmology, this rite is a bridge that connects micro-cosmos and macro-cosmos, the physical and the spiritual worlds. This is a harmonious rite of the universe with its multi-dimensions, which becomes the spiritual centre of the Javanese.

### **8.3. Relevance of the Documentary's Argument to the Early Reform Context**

This section examines the relevance of the argument and claim of *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* to the conditions of the early reform era. I have mentioned in chapter five that the argument of the film is to show a fact that tradition is inseparable from the villagers' life. Through the ritual expressions of *nyadran*, they need to manifest their sense of togetherness and belonging on the grounds of respect and harmony that apply at both individual and social levels. The film also claims that the interfaith gathering with its performance of communal prayers from different religions works as the substitute of the past village cleansing ritual (*merti desa*).

Framing *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* in the context of early reform Indonesia stems my curiosity prompting the question: "Why is *nyadran* in Sorowajan worth documenting?" In this regard, the film shows that firstly the values and belief of the tradition still play an important role in rural Javanese societies. Secondly, the film tends to prompt the viewers to reconsider whether or not such values and belief are still

relevant in the climate of the Indonesian reform. As I often mentioned in the previous chapters, the climate of the reform was featured by uncertain political and economic conditions and by the weakening of the centralistic governance, but the celebration of regionalism.

In this particular way, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* expresses an attitude of the villagers to hold on to the past and to encounter the uncertain transformation of the early reform stage. From this angle, I argue that the documentary articulates what Ricoeur calls a subjective truth, an understanding of an experiential human truth (Ricoeur, 1969, pp. 351–352). The film itself tries to portray the *nyadran* tradition in Sorowajan “objectively”. The film, by content, philosophically implies a subjective truth of the villagers to conduct their *nyadran* tradition in its new practice, the interfaith gathering. In this practice, they preserve the traditional values and belief of *nyadran* – respect, harmony and venerating the deceased – and respond to the political change in 1967. Such a socio-cultural practice continues to the early period of the reform era as the film illustrates. It is necessary to clarify what the subjective truth here suggests, and how the film expresses this subjective truth. This is aimed to find the film’s relevance to the socio-political and cultural contexts of the reform era.

### 8.3.1. Articulation of Subjective Truth

The subjectivity I address here has nothing to do with the subjective or expressive aspect of the filmmaker’s direct involvement with the social actors as that in performative mode (Nichols, 2010, p. 32). It is related to the subject matter of the film itself, which is represented in such a way to communicate the film’s argument. Nichols (2010) mentions that the notion of subjectivity in a documentary is closely related to how the documentary voice produces belief. He further maintains that “Subjectivity itself compels belief: instead of an aura of detached truthfulness we have

the honest admission of a partial but important, situated but impassioned perspective” (Nichols, 2010, p. 81). The belief is achieved using three rhetorical discourse strategies: to be credible, convincing, and compelling (Nichols, 2010, p. 80). This is to say that an interplay of perspectives and their arrangement construct this belief-producing documentary voice.

*Nyadran* tradition with its rituals of ancestors’ graveyard cleaning and interfaith gathering is the experiential human truth of Sorowajan villagers. The experiential human truth here concerns the villagers’ attitudes towards the values and the belief they try to preserve, that is harmony, respect, and venerating the dead. From this vantage point, *nyadran* transmits its subjective aspect. Through the personal testimonies of the social actors and the recording of the rituals in *nyadran*, the documentary does not only try to validate the *nyadran* tradition as a factual socio-cultural activity in Sorowajan, but these devices also imply the villagers’ perspectives about *nyadran*. I discern the *nyadran* tradition here as a manifestation of the villagers' understanding of their socio-cultural life and religious experience pertinent to harmony, respect and venerating the deceased. Although *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* fulfils the criteria of an ethnographic film and the film expresses it in the opening titles, the documentary still leaves traces of subjective and personal attitudes demonstrated in it. The documentary clearly illustrates the villagers' appreciation and observance of the values and belief by practising the ancestors’ grave cleaning ritual privately and joining the interfaith gathering communally.

In other words, *nyadran* is the outward expression of what the villagers believe to be unerring about *nyadran*. The *nyadran* tradition with its modified ritual (the interfaith gathering), as testified by Bardiman, Wasi Akhir, Muhammad Badroni, Muhadi and Basri, is necessitated to express what they think right. This is what I consider subjective truth. The subjective truth here is the truth of mental attitude and

experience of the villagers to share a view on the significant values and belief of *nyadran*. By having a shared view of the significance of the values, such a subjective truth becomes a shared truth, a communal truth. However, I do not perceive it as an objective truth in the sense that *nyadran*, by its form and meaning, is unchangeable and universally acceptable. Harmony, respect and venerating the deceased may be possessed and demonstrated in different cultures. The ontological and epistemological reasons lying under the values and belief can be different and are manifested distinctively. This is because interpretation, experience, and environment where the villagers live take part in giving meanings to the values and belief. Therefore, in my view, such values cannot be treated as objective ideas in this regard.

The villager's subjective truth of harmony (*rukun*), respect (*hormat*) and venerating the dead is then expressed individually and communally. Most of the villagers have followed the transformation of *merti desa* into interfaith gathering communally, while some of them also still practice Javanism individually. In this context, I consider subjectivity from the cultural content of the film, *nyadran* tradition. I do not read subjectivity from the vantage point of the filmmakers' psychic involvement in the process of filming that is desiring, fascinating and fantasizing the *nyadran* tradition. This filmmaker's personality influence is the kind of subjectivity that Michael Renov mostly explains in his *The Subject of Documentary* (2004).

