

Visualization of Patriarchal Culture in the Film Kartini (2017): A Semiotic Analysis by John Fiske

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Abstract

Film is a medium that represents various socio-cultural realities, enabling the visualization and depiction of social issues, one of which is the culture of patriarchy. Patriarchy is a term used to describe a social system where power, control, and authority are primarily in the hands of men or male figures. Patriarchy is a central theme in the film Kartini. Therefore, the aim of this study is to reveal and understand the hidden meanings that depict the visualization of patriarchal culture in the film Kartini. This study employs a qualitative research method, utilizing John Fiske's semiotic analysis approach. The findings of this research indicate that patriarchal culture is visualized through John Fiske's three codes of encoding, including 1) reality, 2) representation, and 3) ideology, demonstrating that patriarchal culture remains influential in affecting women's lives.

Keywords: Patriarchal Culture, John Fiske's Semiotic, Film Kartini

Introduction

Film is one form of mass media communication. Films are capable of visualizing everything through moving images, accompanied by audiovisual elements that enrich the audience's experience through what is presented on the screen. Films serve as a tool to convey various messages to the public through storytelling and artistic expression as a means for filmmakers to express ideas and narratives (Wibowo, 2006). Thus, films are not just a medium of entertainment but can also be a medium for delivering messages across various domains, such as socio-cultural, political, and artistic, which can influence society's broader perspectives.

Films not only shape societal constructs but also serve as recordings of life that grow and develop within society and are then projected onto the screen (Sobur, 2016). Over time, films have evolved into a medium that represents various social and cultural realities, allowing the visualization and depiction of social issues, one of which is patriarchal culture. Patriarchal culture is a term used to describe a social system in which power, control, and authority are primarily held by men or male figures. In this cultural context, men have dominance that encompasses various aspects of life, from family structure, community life, to social institutions. Patriarchy creates a gender hierarchy that

gives greater privileges and control to men, while women often find themselves in lower and more restricted positions (Bemmelen, 2009).

Patriarchal culture becomes one of the central themes clearly highlighted by Hanung Bramantyo in *Kartini*. Hanung Bramantyo is one of the directors who, in each of his works, typically features marginalized groups within society. This is to show another side of reality that is generally already known to the public (Suhroh et al., 2021). *Kartini* is a biopic that tells the life journey of Raden Ajeng Kartini, an Indonesian historical figure who fought against patriarchal norms controlling women's lives during the colonial era. These patriarchal norms include arranged early marriages, restrictions on women's education, traditional roles for women, and family control over women, all of which had to be adhered to by women at that time.

Kartini is set in the 1800s and tells the story of Kartini (Dian Sastrowardoyo), who was born from a mother without a noble title, Yu Ngasirah (Christine Hakim). Upon reaching adolescence, Kartini had to undergo the tradition of seclusion, which limited her interactions with the outside world until a proposal came from a nobleman willing to marry her. However, by the support of her brother, the period of seclusion did not become an obstacle for Kartini to continue learning and fighting for women's rights, especially in education.

Together with her sisters, Kardinah (Ayu Shita) and Roekmini (Acha Septriasa), Kartini was able to fight for women's rights at that time. She wrote critiques related to Javanese traditions that harmed women during that era. With the help of Ovink Soer, Kartini managed to publish these writings, although she had to use a pseudonym. Because of Kartini's and her sisters' works and efforts, they were invited to the coronation celebration of Queen Wilhelmina in Semarang, where their work was recognized and offered to be exhibited in the Netherlands.

Due to this great achievement, Kartini and her two sisters had the opportunity to look deeper into the condition of women at that time. Generally, women, especially those without noble titles, married at a young age and could not receive a proper education. This inspired Kartini to establish a school for ordinary women to receive proper education. However, obstacles that hindered Kartini from realizing her dream began to arise. Nevertheless, because of her determination and spirit, Kartini was able to overcome these obstacles and achieve her dream, albeit through a different path.

With her determination and spirit, Kartini was able to overcome social and cultural barriers that restricted women in terms of education, marriage, and freedom of expression. Through the depiction of Kartini's character in this film, the patriarchal culture that narrows the role of women in society is clearly revealed through the scenes and dialogues in the film. Kartini serves as concrete evidence of how media, such as film, can play a significant role in providing a deeper understanding of patriarchal culture and the struggle for equality.

This research focuses on analyzing the film using John Fiske's semiotic method, which includes three levels of coding: the level of reality, the level of representation, and the level of ideology. With these three levels, it is expected to describe how the visualization of patriarchal culture is presented in *Kartini*.

