



Experiencing Jakarta as a Female Resident: The Representation of Young Lower-Class Urban Women in Indonesian Film

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Abstract. Many Indonesian people believe that Jakarta, the capital, can provide a better life for the majority of its residents. It is commonly assumed that an urban environment will offer a superior quality of life compared to a rural one. However, the movie *The Day Before the Wedding* depicts the experiences of women living in Jakarta, which may not fully align with their initial expectations. This study aims to elucidate the portrayal of young women from the lower class who confront adversity in the urban environment of Jakarta in the film *The Day Before The Wedding* (2023). It focuses on the relationship between young female characters from the lower class and men associated with social and environmental issues in the city, as depicted in the film. This research is qualitative, with a focus on audiovisual ethnography. The data were analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and Hanson and Pratt's concepts of gender, space, and work. The results of this study show that signs in the film denotatively and connotatively indicate women's problems in terms of physical safety and shelter, as well as employment opportunities. These problems arise because of the existence of stereotypes about the body and regulations at the government and corporate scale that do not fully view women as subjects.

Keywords: Gender, Indonesia, Urban Space, Women

1 Introduction

The urbanization process is frequently linked to an increase in the autonomy and independence of women. It is commonly assumed that an urban environment will offer a superior quality of life compared to a rural one. However, in numerous urban centers, there are considerable risks of violence and significant limitations on employment, mobility, and leadership opportunities that are indicative of pervasive gender-based inequalities [1]. Ideally, cities and villages should be safe places for everyone, including women. *The Day Before the Wedding* movie [2] portrays the multifaceted challenges that young urban women encounter, particularly in navigating financial and value-related issues. The film's setting is Jakarta, Indonesia's capital city, often regarded as the country's most developed urban center. However, the film suggests that even in a city like Jakarta, women's lives may still be fraught with difficulties. This research

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G. Nur Pramudyo et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Culture and Sustainable Development (ICOCAS 2024)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 872,

https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-313-9_27

attempts to draw attention to the experiences of lower-class women living in Jakarta, as it is believed that the class of women determines how they are treated and their ability to protect themselves. Space is a part of our contemporary cultural reality, and studying the culture of space offers essential insight into the broader interrogation of cultural norms [3]. Most of the population of developed countries and an increasing proportion of developing countries' populations continue to reside in urban areas [4].

Nussbaum posits that the treatment received by women is contingent upon their geographical location [5]. Consequently, an exhaustive comprehension of women's circumstances necessitates a profound grasp of their regional context and social class. Moreover, Hanson and Pratt suggested the relationship between gender, work, and space [6]. They illustrate how boundaries are formed between women and men, as well as among women residing in different neighborhoods. This study aims to elucidate the portrayal of young women from the lower-class who confront adversity in the urban environment of Jakarta in the film *The Day Before The Wedding* (2023). It focuses on the relationship between young female characters from the lower-class and men associated with social and environmental issues in the city, as depicted in the film.

This study employs the conceptual framework of gender, space, and work, as proposed by Hanson and Pratt, in conjunction with Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, to analyze the signs depicted in the film. Hanson and Pratt analysis focuses on three key themes: the segregation of men and women into different occupations, the variations in women's work experiences across different parts of the city, and the ways in which these differences are grounded and constituted through the interplay of space, place, and situated social networks [6]. Barthes' idea of Denotation and Connotation is used as a basis for analyzing audiovisual elements in films. Denotation, as the first level of meaning that refers to the direct meaning (objectivity) of signs, is the initial step in identifying symptoms in films, which are then further interpreted at the connotation level. The connotation level involves a comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural context in the process of interpreting signs [7]. It is hoped that the results of this research will contribute to the study of Indonesian films and provide reflection material for individuals and policymakers in addressing regulations related to urban women.

2 Methods

This research is qualitative, with a focus on audiovisual ethnography. Qualitative approaches are typically employed to investigate novel phenomena and to document individuals' thoughts, feelings, or interpretations of meaning and processes [8]. The primary data source in this study is the movie *The Day Before The Wedding* (2023), produced by Agung Haryanto, Mala Shinta, and Razka Robby Ertanto. The data

collection was done by Capturing the Phenomenon. The analysis process refers to Michael W. Firmin, which includes simultaneous data collection and analysis, the practice of writing memos during and after data collection, the use of some coding, the use of writing as a tool for analysis, and the development of concepts and connections of one's analysis to the literature in one's field [8]. The data were analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and Hanson and Pratt's concepts of gender, space, and work. The initial stage of the process entails the observation and documentation of the film's audiovisual elements, employing the connotative and denotative perspectives put forth by Roland Barthes. This is followed by an interpretation that draws upon the theoretical frameworks of gender, space, and work, as articulated by Hanson and Pratt, with the incorporation of supplementary references as needed.