Renov argues that it is impossible to attain an objective account of documentary projection and a question of audience experience in a documentary film. He points out that the distinction between "subjective" and "objective" knowledge in the tradition of European intellectual history is not something new. Renov infers that in the scholastic tradition, "subjective" had been understood as "things are in themselves (from the sense of subject as substance), and "objective" was as "things presented to consciousness (thrown before the mind)" (Renov, 2004, p. 173). Their meanings

changed after the emergence of positivism in the late nineteenth century. “Objective” is related to something “factual, fair-minded, and reliable”, while “subjective” is construed as something impressionistic rather than factual, and is influenced by “personal feelings and relatively unreliable” (Renov, 2004, p. 173).

In the history of documentary filmmaking, objective and scientific orientation with its journalistic style is perceived as something inherent in this non-fiction genre. Renov argues that this is not true for the spectre of subjectivity, even in the observational mode of documentary (direct cinema) and Jean Rouch’s *cinéma vérité*, cannot be expunged. This spectre of subjectivity, which can be in the forms of the filmmaker’s personality and interpretation of actualities when filming in these “objective and scientific” approaches, is seen as “a kind of contamination, to be expected but minimised” (Renov, 2004, p. 174). Subjectivity is no longer perceived as such in the post- *cinéma vérité* (1970-1990) onwards. Objective stance of a documentary film has now been replaced by a more subjective stance where a personalist angle of the filmmaker and actors involved as well as the commitment to the subject matter of the film are celebrated (Renov, 2004, p. 176)

In this thesis, the discussion of subjective truth relates to Ricoeur’s idea of interpretation and Hall’s notion of the fluidity of cultural meaning and identity as explained in chapter two. It is, therefore, the cultural content of the film that is examined in this thesis. Ricoeur asserts that belief, explanation and understanding are integral aspects of interpretation. Belief concerns the logic attitude Ricoeur applies to verify an assumption that leads to understanding. Explanation is a method while understanding is a result. He considers that understanding itself is an experiential human truth having a subjective dimension (Ricoeur, 1969, pp. 351–352). It is at this point that I consider *nyadran* tradition itself as an expressive form of Sorowajan villagers’ interpretation and understanding about their socio-cultural life and religious

experience.

As to Hall, the bridge between culture and representation resides in the need of human being to share meanings (Hall, 1997, p. 1). Cultural meaning encompasses mental, emotional, and practical aspects because members of a particular culture always give meanings to anything they share, from material objects to non-material ones. Therefore, there is no precisely the same cultural understanding of a particular cultural expression from time to time because members of a culture perceive, contextualise and interpret it differently. They always adjust it with their conditions throughout times (Hall, 1997, p. 3). For this reason, Hall contends that cultural identity is always unstable, polysemous, narrated, and imaginary (Du Gay and Hall, 1996, pp. 3–4). The transformation of *nyadran* shown in the film is the result of the negotiation of two interests: preserving the interpretation and understanding of the villagers' social, cultural as well as religious experience and adapting to the socio-political transformation.

### 8.3.2. Representation of Subjective Truth

Some scenes demonstrate this subjective truth, an altered understanding or interpretation to express the significance of socio-cultural and religious experience as a Javanese community. First, we can see the articulation of subjective truth at the communal level. In this regard, the interfaith gathering is the expression of this subjective truth. For instance, while the documentary shows the villagers coming to the event and greeting their fellows, asynchronous voice-over, saxophone, and gamelan music are audible. As was explained before, voice-over is employed in *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* although the filmmaker claims it an ethnographic documentary. The role of the voice-over is to help viewers understand the film narrative. The voice-over commentary gives an introduction to the nature of the gathering and what is about to



happen.

The villagers of Sorowajan do not do *nyadran* as a ritual to 'cleanse' their village (*merti desa*) as they did in the past, but they transform it into a communal gathering aimed to advance their tolerance in a form of interfaith communal prayer. Three village dignitaries representing the Muslim, the Catholics, and the Hindus lead the prayer. What has changed? Moreover, how do they all make sense of it?

From this voice-over narration, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* informs the viewers a fact that to express the villagers' understanding of the significance of *nyadran* in a Javanese community, the villagers did this through the ritual of *merti desa*, the cleansing village in the past. The old ritual of *merti desa* is no longer practised in the *nyadran* tradition of the present time.

Where is the subjective truth here? The fact of transformation itself indicates subjectivity. The transformation of *nyadran* communicates an alteration, a deviation from the past convention wherein *merti desa* was an integral part of *the nyadran* tradition. In other words, the transformation of the tradition was a reinterpretation of the old form of *nyadran*, which was then communally accepted and practised. The transformation was instigated by the imposition of the New Order's developmental and religious policies. The policies situated the villagers to adjust their outward expression of the *nyadran* tradition to the policies. They did this to accommodate the "official" religions permitted by the New Order regime and to leave the outdated (irrational) expressions of their Javanese incantations and *mantrams* in the *nyadran* tradition, at least communally. As a result, they modified their old *merti desa* ritual. I view that such a decision is a method to preserve the basic values and belief of *nyadran* – social harmony, respect, and venerating the deceased – in a novel form. The villagers think that the interfaith gathering is agreeable with the interfering and policing spirit of the New Order regime.

The shots of the villagers attending the event and exchanging greetings, to a

certain degree, express the willingness of the villagers to participate in the new ritual of their *nyadran* tradition. Such a social gesture indicates the villagers' attitude to accept the transformation, the interfaith gathering, in their *nyadran* tradition. In other words, the scene shows the acceptance of the villagers to the modified socio-cultural and religious expression while maintaining the purpose of the gathering, tolerance. Tolerance in Javanese worldview is regarded as a condition where mental attitudes of harmony and respect converge and are expressed outwardly in the social life (Pranoto, 2009; Endraswara, 2013b).

The scene depicting the series of the Catholic, the Hindus and the Muslim prayers further communicates the subjective truth of the interfaith gathering. The scene demonstrates that after the village head gives his remark to open the gathering, the village dignitaries, representing diverse religions coexisting in the village, commence the prayer rite. Each of them leads the prayer for the whole village in each religious manner. Then, shots of religious dignitaries leading the prayer sessions appear in long and close-up shots to heighten their importance. The village Catholic elder, Mr Pujo Susanto, first begins the prayer; then comes the Hindu priest, Wasyi Akhir; and lastly the Muslim *kyai*, Muhammad Badroni takes his turn. While each of them is leading the prayer, the villagers embracing the same religion as that of each dignitary respond to him while others solemnly respect it.

