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# Javanese feminism in Yogyakarta-produced Javanese-language short films: An analysis of representation and potential uses in higher education

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**Abstract:** *This article examines how women's agency is narrated and constrained in three Yogyakarta-produced short films: Bakmi Kangen Rasa (2024), Mancing Mayit (2024), and Bendera Putih (2023). It responds to a gap between studies of Javanese women in written literature, single-film feminist analyses, and attention to the multimodal construction of gender. Using an interpretive qualitative, text-oriented approach, Javanese cultural-relational ethics provides the main interpretive frame; feminist stylistics directs attention to voice and power, while visual grammar guides consideration of objects, space, and audiovisual choices. Sinta's defense of a family noodle shop and Kunti's objection to a husband's debt-related decisions disclose situated forms of contestation, but neither speech nor caregiving alone proves an equitable redistribution of power. Bendera Putih functions as a limiting case: communal solidarity and an audiovisual dilemma cannot be treated as evidence of female agency without specific female-centered scenes. Concepts such as tepa selira, kanca wingking, and guyub rukun are therefore examined for both enabling and restrictive effects. The article advances a cautious account of Javanese female agency and proposes—not empirically tests—scene-based activities for higher-education literary study. Verbatim dialogue, film timestamps, and learning outcomes require further validation before stronger empirical claims can be made.*

***Keywords:*** *Javanese feminism, female agency, short film, multimodal analysis, cultural negotiation, higher education*

## INTRODUCTION

Feminist criticism asks how women become subjects of representation, who has authority over their lives, and how social arrangements reproduce or challenge gender hierarchy (de Beauvoir, 2011; Mills, 1995). Such questions remain relevant to Javanese society, where familial obligations, language etiquette, and communal relations can both support women and organize unequal expectations (Handayani & Sugiarti, 2004). The analytical task is therefore not to oppose a supposedly individualist "Western" feminism to a harmonious "Javanese" alternative, but to ask under what conditions culturally valued relationships enlarge or restrict women's choices.

Javanese short films offer a productive object of inquiry because they combine narrative with dialogue, speech levels, gesture, sound, framing, and spatial composition. Gender meanings emerge not only from what characters say but also from whose perspective structures a conflict, who occupies the visual foreground, who controls valued spaces and resources, and whether a character's objection changes subsequent events (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Mills, 1995). The movement from written narrative

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to audiovisual storytelling consequently requires close attention to both language and filmic form.

Yogyakarta is a relevant production context because regional cultural programs support locally grounded film projects. Bakmi Kangen Rasa and Mancing Mayit were among the films presented in the Yogyakarta Special Region Cultural Office's 2024 release of works funded through its 2023 program (Harian Jogja, 2024). Bendera Putih was selected through a Yogyakarta City cultural filmmaking program in 2023 (Yogyakarta City Cultural Office, 2023). These institutional links establish a defensible production context; they do not imply that three selected films represent all Javanese-language short films or all experiences of Javanese women.

Previous studies address related but distinct objects. Rosita and Sulanjari (2023) examine images of Javanese women in the novel Sindhen Padmi, providing a written-literature focus rather than a filmic account. El Hidayah et al. (2024) explore modernization and Javanese womanhood in the short film Wedok, centering a particular cultural change. Wananda and Surur (2024) analyze Tilik using John Fiske's semiotic levels and identify manifestations of women's leadership, expression, public participation, and solidarity; their single-film corpus does not establish cross-film patterns. For Bendera Putih, Utami and Arifianto (2025) examine audiovisual dissonance and ethical dilemmas, not a film-specific demonstration of women's emancipation. These works suggest the value of integrating close narrative analysis, gendered access to decisions, and multimodal interpretation without extending conclusions beyond documented scenes.

This article asks: (1) how domestic, economic, and communal power relations shape women's choices in the selected films; (2) whether cultural practices such as tepa selira or guyub rukun facilitate negotiation or naturalize unequal responsibility; (3) how narrative and available audiovisual cues articulate voice, authority, and constraint; and (4) what potential applications follow for Javanese literary learning at university level. The contribution is an operational, evidence-sensitive reading of gendered agency, rather than a claim that the films demonstrate a single, coherent model of Javanese feminism.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Feminist agency, discourse, and cultural location*

The main analytical frame of this study is situated Javanese female agency: the practical capacity of women to express an interest, contest an imposed decision, secure access to resources, and alter the terms of a relationship within historically specific cultural settings. Agency is not equated with assertive dialogue alone. It is examined alongside decision-making authority, economic dependence, sanctions, and the consequences of speaking or acting. De Beauvoir's (2011) account of woman as socially constituted "Other" helps formulate questions about who is treated as a legitimate decision-maker; it is a critical interlocutor, not a description automatically applicable to every Javanese family.