Research Method

This research uses a qualitative research type. Qualitative research aims to gain a better understanding of phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, actions, and others. Qualitative research is conducted in a

natural context and employs various scientific methods (Moleong, 2011). The data forms include text such as images, photos, captures, and more. The approach used in this research is John Fiske's semiotic analysis approach, which includes three levels of coding: the level of reality, the level of representation, and the level of ideology. The object of this research is the film Kartini.

The data collection techniques in this research use three methods: observation, literature study, and documentation study. Observation is a process of directly observing the research object. In this research, the observation process is conducted by watching the film Kartini to obtain relevant data on how patriarchal culture is visualized in the film Kartini. The literature study in this research is conducted by searching for and reading literature in the form of theses, journals, scientific articles, and books relevant to the research being conducted. The documentation study used in this research involves taking screen captures of scenes that visualize patriarchal culture in the film Kartini.

Fiske defines semiotics as the understanding of signs involving the comprehension of how each type of work, in the context of society, communicates and conveys meaning (Fiske, 2007). John Fiske developed the theory of television codes, which states that the codes in television programs are interconnected and form specific meanings. Thus, reality not only appears through these codes but is also influenced by viewers' different perceptions based on each individual's references. Fiske's conceptual model is not only applicable to television programs but can also be applied to other media texts, including films. Fiske classifies coding into three levels for television broadcasts, which can also be applied in the context of films (Vera, 2014).

Table 1. Three level of signs of John Fiske

Reality	Events identified (encoded) as reality can manifest in various aspects, such as the appearance of clothing, environment, behavior, conversations, gestures, expressions, sounds, and also in written language forms like documents, interview transcripts, and so on.
Reality	Events identified (encoded) as reality can manifest in various aspects, such as the appearance of clothing, environment, behavior, conversations, gestures, expressions, sounds, and also in written language forms like documents, interview transcripts, and so on.
Ideology	All elements are arranged and grouped within ideological codes, including but not limited to patriarchy, individualism, race, class, materialism, capitalism, and so on.

Result and Discussion

Based on research conducted, it was found that patriarchal culture is well visualized in the film Kartini, particularly in a scene depicting the restriction of education for women. The selection of this data is based on the strongest elements that represent patriarchal messages in the film Kartini.

Level of Reality



Figure 1. Debate about Kartini continuing her education

The setting takes place in the Kadipaten of Jepara, specifically in the office of the regent of Jepara. The scene depicts Raden Sosroningrat's older brother opposing Kartini's determination to continue her education in the Netherlands. The atmosphere portrayed in the scene is one of palpable tension between Raden Sosroningrat's older brother and Kartini due to the disagreement over Kartini's desire to pursue higher education. In this context, patriarchal culture restricts women's access to higher education and assigns them a predominantly domestic role in society. Women are perceived as not needing to pursue education beyond a certain level because their role, once married, will primarily be that of a homemaker.

The makeup used in the scene is very natural, almost appearing as if no makeup is worn. The wardrobe consists of Javanese beskap, a traditional attire worn by noble men consisting of a jacket, waistcloth (stagen), batik cloth (jarik), and a dagger (keris). The choice of different colors of beskap for Raden Sosroningrat, his older brother, and Kartini symbolizes their differing personalities, attitudes, and perspectives. Raden Sosroningrat wears a brown beskap, symbolizing maturity, depth, and serenity, reflecting his character as wise, tradition-bound, and stable in facing change. In contrast, his older brother and Kartini wear black beskap, symbolizing power, authority, and conservatism. For Raden Sosroningrat and his older brother, the use of black beskap signifies a more rigid, conservative, and classic attitude.

The blangkon worn by Raden Sosroningrat, his older brother, and Kartini signifies their status as Javanese figures with influence in society. The gestures and expressions in the scene display the tension and anger of Raden Sosroningrat's older brother towards Raden Sosroningrat's decision to support Kartini's choice to pursue education in the Netherlands. This highlights the complex dynamics of patriarchal culture that limits women's access to higher education and their roles in society, stereotyping women as

weak, fragile creatures who must submit to male authority (Zahrudin in Margareta, 2022). Consequently, women are stereotyped as mere domestic workers, focusing solely on household duties.

Representation Level

“Kalau Dhimas menuruti permintaan anak perempuan untuk sekolah tinggi akibatnya nanti dia ingin menjadi bupati. Selanjutnya, akan ditiru oleh orang-orang biasa. Kalau sudah seperti ini, bisa terjadi lho, Dhimas, anak bukan kayu jadi raja; jadi kacau!”