The series of prayers scene above represents the new ritual of the villagers to express *nyadran*. They have discontinued the old *merti desa* ritual where the expression of thanksgiving and supplication to divine power had to be publically performed using Javanese incantations and *mantrams* as the medium. The transformation relates to the political change in 1967 as explained in the previous section. The usage of the main religions as the medium to preserve their *nyadran* tradition illuminates the flexibility and the strategy of the villagers to bridge the values

and the belief of the past, which are still necessitated and relevant in their contemporary life. The interfaith gathering ritual becomes the tradition, the “modern” ritual of the socio-cultural and religious experience of the Sorowajan villagers. The villagers have made sense of the interfaith gathering, accepted it, and considered it correct. This is where the subjectivity, the new interpretation of those values and belief, is manifested in a new form.

Although they have disposed of the old ritual in the public performance and have incorporated fashions of the main religions instead, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* shows a remaining feature of the past. In the interfaith gathering scenes, the villagers still hold on to bringing *tumpeng* (traditional Javanese coned rice) and other foods to be shared in the gathering. Provision of foods is obligatory in all Thanksgiving rituals *à la* Javanese (*slametan*) (Hecht and Biondo, 2010, p. 190). This paraphernalia is the expressive legacy of the old ritual for the communal feast. It is called *ambengan* (Raharjo, 2015, unpaginated). The documentary demonstrates this feast after the prayer ritual. Some people distribute the foods, and then the villagers gratefully consume them on the spot. The villagers also receive *ambengan*, boxes of foods, before going home. The scene expresses a spirit of mutualism exhibited by the villagers. There are shots recording pleasant social intercourse that occur among adults and children while some people are serving their fellow-villagers with foods and drinks. Also, it is observable how at the end of the festivity, all of the blessed foods as the communal offerings are distributed to the villagers to be taken home. People smile, shake hands and greet each other before leaving the venue contentedly. Togetherness and fraternity are strongly expressed in this scene.

The testimonial scenes also indicate subjective truth where the values and the belief of the past are preserved in the spirit of the main religious fashions. The scenes depict religious activities conducted in groups or families where they pray for the

deceased souls of their ancestors and the harmonious life of the village in the night before the interfaith gathering. As a case in point, the Muslim dignitary, Muhammad Badroni, gives a testimony that he has been the leading figure in the Islamic community for more than ten years. He testifies that during his leadership, social and religious life goes well. The villagers are close to one another, and they live harmoniously while the interfaith gathering continues to be held on every 20<sup>th</sup> day of the *Ruwah* month. He also claims that he is the one initiating all villagers, be they in groups or families, to pray for their ancestors and the harmony of the villagers based on their religions in every evening before the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the *Ruwah* month. This has been the custom ever since. The subjective quality of this custom lies in how this religious activity complements the *nyadran* tradition. It comes from one's idea under the motive for honouring the ancestors and deceased souls as well as the social harmony of the village. Then, the villagers accepted and practised it.

Following Badroni's testimony, the documentary illustrates how the Hindu people led by Wasyi Akhir conduct their prayer and offering in their ritual. In the context of this new custom, Akhir underlines the complementary nature of this prayer and offering to *nyadran* tradition. He mentions that in Hinduism there is *Sradha* or *Sradhanan*, an activity and an occasion held to connect people to their ancestors with prayers and offerings. The film also shows the evening prayer of the Catholics, the family of Pujo Susanto. The scene shows Pujo Susanto, his wife and their three children are sitting around a table and praying the Catholic way in Javanese. The film also demonstrates the Muslim villagers are congregating around inside a mosque hall and doing their *tahlilan* or *dhikr*. *Tahlilan* or *dhikr* is the repetition of certain phrases to praise God in Islamic tradition as a form of meditation (Gulevich, 2004; Adamec, 2009). The representations of the prayers of different religions illuminate the extent the religions have penetrated and reconfigured the old Javanese style ritual into the forms

presently understood by the villagers.

*Nyadran à la Sorowajan* also demonstrates the representation of subjective truth at the private level. As explained in the previous section, the film shows that some villagers still practised Javanism individually. Two events suggest this, namely the practice of *mantram* incantation and incense burning at the ancestors' cleaning graveyard ritual, and the Javanised *Qunut* prayer *à la* Kamari. Unlike the subjective truth of the interfaith gathering whose main feature is the transformational quality to justify the preservation of the old values and belief, the subjective truth of the two scenes above lies in the necessity to perform some familiar expressions of Javanism. In this case, they are the incantation of *mantram*, incense burning, candle lighting, and praying fashion. Shortly, anything of the old ways well familiarised by the performers.

The reason behind these individual performances could be for preserving a sense of connection with the past rather than expressing it through the interfaith fashion. However, both scenes demonstrate the quality that their actions are well recognised. The incantation and incense-burning scene show how the performer utters the Javanese *mantram* fluently and without hesitation while burning the incense.

*Oh Pangeran Inggang Maha Suci, kula nyuwunaken pangapunten sedherek kula kawandasa gangsal: ingkang mapan wonten kiblata Wetan sewelas, Kidul sanga, Kilen sanga, Ler sanga, Tengah pitu. Menawi wonten kapelatan sampun dipun pangapunten... [O, Divine Being, I beseech Thee to show Thy mercy upon the forty-five souls of my brothers and sisters: eleven to the East, nine to the South, nine to the West, nine to the North, and seven to the Middle. Should they have offended Thee, be mercifully lenient with them...]*

Likewise, the *Qunut* prayer of Dullah Kamari demonstrates the personal attachment to the past via the praying gesture and manner he performs. The scene starts with a shot that captures a burning candle on an ashtray and petals of red-white roses and *kenanga* buds on a piece of banana leaves. These are all placed on a decorated plastic mat. Then, the camera slowly tilts filming the fingers movement of Kamari as he starts chanting, '*Om Swasti Astu, Om Awigenad din Amosidem Om, Allahuma dina fiman*

*hadaeta wa fina fiman afaeta...'*. This incantation suggests a combination of Hinduistic (*Om Swasti Astu...*) and Islamic (*Allahuma dina fiman...*) greetings and prayers that he utters. While performing this fluently, his gesture shows solemnity.