Handayani and Novianto (2004) provide the central cultural context for reading gendered subordination and negotiation among Javanese women. Jati's (2015) discussion of wani ing tata informs analysis of how socially regulated conduct may permit strategic action without guaranteeing emancipation. Feminist stylistics (Mills,

1995) is used as an analytical instrument for identifying whose account is privileged, who is addressed as an object, and whether an apparent female voice produces narrative or material consequences. Butler's (1990) account of gender as reiterated social performance adds a limited supporting question: how do speech and everyday acts make a gendered expectation appear normal? None of these perspectives is used merely as a label attached to a character.

### *Operational meanings of Javanese cultural concepts*

Cultural concepts must be distinguished from feminist findings. *Kanca wingking* denotes a gendered expectation associating women with service or activities behind the public foreground (Handayani & Novianto, 2004; Chasanah & Arimi, 2024); the analytical indicator is an allocation of authority, space, or labor, not the mere depiction of a kitchen. *Tepa selira* is sensitivity to others' circumstances, indicated by explicit consideration of their well-being and the consequences of decisions (Magnis-Suseno, 1984). *Gotong royong* denotes coordinated collective assistance and is only coded when collaboration, contribution, or a distribution of work can be identified (Koentjaraningrat, 1961). *Guyub rukun* names an ideal of social togetherness and concord; it may foster mutual support or discourage dissent (Magnis-Suseno, 1984). *Wani ing tata* refers here to assertive conduct within recognized conventions of restraint and etiquette, identified through the combination of a contested decision and a controlled manner of response (Jati, 2015).

For each concept, interpretation proceeds in three steps. First, identify what cultural practice or evaluative term is actually present. Second, assess how it structures a woman's available options and the costs attached to them. Third, ask whether a woman uses the practice to negotiate, reject, or transform a power asymmetry. A scene that displays harmony without identifying women's participation cannot be coded as female collective agency. Likewise, nrima (acceptance) is retained as a possible sensitizing concept rather than a result: the available scene documentation does not establish a specific sequence in which a female character knowingly accepts a constraint while changing its terms.

### *Film as a narrative and multimodal text*

A filmic reading brings the distribution of narrative attention together with visual and sonic evidence (Bordwell et al., 2020; Chion, 2019). At the verbal level, it considers address terms, accusations, requests, pauses, and changes in speaking position (Mills, 1995). At the visual level, it examines props, gestures, bodily orientation, occupation of domestic or public space, and, where documented, camera framing (Bordwell et al., 2020; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). At the auditory level, it considers who is heard, whose speech is interrupted, and whether sound supports or unsettles the visible scene (Chion, 2019). These dimensions can converge or diverge; a respectful style of address need not imply equal authority, just as forceful speech need not secure control over property.

## METHOD

### *Design and corpus*

The study adopts an interpretive qualitative design centered on textual and multimodal analysis of a purposively selected film corpus. Javanese feminist cultural interpretation is the primary frame; Mills's (1995) feminist stylistics supplies questions about subject position and discursive power, and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) inform the reading of visual organization. References to other feminist perspectives are conceptual dialogues, not a comparative-literature experiment: no specified written Javanese literary work was systematically paired with these films.

The three films were selected from identifiable Yogyakarta production and cultural-funding contexts associated with 2023–2024, with attention to domestic livelihood, debt pressure, and communal obligation. Inclusion required a short narrative format, documented Yogyakarta production or program connection, a culturally situated social conflict, and relevance to examining gendered decisions or their social conditions. Films outside this bounded corpus were not treated as excluded on the basis of a systematic review. The sample is therefore analytical and nonrepresentative. Bakmi Kangen Rasa and Mancing Mayit provide the primary female-centered conflict readings; Bendera Putih is retained as a contrasting case for examining what cannot be inferred about women from a community-centered narrative alone.

The date for *Mancing Mayit* is standardized as 2024 in accordance with the film entry in the Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival catalogue, which identifies Christian Banisrael as director and Medioker Films as production company (Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival, 2024). Bakmi Kangen Rasa is dated 2024 in its film listing and public cultural-program release, while Bendera Putih is dated 2023 in the Yogyakarta City program documentation (Harian Jogja, 2024; Dinas Kebudayaan Kota Yogyakarta, 2023). "Yogyakarta-produced" refers to these evidenced production/program ties, not to an exclusive geographical distribution of cast, language, or audience.