3 Result and Discussion

The problems urban women face in this film are related to security and the ability to live a decent life. Hanson and Pratt argue that social, economic, and geographic boundaries are not discrete entities but rather are overlaid and intertwined [6]. The following findings are related to women's experiences living in Jakarta as depicted in the film :

3.1 The Lack of Safety for Women

In this film, the experiences of lower-class women are explored through the lives of two main characters (Clara and Kinan), young women who face challenges in finding employment and making a living in the capital by becoming wedding dress cosplayers [2]. In addition to the two main characters, there are also additional characters, namely their friends, who experience economic difficulties. They live together in a rented house that requires some repairs, and often struggle to eat. In this condition, they also experienced several events that threatened them, namely being observed by male neighbors and experiencing pickpocketing when working in public spaces.

In the denotative aspect, it appears that a man is observing the woman from the gap in the wall. Connotatively, the peeping incident in the bathroom suggests that lower-class women may still face challenges in maintaining their privacy and security, particularly in their personal spaces. It appears that some men still view their bodies as objects. This is also evident in the out-of-wedlock pregnancy of the female character (Clara), as the male character (Gerald) seemed unable to control himself when he saw Clara's body.

The pickpocketing incident (*denotative sign*) not only reflects the challenges of survival in the big city but also suggests that women may still be perceived as vulnerable targets for criminal acts and shows the weak security system in the city of Jakarta (*connotative*

sign). Parker has shown that crime patterns are closely related to gender and the local urban economy [8]. The women in this movie are still in the confines of female stereotypes, low economy, and low social capital because they are migrants in the city. The covariation between low social capital and violent crime is well established [9]. The incident above suggests that women may not yet fully enjoy the same sense of security and comfort in big cities as in smaller communities. It also appears that the perception of women as the second sex still influences the male mindset. Ultimately, the crime rate, which is a consequence of job competition in the city, may impact women's security. This is in accordance with Hengenhold's assertion that women in urban industrial societies consistently report a greater fear of crime and spend a more significant proportion of their income on protection than men [10]. These findings also prove that the government has not been able to fully provide comfort and safety for the lives of lower-class women in urban spaces. Governments urgently need to develop city-level policies that break the link between crime and political and economic conditions [11].

3.2 The Body as a Potential Determinant of Women's Employment Opportunities in the City

The problems women face in finding a job are limited to education and the ideal body standards they must have to be accepted in a job in Jakarta. Clara declines to reside in the village as her parents recommend, asserting that the city of Jakarta offers a superior and more contemporary way of life [2]. She champions the significance of work for women and the realization of their aspirations rather than being confined to the traditional roles of marriage and domesticity, particularly in her hometown. She has high expectations for Jakarta, yet the reality of urban life proves to be a significant challenge for her. Physical beauty is essential in determining whether a woman will be hired in an urban setting. She repeatedly failed job applications and had to pass a series of tests that demanded body perfection. She applied to be a flight attendant, which is generally known to require physical perfection. However, the denotative sign, when interpreted connotatively, also indicates the difficulty of job competition for women as well as the additional burden on the physical aspect that is implicitly rooted in the job recruitment system in Jakarta. Deng et al. that Men can ease appearance discrimination in the employment market by improving their educational credentials. Still, women with better education are more likely to encounter appearance discrimination [12].

The findings in this study are in line with several studies. Hamerhesh and Biddle found that plain people earn less than average-looking people, who earn less than good-looking people [13]. Economic studies have demonstrated a correlation between physical attractiveness and higher wages. From an early age, the labor and marriage markets have perceived the advantages of physical attractiveness. Findings indicate that

the income of women who perceive themselves as attractive is 19% higher than that of women who are perceived as unattractive after applying makeup [14]. This finding is emphasized by the irony that both female characters became very popular and attracted much attention when they became bridal cosplayers. This makes Clara's character refuse to wear the jilbab when in the city. Not only does this reflect his religious principles, but it also shows a mindset shaped by the influences and demands of the city. The arduous pursuit of employment for women is compounded by the constraints imposed upon those unable to exercise complete autonomy in selecting their profession during pregnancy. The female protagonist in this cinematic work ultimately failed to become a flight attendant due to her pregnancy status, revealed during the selection process. This shows that urban women's bodies have become the primary asset in their job search. The women's return to the village can be seen as a critique of Jakarta as the capital (government regulation) and patriarchal values that still largely shackle urban women.

4 Conclusion

The analysis in the film *The Day Before the Wedding* shows the representation of lower-class young women who still face many challenges regarding safety and employment even though they already live in the city (Jakarta). Signs in the film denotatively and connotatively indicate women's problems in terms of physical safety and shelter, as well as employment opportunities. These problems arise because of the existence of stereotypes about the body and regulations at the government and corporate scale that do not fully view women as subjects. The issues facing urban areas require the attention of policymakers and the awareness of local residents to ensure the safety of women and prevent their objectification. The implementation of changes to urban infrastructure must be accompanied by corresponding policy reforms and a shift in attitudes towards gender equality.

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