### 8.3.3. Subjective Truth and the Early Reform Era

As described in the preceding chapters, freedom of expression and socio-cultural experiments became a few of the euphoric manifestations of the political reform in 1998 (Heeren, 2012; Nugroho and Herlina S., 2015). The political reform did not come without costs. The collapse of the New Order regime was accompanied by great adversities: massive economic decline, widespread rioting, communal conflicts, and the fears of Indonesia's disintegration (Aspinall and Fealy, 2010; Crouch, 2010). I frame the articulation of subjective truth in *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* in the context of the threat of the communal conflicts and the fears of disintegration, which are intermingled with the freedom of expression of the period. I consider that the relevance of the film's argument to the transitional conditions of the early reform period lies in the film's capability to be read as articulating subjective truth.

The film's subjective truth, which implies the villagers' perception of the values and the belief of *nyadran* as well as the need to express the tradition in individual and communal spaces, suggests that the tradition is still significant and relevant for them. About the threat of communal conflicts and the fears of disintegration, the practice of *nyadran* can be seen as a pre-emptive measure against the threat and the fear. This suits the purpose of *nyadran*, harmony. The interfaith gathering and communal prayer are a mimesis of social harmony preserved and developed in the village. The practice of the old Javanism in the private domain echoes individual freedom to materialise the tradition, coexisting with the interfaith gathering in the communal domain. Between these two domains, private and communal, the villagers

keep on holding onto the *nyadran* tradition.

Titi Mumfangati and Isyanti, cultural researchers at Bureau of Cultural Heritage Conservation and Preservation of Yogyakarta (*Balai Pelestarian Nilai Budaya Yogyakarta*), also confirm the perennial significance of *nyadran* tradition for Javanese societies. Mumfangati, for example, mentions that in different ages, the Javanese may give different meanings and have various motives to conduct the ritual of visiting their ancestor's graves in *nyadran*. However, the basic idea of the ritual as an expressive veneration to the ancestors still endures. This also applies in the reform era. Therefore, for the Javanese, they have the custom to practise the ritual by bringing their family members to the graves. Not only does this behaviour have the function to venerate the deceased, but also to make their family members recognise who was buried there and their relations with them (Mumfangati, 2007, p. 153).

As to Isyanti, her investigation on *merti bumi* or *merti desa* (Javanese village cleansing ritual) suggests that such a ritual in its diverse expressions continues in some parts of Java. This is rendered by the reason behind the ritual in which the Javanese need to maintain harmonious relations among nature, human and God. These three-partied relations must be preserved so that peace, safety, and welfare prevail. This is then symbolically materialised in the ritual (Isyanti, 2007, pp. 132–133). In addition, the significant nature of the ritual lies in certain values. She identifies five values in it: communal sharing (*gotong royong*), unity (*persatuan dan kesatuan*), dialogue (*musyawarah*), social observance (*kepatuhan sosial*), local wisdom (*kearifan setempat*) (Isyanti, 2007, p. 134).

From Isyanti's perspective, the interfaith gathering of *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* communicates these five values. The communal sharing is reflected in the willingness of the villagers to provide Javanese rice coned (*tumpeng*), drinks, boxes of foods (*ambengan*) and donation to share. The communal sharing also shows their unity.

Interfaith gathering also becomes the medium of social intercourse for the villagers to discuss matters that concern them or to have pleasant conversations. The social observance of the villagers is represented by their presence in the interfaith gathering, regardless of their different faiths. This also indicates the inclusiveness of the ritual that reflects their local wisdom.

The contextualisation of the film's subjective truth to the early reform period's threat of communal conflicts and the fears of disintegration shows one thing. By highlighting the interfaith gathering as a bond of the villagers' religious diversities and harmony, *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* expresses its oppositional voice to communal conflicts and the fears of disintegration. Although this seems an optimistic voice, the documentary also equally shows its challenging tone to the practice of *nyadran* tradition at the end of the film as outlined in the second section of this chapter. Nonetheless, what the film doubts about the future of *nyadran* needs reconsidering as the tradition with its interfaith gathering endures to the present time. Such a unique way of expressing *nyadran* is even exposed in a local newspaper's coverage, "*Tradisi Nyadran Jelang Ramadan di Bantul ini digelar Lintas Agama (Facing the fasting month, Interfaith Nyadran still held in Bantul)*" (Raharjo, 2015). By being covered and communicated in this reportage, Sorowajan's style of *nyadran*, of perpetuating their communal identity as being Javanese meets a representation of Anderson's imagined community.

#### **8.4. Conclusion**

*Nyadran à la Sorowajan* represents Javanese-ness of the negotiated interests. The film shows the Javanese people who are still connected with the past. They preserve the legacy of the socio-cultural values and belief. In addition, the documentary conveys the inevitable socio-political transformation for progress and modernity in their



*nyadran* tradition. Such representation could imply an ambivalence, a cultural positioning for being strictly a modern Javanese following the progress or a disillusioned Javanese finding the progress hard to understand. Although objective and neutral in tone, the documentary does not project such ambivalence. Instead, the film expresses a conversation of the Javanese villagers to synthesise their need for preserving tradition, for maintaining social harmony and for observing the New Order's policies expressed in the interfaith gathering of *nyadran*.