### *Units of analysis and interpretive procedure*

The unit of analysis is a sequence of action or dialogue in which a conflict over choice, obligation, reputation, or resources becomes legible. Each complete unit should comprise: film title and timecode; speaker and original-language utterance (where audible); contextual translation; character action; relevant framing, props, or sound; position of authority; options open to the woman; and the immediate consequence. In the research manuscript supplied for revision, scene descriptions and two blocks of dialogue were present but had no verified timecodes or independently accessible footage. This revised account consequently uses the documented narrative situations and explicitly marked scene descriptions as a provisional analytical record; it does not reproduce the original verbatim quotations as authenticated film transcripts.

Coding proceeds in five linked passes: (1) identify the conflict and the decision at stake; (2) map speakers, ownership claims, gendered expectations, and dependence; (3) annotate verbal and visual cues only where documented; (4) evaluate whether an action expands, reproduces, or leaves unresolved women's options; and (5) compare patterns and counterexamples across the three films. The codes group around personal voice, relational negotiation, social/material access, and cultural ethics. Interpretations are

presented with their evidentiary limits; an absent timecode, undocumented camera angle, or untested outcome is not silently completed by inference (Miles et al., 2019).

The earlier text also reported classroom observations and interviews but provided no sites, participant counts, instruments, dates, transcripts, or ethical procedures. Those claims are not retained as empirical evidence. Implications for higher education are treated as proposed uses of the films, not tested instructional outcomes. Credibility of the current revision rests on transparent separation of documented narrative content, culturally informed interpretation, and evidence requiring verification; inter-rater reliability and source triangulation are not claimed without audit materials.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Result*

### *Film corpus and the status of evidence*

The corpus stages three different conflicts. *Bakmi Kangen Rasa* positions Sinta, an adopted daughter, within an inheritance and livelihood dispute; *Mancing Mayit* places Kunti within the social consequences of Togog's loan-related decisions; *Bendera Putih* centers a neighborhood dilemma between mourning and a planned communal celebration. Table 1 specifies the gender question in each narrative without assuming that all three furnish equally detailed evidence of women's action.

**Table 1. Corpus, central conflict, and role within the analysis**

| Film / production context | Central conflict | Analytical role |
|---|---|---|
| Bakmi Kangen Rasa (2024); Dhisga Amandatya; Lajar Tantjap Film | Sinta wants to continue her deceased adoptive father's noodle business; a biological son intends to sell the house and shop. | Primary case: property, kinship legitimacy, labor, and Sinta's decision-making |
| Mancing Mayit (2024); Christian Banisrael; Medioker Films | Togog's debts prompt a risky attempt to gain luck from a corpse-related ritual, placing family security under pressure. | Primary case: debt, gendered exposure to risk, and Kunti's challenge |
| Bendera Putih (2023); Budi Dwi Arifianto; CV Suryo Miguno Production | A neighborhood death complicates a scheduled Independence Day tirakatan. | Boundary case: communal concord; female agency cannot be inferred without documented female scenes |

### *Discussion*

*Bakmi Kangen Rasa: livelihood, kinship, and the limits of recognition,* The primary-case classification in the Table 1: Sinta seeks to sustain a legendary noodle shop after the death of her adoptive father, whereas his biological child returns wishing to sell the house and business to address debts (Amandatya, 2024). The working manuscript describes Sinta defending the shop as memory, work, and continuing livelihood rather than solely a saleable asset. The precise phrasing of her exchange with Aryo, however, requires checking against the film and is therefore not quoted here.

The situation reveals two unequal resources of authority. The biological son's claim derives from recognized kinship and control over the proposed sale; Sinta's competing claim draws on practical labor, affective affiliation, and responsibility for a business that remains socially meaningful. This is not a simple opposition between

patriarchal coercion and female freedom: the available account does not establish the legal status of ownership, whether Sinta ultimately controls the shop, or whether employees receive a voice in the decision. Her resolve therefore indicates a claim to agency; the degree of realized economic autonomy remains open.