(If you follow your daughter's desire to pursue higher education, just wait and see, she will want to become a regent. This will be followed by common people; it can happen, you know, Dhimas. A carpenter's daughter could become a queen; this will ruin everything!)

“Perubahan pasti akan datang”

(Change will definitely come.)

The dialogue between Raden Sosroningrat and his older brother illustrates a classic debate between conservatism and progressivism, between maintaining tradition and adapting to change. This reflects a common dynamic in society where older generations tend to uphold traditional norms while younger generations seek change and progress. It shows that the older generation adheres strongly to patriarchal values, evident in their efforts to preserve traditional norms that dictate a woman's life should culminate in marriage, thereby suggesting there is no need for higher education or pursuing a career (Sari & Haryono, 2018).

The cinematography technique used in the scene is an Over the Head Shot, also known as Bird's Eye View or Top Shot, where the camera is positioned above the subject or scene, highlighting it from a high angle. This technique emphasizes the tension between Raden Sosroningrat and his older brother in the scene, underscoring their differing perspectives on Kartini's desire for higher education and the broader implications of societal change.



Figure 2. Over the head shot camera's position

The camera position using an Over the Head Shot can provide a unique and dramatic perspective. This angle emphasizes the confrontation between the two characters in a tense situation. Raden Sosroningrat's older brother is portrayed as a patriarchal figure upholding traditional norms of patriarchal culture. Women are deemed unnecessary to pursue higher education, as their role should remain confined to managing

household affairs. In contrast, Raden Sosroningrat supports Kartini's decision to advocate for change and progress towards gender equality.

The editing used in this scene includes visual effects such as tone up adjustments, enhancing the contrast between light and dark tones to underscore the tension between the characters. Side lighting is employed to illuminate different sides of their faces, creating a dramatic effect that emphasizes facial contours and adds depth to their emotional expressions. This technique also visually intensifies the conflict between the characters, reinforcing the sense of tension.

Ideological Level

The ideology depicted in the scene includes patriarchy and class ideology. Patriarchal ideology is shown through Raden Sosroningrat's brother's rejection of Kartini's desire to pursue higher education. He emphasizes that if a woman pursues higher education, it could lead to ambitions for higher positions, such as becoming a regent. In this context, patriarchy governs one of sociology's components known as sex roles, categorizing behaviors by gender, leading to stereotypes about women as domestic workers and men as public servants. This division limits social roles for both genders and creates power imbalances that often favor men (Hermawati, 2007).

As a social system, patriarchy places men in dominant roles, controlling political leadership, moral authority, social rights, and property ownership, often marginalizing women in various aspects of life, including education. This lack of education leads to high illiteracy rates among women (UNESCO, 2020). In patriarchal structures, women are often considered irrational and unfit for leadership roles, relegating them to traditional roles focused on domestic tasks and reproductive functions, thereby directly limiting their access to formal education and self-development opportunities. Meanwhile, men are placed in higher positions as family breadwinners and heirs (Sihite, 2007), hindering women's pursuit of higher education and full participation in society.

Class ideology is evident in Raden Sosroningrat's brother's statement that "A carpenter's daughter could become a queen; this will ruin everything!" This reflects a view that underestimates the abilities of women without noble titles and denies their potential to play roles beyond the traditional ones set by patriarchy. During the Dutch colonial period, women were prohibited from pursuing education unless they were of noble status (Sakina & A., 2017), reinforcing the assumption that non-noble women lack the ability or qualification for high social positions. This perception limits women from non-noble backgrounds, despite their talents and skills potentially contributing significantly in various fields.

Women without noble status are often seen as lacking the capacity or qualification for high social positions, illustrating how access to education and professional opportunities is often determined by social class (Bourdieu, 1984). This view explains stereotypes based on patriarchal culture, where power and leadership are considered the domain of men and those from upper social classes. Thus, patriarchal culture subjects women from lower social classes to double discrimination—restricted by restrictive gender norms and underestimated social conditions that overlook their abilities and potential (Crenshaw, 2018).

Conclusion

Based on the research conducted, the main findings reveal signs of reality levels that generate hidden meanings depicting the visualization of patriarchal culture in the film

Kartini. The film prominently highlights restrictions on women's education and portrays how women's access to education and professional opportunities is limited to uphold traditional gender roles. The level of representation is marked by cinematography that reinforces patriarchal cultural values through techniques such as Bird's Eye View shots, as well as lighting and editing that create visual tension between characters, intensifying the sense of conflict. Meanwhile, the level of ideology is evidenced in scenes containing patriarchal ideology. Through these signs, the film Kartini successfully represents and critiques the patriarchal culture that continues to strongly influence women's lives.

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