*Nyadran à la Sorowajan* also articulates that the negotiated Javanese-ness in the *nyadran* tradition, to a certain degree, serves the New Order's state culture. Nevertheless, it is not entirely true as the film also suggests that the tradition still provides a private space, however little, for some old practices of Javanism to take place. This evidence contributes to making the subject matter of the film, *nyadran*; expose its nature to be a medium for the Javanese's diverse cultural expressions. Not only does this presence of Javanese's cultural diversity demonstrate the Javanese's syncretic capability, but it also reveals the subjective truth experienced by the villagers. Subjective truth is the kind of subjective experience whose validity – the values and the belief – is taken for granted by the villagers. This explains why *nyadran* tradition endures regardless of its transformed manifestation. The cultural reading of the film leads to an understanding that the interfaith gathering in *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* is a domesticated cultural representation.

## **CHAPTER IX**

### **CONCLUSION: IMAGINING JAVANESENESS**

This chapter is aimed to tie the knot of the research questions and the whole body of analysis of the thesis. This last chapter is divided into five sections. The section one provides an overall conclusion of the thesis. The conclusion is further interlinked to the research questions of this thesis, which is elaborated in sections two, three and four. As mentioned in chapter one, to examine the representation of Javanese culture, I proposed three research questions: By what means do the film implicitly recall Javanese culture? What images of Javanese culture do the documentary films express? How do the films project various models of Javanese culture? The last section explains a possible research direction that can be further conducted from this thesis.

### **9.1. Overall Conclusion**

The filmmakers construct, develop and mix the films' themes and expressions of Javanese culture through the symbols in the documentaries. As a result, the documentaries represent images of Javanese culture. From the socio-political context, the understandings of Javanese culture are no longer homogeneous as desired by the New Order, but heterogeneous ones. They are more interpretive, democratised and liberal that are dissimilar to the notion of Javanese culture heavily oriented to the New Order's co-optation of *priyayi* or aristocratic culture. The polysemous interpretations of Javanese culture here articulate imagination of what it means to be Javanese that is different from the one constructed by the New Order regime.

The New Order regime manipulated some features of Javanese court culture blended with Javanese mysticism, over-emphasised morality and economic-oriented logic to be the characterising values of the state policy for cultural representation in Indonesia. In connection to this, such a hybrid notion where Javanese aristocratic cultural mentality became the bedrock has reduced the complexity and the multi-faceted Javanese culture itself. *Priyayi* culture cannot solely be the representational

image of Javanese culture itself. Javanese culture and Javanese culture, in my view, are highly complex and too broad, to be “easily” reduced to aristocratic values, for other expressions of Javanese culture, that is non-court ones, exist. The six documentaries show that they, to a varying degree, utilise symbolism to express the influences of the Javanese traditional values and beliefs in presenting the films’ subject matters.

The documentaries examined in this thesis are indeed products of the independent video and documentary movement by the grassroots at the dawn of the post-New Order era. The films’ nature as socio-cultural documentaries that celebrate freedom of expression of the era has enriched the diversity of documentary films circles and media ecology in Indonesia. The six films have become examples of the ordinary people’s cinematic attempts to communicate their perceptions or viewpoints about Javanese culture through diverse subjects in the post-authoritarian Indonesia. It is an era where practices of the hegemony of state culture are no longer favoured.

The Javanese culture framed in the socio-cultural issues portrayed in the documentaries has proven to be urgent. This thesis has attested that the six Indonesian documentaries try to project images of cultural identity, which are more liberal, independent and even dissociated from the New Order’s court-based Javanese culture. The representation of Javanese culture of the films is more explorative and subjective in which the idea of being Javanese and of Javanese culture is not seen from a homogeneous platform. These films indicate that cultural practices and expressions relying on traditional values and beliefs still endure and find their outlets in the reform era for the ordinary people of Indonesia. These phenomena are captured in the daily life of the commoners represented in the films. The combination of socio-cultural problems and how they are signified inspire the documentary filmmakers to produce their films. This fact suggests two things. First, local traditions, customs and values in

the context of Indonesia are still fascinating to explore. Second, how the filmmakers can present their culture-related subject matters with different perspectives matters in this case. This is important considering that these documentaries are the products of non-professional filmmakers that are marginal to the Indonesian film industry, which is always market-oriented. Hence, there is idealism offered in these films, by content and format (documentary), that engage Javanese-ness. These efforts, once again, are produced by non-professional filmmakers whose motivations are not controlled by the state. This is an uncommon practice and situation in the history of Indonesian documentary films concerning the pre-reform periods, the Old Order and New Order regimes.

In this context, Javanese-ness projected here represents Ricoeurian productive imagination. This is the kind of imagination that is rational and still based on its existing realities (Taylor, 2006, p. 97). My analysis, therefore, results in the three models of a productive imagination of Javanese-ness as explained in the analysis. These models of imagined Javanese-ness need to be construed as part of the films' social critiques of the socio-political conditions of the early reform period. The conditions where political instability and unethical practices of corruptions by public officials were becoming the hot issues as explained in the preceding chapters. In such situation, ethical crisis of profession and leadership emerged. In this context, *Wayang Kulit*, *Ksatria Kerajaan* and *Bathik*, for instance, address the crisis. The importance to revisit the past values went along with the growing awareness of the regional and local politic of identity in Indonesia. In other words, the films convey a message that it is necessary to reread the values and apply them contextually to alleviate the crisis.

From the socio-political and cultural context of the era, I consider that such imagining does not express a domineering or hegemonic quality, as what these films

offer are the non-state views, the ordinary people's perspectives in response to the external conditions beyond the filmic world. The six documentary films are exactly products that express a cinematic and cultural celebration, the manifestation of the spirit of freedom in the post-authoritarian New Order. This was truly the era where the flux of interpretations and liberal readings were at their peak, cherishing the freedom expression of the era.