The earlier scene account depicts Sinta in a working kitchen, responding to confrontation while handling an everyday cooking implement. As a provisional multimodal cue, this prop connects her speech to embodied expertise and the shop's material operation. Nevertheless, a kitchen setting can simultaneously associate women with service work and furnish evidence of economic competence. Without a verified shot-by-shot record, it would be unwarranted to infer specific camera angles, visual dominance, or a definitive emancipatory ending. *Tepa selira* is an interpretive possibility insofar as Sinta frames business continuity in relation to others' livelihoods; it becomes feminist agency only if that concern is joined to an actual claim on decisions and resources.

*Mancing Mayit: the gendered costs of financial desperation Mancing Mayit* tells of Togog, whose loan burden leads him to seek luck by fishing at a place associated with a corpse; this central story is described in the festival synopsis (Banisrael, 2024). The original manuscript places his wife, Kunti, in the consequences of his financial actions and describes her objection to both the debt-related exposure of her reputation and his irrational proposed solution. Because the available material does not verify the quotation or subtitle wording, her response is discussed as an author-supplied scene account rather than presented as a film-checked transcript.

Kunti's resistance matters because the economic decision is taken by Togog while possible shame and risk extend to her. At the relational level, she challenges the presumption that a husband may determine a risky strategy while a wife must absorb its consequences. At the personal level, her objection asserts a boundary on the use of her dignity as collateral for another person's decision. These are stronger indicators than the observation that she merely speaks forcefully: they connect voice to an unequal distribution of risk. Yet an objection is not itself evidence of a redistribution of financial control; the manuscript does not specify an outcome demonstrating that Kunti gains access to debt information or authority over repayment.

The contrast between the couple's competing accounts can be approached through feminist stylistics by asking whose justification the story permits and whose losses become visible (Mills, 1995). The working script identifies a confrontation but supplies no reliable shot sequence or sound analysis; gesture, framing, and music cannot therefore be described in detail. Nor can Kunti's response properly be coded as "critical *nrima*": it is a dispute rather than documented acceptance followed by strategic transformation. The film supports an analysis of gendered financial vulnerability while leaving the longer-term consequences of Kunti's intervention undetermined.

*Bendera Putih: communal ethics as a necessary counterexample Bendera Putih* centers a conflict between the etiquette of mourning and the community's wish to hold an Independence Day *tirakatan*. The director's coauthored study describes the film's deliberate visual–auditory dissonance as a means of conveying ethical ambiguity (Utami & Arifianto, 2025). The film thus supplies a useful test of any claim that Javanese communal solidarity straightforwardly supports women. An account of a collective dilemma is not, by itself, an account of female voice or leadership.

The earlier manuscript asserted that women participate actively in sustaining *guyub rukun* but did not identify a named female character, original utterance, decision-making event, or timecoded interaction supporting that assertion. This revision therefore does not claim female collective agency in *Bendera Putih* as a finding. Instead, it asks what an adequate test would require: identifying the persons who define the obligations of mourning, who organizes communal care, who decides whether the event proceeds, and whether women's unpaid participation is treated as an entitlement to make decisions or merely an expected contribution. Such questions expose both the promise and the burden of harmony without inventing an unseen scene.

The film's use of audiovisual dissonance further cautions against treating social cohesion as a visually or morally uncomplicated fact. Where sound and picture pull in different directions, an apparent public consensus may coexist with tension or exclusion (Utami & Arifianto, 2025). Only a documented female-centered sequence could establish the extent to which this general ambiguity also involves gender. As currently evidenced, *Bendera Putih* sets the boundary of the article's feminist claims rather than providing a third equal example of emancipation.

### *Synthesis: from cultural values to gendered power relations*

The findings are most precise when cultural concepts are evaluated against options, authority, and consequences. In Sinta's case, a relation-centered claim for preservation may support female economic initiative, while kinship and inheritance norms may restrict its legal effect. In Kunti's case, moral objection makes the unfair distribution of risk visible, while actual access to financial decisions remains unestablished. In *Bendera Putih*, the community's ethic of mourning frames a collective dilemma, but the gendered distribution of care and authority is not demonstrated by the available scene evidence. Table 2 separates the scene-level basis from interpretation and the principal uncertainty.

**Table 2. Evidence-led synthesis of female agency and its limits**

| Theme / film | Documented narrative or scene basis | Interpretation and limit |
|---|---|---|
| Economic decision / Bakmi Kangen Rasa | Sinta contests the intended sale of her adoptive father's shop; earlier notes place her response in a kitchen work setting. | A claim to cultural and livelihood stewardship; ownership, outcome, and shot details require verification. |
| Relational risk / Mancing Mayit | Togog's loan-related actions create family risk; existing scene notes report Kunti's objection. | Her complaint contests unequal exposure to harm; financial authority after the dispute is not established. |
| Communal obligation / Bendera Putih | Death and *tirakatan* create a conflict about mourning and neighborhood cooperation. | *Guyub rukun* is a contextual ethic, not demonstrated female agency without named/timecoded female decisions. |
| Cultural practice across corpus | Domestic labor, family obligation, and community concord recur in different forms. | Values may enable care or naturalize gendered burdens; none is inherently emancipatory. |

A dimensional comparison with feminist thought is more defensible than a binary of "Western individualism" and "Javanese collectivism". Regarding voice, Sinta and Kunti make claims that interrupt male-led decisions; regarding autonomy, both operate within material or marital dependencies; regarding resources, one conflict

concerns business continuity and the other household financial risk; regarding relational responsibility, both connect personal stakes to family or community welfare. De Beauvoir's (2011) critique of being constituted as secondary and Mills's (1995) questions about discursive positions illuminate these dimensions without requiring that local values be abandoned. The same situated act can preserve relationships and challenge a specific exercise of power.

This comparison is conceptual, not empirical comparative literature. Claims about transformations from classical Javanese literary texts cannot be verified here because no identified written work was selected, coded, and analyzed alongside the film corpus. A subsequent study could compare specified passages from a *serat* or modern Javanese novel using the same dimensions and a transparent selection protocol. The distinction keeps a promising comparison from being misrepresented as an already completed result.

### *Potential pedagogical implications for higher education*

The films may be used as a carefully scaffolded set of multimodal texts in courses such as Javanese Literary Appreciation, Literary Criticism, Cultural Studies, and Gender Studies. A feasible instructional sequence begins with a brief, timecoded scene excerpt; students transcribe the Javanese or Indonesian speech as heard, note register and address terms, prepare a contextual translation, and annotate gestures, props, speaking turns, and soundtrack. They then map who controls a decision or resource and distinguish an observable action from an interpretation based on *tepa selira*, *wani ing tata*, or patriarchal subordination.

A comparative classroom assignment could place the Sinta and Kunti scenes side by side using five fixed dimensions: the disputed decision, claimed authority, access to material resources, possible sanctions, and demonstrable consequences. *Bendera Putih* would operate as a contrasting example, requiring students to identify what evidence would be necessary before attributing community agency to women. If comparison with written literature is a curriculum goal, the instructor must first choose a definite literary work and excerpt rather than implying that the present research already analyzed such a text.

These proposals are potential pedagogical implications. No validated pretest/posttest, classroom trial, or student interview dataset accompanies this revised study. Consequently, it cannot claim that these films improve students' critical thinking, gender sensitivity, or learning outcomes. The proposed activities are practical candidates for future teaching research, whose effects would require appropriate course-level assessment.

## CONCLUSION

This study finds that women's agency in Yogyakarta-produced short films is best examined as a situated negotiation over resources, relationships, and culturally sanctioned obligations, rather than as a simple attribute of outspoken female characters. In *Bakmi Kangen Rasa*, Sinta's effort to maintain a family noodle shop makes visible a conflict between economic stewardship and kinship-based authority. In *Mancing Mayit*, Kunti's challenge to the consequences of Togog's debt points to the unequal distribution of household risk. Neither case, on the currently documented evidence, establishes a

complete transformation of property rights or financial decision-making. *Bendera Putih* contributes a productive boundary case: its communal dilemma may illuminate *guyub rukun*, but it does not substantiate women's agency without identified female-centered scenes.

The theoretical contribution is a critical use of Javanese cultural concepts as questions about power rather than as automatic markers of liberation. *Tepa selira*, *wani ing tata*, and communal harmony can support responsible action while also legitimizing expectations that women preserve relationships at their own expense; *nrima* is not retained as a principal empirical finding. In relation to feminist perspectives, the films invite comparison across specific dimensions of voice, decision-making, resource access, and relational obligation, without reducing either Javanese or other feminist traditions to a uniform position.

For higher education, the corpus has potential as material for transcription, visual and verbal analysis, and evidence-based discussion of gender relations. Such instructional potential remains a proposal rather than a measured educational effect. The main limitation of the present textual record is the absence of independently verified timecoded dialogue and detailed scene logs, particularly for *Bendera Putih*. Future work should complete those records, establish the consequences of the characters' actions, and test any pedagogical uses before advancing stronger empirical generalizations.

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