## **9.2. Symbolism and the Articulation of Javanese**

The employment of symbols in the documentaries with their figurative meanings projects the images of the Javanese people. This is, of course, contextual to the films' themes and narratives. As explained in chapters four and five, *jamu*, the palace guard (Pardi), the struggle of the Sikep, the interfaith gathering of Sorowajan, the *wayang kulit* artisan (Sagio) and the batik (*Semen Rama*) are the hermeneutic symbols of Javanese cultural identity to evoke various images of Javanese. Ricoeur (1969) mentions that the figurative meaning of a symbol is not a kind of meaning that is out of context. It is always contextual to the function of the symbol in the medium that incorporates it (Ricoeur, 1969, p. 350).

In this regard, Ricoeur also maintains that figurative meanings as embodied in symbol and metaphor are necessitated to understand imagination and vision created in a work (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 5). Symbol and metaphor become the instruments of discourse applied in a work, bearing both the rhetorical power and reference to actualities. I view this quality present in the documentaries. Therefore, I consider that imagining Javanese becomes relevant in that the films have yielded more democratised, interpretive, personal, and varied imagination of being Javanese. The imagined Javanese here is different from that of the aristocratic model of the New Order regime. In this thesis, the function of the symbols is to help the representation of

the Javanese people appear diverse, amorphous, abstract and transient sense.

The filmmakers make use of the symbols to help the notion of Javanese-ness expressed in the films significantly. These symbols are the key points for the viewers to realise or to be aware of the strong presence of Javanese culture in the documentaries. However, from the hermeneutic angle, I conclude that these symbols express the Javanese traditional beliefs and values. These cultural expressions do not merely serve as the cultural background of the documentaries. They are also contained within the films' subjects. The symbols that are situated within the important scenes contextually deepen the cultural interpretation of what the symbols represent.

Some documentaries share a commonality in their symbolism. A case in point is the interfaith gathering in *Sorowajan*. This symbol, together with the royal guard figure in *Ksatria Kerajaan* and the Sikep's cultural struggle in *Kulo Ndiko Sami*, is concerned about identity. The symbols employed in *Wayang Kulit*, *Bathik* and *Jamu* also demonstrate their similarity. In *Wayang Kulit*, we have the figure of Sagio, the artisan. In *Bathik*, we find the *Semen Rama*. In *Jamu*, we have the jamu products themselves. They are all the symbols that express the films' connection with Javanese ethics. However, these commonalities do not necessarily yield a shared image of Javanese-ness.

Using symbolism to represent Javanese-ness itself, from the Javanese cultural perspective, is not something alien. In Javanese cultural and social communication, indirect expressions, including symbolism, are common. An old Javanese proverb suggests this familiarity of the Javanese with symbolism: "*Wong Jawa nggone rasa, pada gulangening kalbu, ing sasmita amrih lantip, kuwowo nahan hawa, kinemat mamoting driya*" (Herusatoto, 2000, p. 86). This proverb means that Javanese people are accustomed to using their sensory experience and clear thought to gain

understanding or *rasa*<sup>15</sup>. With this understanding, the Javanese can better recognise their conscience for them not to be easily manipulated. Then, they can unveil what is covered from an outer appearance. With this ability, the Javanese are expected to control spontaneous impulses and desires so that the purpose of their life is not easily deviated. The intention of Javanese people to be prudent and to favour things beyond the physical appearance is further reflected in Javanese language itself. The language is full of poetic (*kembang*), symbolic (*lambang*), and metaphoric (*sinamuning samudana*) expressions (Herusatoto, 2000, p. 86).

### 9.3. Images of Javaneseness

With regard to Javaneseness itself, I have explained in the last three chapters wherein the documentary films examined project three models. The first model represents the imagination of being Javanese that expresses the aspiration to reconsider the significance of traditional Javanese values. The second model concerns the imagination of being Javanese seen from marginalised subject matters, namely sexuality and the Sikep. These topics were less favoured during the New Order regime, and the images of Javaneseness are contradictory to the regime's aristocratic construct. The third model is the imagination of being Javanese shaped by the negotiation of interests as a result of the regime change.

The first model describes a specific projection of what it means to be Javanese based on the willingness to hold onto the traditional Javanese values. The values in their application are pertinent to the Javanese courts, but they are not necessarily and

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<sup>15</sup> *Rasa* in Javanese culture refers to a term describing a combination of sensory experiences implying a particular aesthetic and a cognitive organ used to gain "knowledge" (*ngelmu*). The understanding of "knowledge" in the traditional Javanese context has gnostic quality referring to a mystical or spiritual form of knowledge comprising not only intellectual but also intuitive dimensions. It does not approximate Western sense of knowledge nor Indonesian "ilmu". Indonesian word "ilmu" is closely similar to Western knowledge (Stange, 1984, pp. 114–115)



exclusively aristocratic. They may share with those of the universal ones, such as professionalism, sincerity, humility, sacrifice, simplicity, mercy, decisiveness, commitment, reasoning, confidence, benevolence, consideration, attentiveness, prudence, visionary and justice. *Wayang Kulit*, for example, shows a quality of being a Javanese that is devoted to a profession, sincere, and modest. *Ksatria Kerajaan* illustrates the image of being a Javanese who is honest, persevering, and humble. As to *Bathik*, the film unravels the ideal qualities of a Javanese leader who is expected to be forgiving, decisive, stout in principle, reasonable, self-confident, benevolent, considerate, attentive, prudent, insightful, inspirational, exemplary and just. The three films affirmatively employ those traditional values as their operating frame to display what it means to be a Javanese, the imagined Javanese.

The second model suggests a different kind of Javaneseness from the first one. If the first model stresses the need to revisit and reinterpret the traditional values and to behave accordingly, this second model depicts being a Javanese who is, to a certain degree, critical of the traditional values and who is not court-related. Two documentaries express these qualities, *Jamu* and *Kulo Ndiko Sami*. *Jamu* represents the “deviation” from the common belief in the highly domesticated, private and exclusive discourse of sex and marriage. Such representation goes against the traditional perception treating sex and marriage, not as something simple and jocular. *Jamu* exposes an image of a Javanese who is liberal, sexually driven, and secretive. In *Kulo Ndiko Sami*, the Javaneseness of the Sikep is not the same as what the New Order stereotyped as being “backwards” and “abnormal”. The film represents the image of the Javanese who are obedient to the government policy and yet they are determined with their aspiration for equality and justice.

The third model demonstrates the imagination of being Javanese who still clings to the tradition, preserves the old values and beliefs. This imagination, at the same time,

represents the Javanese who is aware of the socio-political transformation towards progress and modernity. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* represents such imagination. At a glance, the representation could lead the viewers to think that the Javanese community depicted is in an ambivalent position. They need to hold on to the past values and belief. They realise that they have modified their tradition as the effect of the political change. However, the film does not show this ambivalence. The documentary articulates a combination of preserving tradition, maintaining social harmony and observing the past regime's policy in the manifested in *nyadran*. Thus, the image we have *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* is the Javanese who try to comprehend the progress and modernity and synchronise them with the old values and beliefs. The various images of Javaneseness above disclose an understanding of the heterogeneity of Javanese society itself. The films also become the evidence of the rise and vibrant documentary endeavours of the early reform period in Indonesia. Regarding the cultural understanding, Javaneseness should not be imagined as a homogeneous entity from a Javanese ethnic group, behaving and showing even the so-called "shared values" (Vermeulen and Govers, 1994; Spencer, 2006; Grosby *et al.*, 2007). Javaneseness is always diverse and fluid.

#### **9.4. Strategies for Projecting Various Models of Javaneseness**

The employment of the symbols in combination with the aesthetic properties and the regimes of cultural representation of the films enables them to offer various images of Javaneseness. The correlation between the symbols and the imagined Javaneseness above resides in the power of the symbols communicating their figurative meanings. This enables the films to be read hermeneutically as representing various models of Javaneseness. In chapter five to seven, we notice that Javaneseness is an imagination that is plural and diverse.

About symbols and imagination, Ricoeur asserts the necessity to use imagination in understanding the symbols in that imagination is concerned with both the process and the outcome of perceiving realities in new ways (Taylor, 2006, p. 96). From this understanding, Ricoeur comes with two kinds of imagination: reproductive and productive ones. Reproductive imagination is the imagination that only reflects the existing realities. Ideology and cultural materials are the examples of reproductive social and cultural imagination. Ricoeur adds that productive imagination goes beyond the reproductive one. Productive imagination entails the structuring or arrangement of the existing realities (such as ideology and cultural materials) into something adorned or embellished. This is necessary because a human being has so-called perception, and a physiological and imaginative process always structures this perception. Ricoeur thinks that imagination is inherent in perception; therefore, seeing, interpreting, or thinking are all ways of imagining. He further mentions that there are four domains in productive imagination: social and cultural imagination, epistemological imagination, poetic imagination, and religious symbols imagination. Examples of these are a utopia for social and cultural imagination, theoretical models in science for epistemological imagination; landscape painting (impressionism) and artistic expressions for poetic imagination; and biblical study for religious symbols imagination (Taylor, 2006, pp. 94–97).

From the Ricoeurian imaginations above, I consider that the symbols represented in the documentaries generate productive models of Javanese-ness. The symbols studied illuminate imaginations of Javanese-ness. They are part of the films' social and cultural imagination. This means that the symbols enhance the social and cultural imagination of the films. In other words, the signification of the symbols echoes the social and cultural imagination of the documentaries, the Javanese-ness.

I perceive that the filmmakers' construction and development of symbols put to

particular ends that is to project Javanese-ness. This projection of Javanese-ness is especially related to values and beliefs that are intermingled with the films' rhetoric. In *Jamu*, the construction and development of the symbol are manifested explicitly (jamu and sex) and implicitly (values of sex and marriage in Javanese culture). The satirical tone and argument of the film further echoes the construction and development of the symbol. In *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*, the construction and development of the symbol has explicit (interfaith gathering) and implicit (values of respect, harmony and a sense of communal belonging to Javanese identity) manifestations in the objective tone of the film. The filmmakers of *Ksatria Kerajaan* shows their apparent construction and development of the symbol by presenting the palace guard figure and the folk-belief of *ngalab berkah*. Implicitly, the documentary articulates the need for self-attachment and self-identity of the royal guard accepting the folk-belief in a rather beholden tone. *Kulo Ndiko Sami* exposes its explicit the construction and development of the symbol in the portrayal of the Sikep communities' connectedness with the Javanese majority. As to the implicit manifestation, the construction and development of the symbol is reflected in the Sikep's struggle for a religious recognition, showing their self-identity. In *Wayang Kulit*, the stance is depicted in the representations of Javanese shadow puppet while the portrayal of Sagio implicitly communicates Javanese work ethic of *sepi ing pamrih* (sincerity) and *ramé ing gawé* (commitment to profession or *dharma*). As to *Batik*, the film's stance on the surface delineates a batik motif *Semen Rama* while beneath it the film speaks of the urgency of ethics for Javanese people not to forget their philosophical values of *Asta Brata* in *Semen Rama*.

So what "new reality" is produced from the various imaginations of Javanese-ness above? There is no single state-driven (hegemonic) representation of Javanese-ness stereotyped or articulated here. In *Jamu*, the Javanese-ness illustrated

gives an image of the Javanese who are liberal, sexually driven and secretive at the same time. In *Nyadran à la Sorowajan*, the film offers an image of the Javanese who are communalistic, egalitarian and mystic. *Ksatria Kerajaan* represents the Javanese who are irrational, slightly fatalistic and yet at the same time very loyal. *Kulo Ndiko Sami* illustrates an image of those who are obedient and yet determined. In *Wayang Kulit*, we have the Javanese who are non-materialistic, calm and principled. In *Bathik*, we have the ideal image that Javanese should not abandon their ethical virtues of *Asta Brata*, implying an anxiety of the contemporary Javanese people disconnected with their past.

All of these images are not homogeneous and normative but heterogeneous, interpretive and private that is not a state-driven one. The filmmakers liberally construct and develop this narration of Javaneseness that is dissimilar from the New Order's image, an aristocratic community who is educated, refined in language and manner, moralistic and capitalistic (Jones, 2012, p. 155). This construct proves to reflect the New Order regime's agendas of politics and economy. Such an elusive projection by the New Order regime, I think, is an over-reduction of Javaneseness and Javanese culture as they are perhaps too broad to be clearly defined and standardised (see also Errington, 1984; Beatty, 2003; Mulder, 2005).

The films studied represent Javaneseness deviating from the New Order's construct. This is to say that there is no single hegemonic image of Javaneseness envisioned in the documentaries. The documentaries offer varied and transient imagination of Javaneseness. However, they can still be categorised based on their models of imagination. With this, I come to the point where the analysis of Javaneseness in this thesis is symptomatic. It means that the analysis of Javaneseness relates to the contexts of socio-political signification.

Contextualising the documentaries to the socio-political conditions in the first

decade of the Indonesian reform era suggest a dynamic interplay between the films' subject matters and the expressions of Javanese culture that frame them. *Jamu* is a documentary that highlights Javanese traditional medicine known as *jamu*. The film exposes the mythic qualities of the traditional medicine assumed to have a connection with sex practices in Jakarta's urban life. *Nyadran à la Sorowajan* is a documentary that represents the harmony of interreligious or interfaith life of the villagers of Sorowajan in Yogyakarta. The film has indicated that the long-aged syncretic practices of diverse beliefs in Java have enabled the way for the innovative ritual of interfaith gathering and praying to materialise in the *nyadran* tradition.

*Ksatria Kerajaan* demonstrates the ordinary life and figure of the royal guards at the Sultanate Palace of Yogyakarta. The royal guards believe that serving the palace and the king is a blessing. This a belief is popularly recognised as *ngalab berkah*. *Kulo Ndiko Sami* illustrates the struggle of the Sikep to get their traditional religion officially recognised by the government. *Wayang Kulit: Shadow Theatre in Java* brings to light the modest life of Sagio, a shadow puppet (*wayang kulit*) artisan, who wholeheartedly devotes himself to the preservation of *wayang kulit* artisanship. *Batik: Bebet lan Bobot Lakuning Urip* conveys *Semen Rama*, one of the *batik* motifs, whose history and philosophical patterns are considered relevant for many Javanese to know, practice and preserve.

To emphasise the conclusion, I reaffirm that all of the documentaries examined here show a dynamic interplay between their subject matters and their representations of Javanese-ness. The three models of Javanese-ness articulated are an example of productive imagination of Javanese-ness. What they all have in common is that they do not share qualities of Javanese-ness of the New Order's regime and they are all projections of the ordinary peoples, of the grassroots interpretations. The freedom of expression in the post-authoritarian New Order has made the revival of the

documentary movements in Indonesia to be more egalitarian.

### **9.5. Future Research**

The main reason for examining the films is rendered by two qualities that the documentaries show. First, it is for their complex subject matters. The magnitude of the films lies not in their fame and intensity of their screenings, but in the films' themes that bring alternative images of Javanese-ness to light. Second, it is for their nature as socio-cultural documentaries of the ordinary peoples as non-professional filmmakers that tried to capture the socio-cultural actualities and voice their views. Furthermore, such a cultural interest from the films also goes along with the need for documentary research in Indonesia. As documentary research on ethnic and regional cultures is still limited in number when compared to that of the mainstream feature films, this thesis can contribute to fill the gap.

This thesis stems from my perception that the documentaries examined express diverse interpretations of Javanese-ness. In the context of cultural representation during the transitional and critical early periods of the Indonesian reform, there was limited research about how locality and ethnicity are represented through the media of documentary. Thus, I view that this thesis of imagining Javanese-ness is indeed contributory to that space less explored in academia. The more private and transient understandings of Javanese-ness in the films studied convey a continuous dynamism in re-identifying and redefining what it means to be part of an ethnocultural entity represented in the quasi-realistic nature of documentaries. Within the scope of Javanese-ness represented, the message of the six documentaries has a thing in common. The outcome, therefore, is intelligible in that they offer alternative perspectives of Javanese-ness. At this point, I agree with Nick Fraser, editor of *Storyville* (BBC), commenting on the educative function of a documentary that implies offering

perspectives to change the world.

The idea of the documentary as a binding force in society, viewed by a large number of people and attesting cultural solidarity, is in decline. It has been replaced, to be sure, by the idea that documentaries can be linked to campaigns and made to change the world (Fraser, 2013, p. xiv).

As this thesis deals with the cultural identity represented in the quasi-realistic nature of documentaries, it is then challenging to examine the regimes of truth that operate in such films. This will be further fascinating when applied to different socio-cultural and political environments. Brian Winston asserts that "the documentarist is an artist but one who constrains their imagination to process only what is witnessed" (Winston, Vanstone and Chi, 2017, p. 23). In my thesis, the regime of truth is no longer held by the state hegemonically. The imagination of Javanese-ness represented in this thesis is more democratised, subjective, and transient without the presence of hegemonic narrative of Javanese-ness from the Indonesian state. This is to say that independent documentary movement in the post-New Order Indonesia has been used to challenge "established" constructs, including Javanese-ness, a cultural entity considered the main supporter of the New Order regime. It is possible that this phenomenon is not specifically Indonesian; it might have happened in other parts of the world. This is what my thesis leaves for further research. By using this thesis as a comparison, it is possible to study the projection or the imagination of a particular cultural construct in a documentary film, from any social and ethnic groups worldwide that have ever been considered hegemonic.



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