



Comparative Analysis of Conservative Values in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009) and *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003)

Weni Ratminingsih^{1*}, Harsiwi Fajar Sari²

¹⁻²Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, Indonesia

Korespondensi penulis: weniratmi23@gmail.com

Abstract: Tradition cannot be separated from human life, in any form it is, depending on its culture and community. In the society, there are people who intend to preserve it, or to change it. Conservatism itself is referred to maintain what is already put in place in the society. This is found in movies namely *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*. This study aims to analyze how the characters in both movies manifest the conservatism ideas. The research uses the theory of Conservatism by John Kekes. The qualitative descriptive method is used, and the primary data is from the dialogues of the characters. The secondary data of other information related is also used. The result shows that the characters in both movies portray the four ideas offered by John Kekes about Conservatism, namely Skepticism, Pluralism, Traditionalism, and Pessimism. Further, being conservative to the tradition as shown by the characters in the movies is worth preserved.

Keywords: Conservatism, John Kekes, Tradition.

Abstrak: Tradisi tidak bisa dipisahkan dari kehidupan manusia, dalam tiap bentuknya, tergantung pada budaya dan komunitasnya. Di masyarakat, ada orang-orang yang bermaksud melestarikan budaya tersebut, namun ada juga yang ingin mengubahnya. Konservatisme mengarah kepada menjaga apa yang sudah ada di Masyarakat. Hal ini ditemukan pada film *Mona Lisa Smile* dan *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana karakter di kedua film tersebut menunjukkan ide-ide konservatisme. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori Konservatisme oleh John Kekes. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif, dan data primer diambil dari dialog para karakter. Data sekunder tentang informasi terkait juga digunakan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan para karakter di kedua film mencerminkan keempat ide Konservatisme yang dijabarkan oleh John Kekes, yakni Skeptisisme, Pluralisme, Tradisionalisme, dan Pesimisme. Selain itu, bersikap konservatif terhadap tradisi seperti yang ditunjukkan oleh para karakter di kedua film merupakan hal yang penting untuk dipertahankan.

Kata kunci: Konservatisme, John Kekes, Tradisi.

1. BACKGROUND

Tradition is a thing that cannot be separated from human life, and it is always growing and developing. It is inherited from generation to generation (Shils, 1981). Meanwhile, A.K. Saran (1965) defines tradition is referred to traditional thought As there are many people who are proud of the tradition keep maintaining it, some others have different idea that a tradition also need a change. We can perceive ethnic groups preserve their tradition in their daily life. Meanwhile, we can also find another practice of tradition reflected in any fiction world, such as novels or movies.

Movies as one of the literary genres besides having their advantage to entertain people, they also introduce new knowledge, such as culture and values. Concerning the values, it means that how a movie can make people experience something, as proposed by Klarer (2004: 53) that “movie is made by literary techniques, conversely, the literary practice developed particular features under the impact of the movie”.

Perempuan Berkalung Sorban (*Woman with a Turban*) is a movie that tells Muslim characters who hold the Islamic idealism values. This was released in 2009 by Hanung Bramantyo, based on Abidah El Khalieqy's novel. Set in a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) environment, the movie presents about the dynamics of life in the community, as well as its problem. Anisa, the main character, attempt to gain freedom of thought in the environment. Bringing the tradition and religion issue, the movie exposes that the inability to critical thinking exists in the *pesantren*; which means they commonly comprehend verses with a single interpretation and claim it as a single truth.

Another movie that brings tradition issue is *Mona Lisa Smile*. It is a movie released in 2003 and produced by Mike Newell. It is about a character named Katherine Watson, a Ph.D student at Oakland State University, who is occupied as an Art History instructor at Wellesley College for 1953/1954 school year. The academic community at Wellesley commonly hold a view that women, referring to the female university students, must stick to the traditional values and thoughts, that their main goal in life is marrying a man from a devoted family. Some more liberal thoughts concerning that idea do exist, yet they are suppressed by the rest of academic members. Katherine is aware of that, and she tries to provide understanding to her students about the importance in learning.

In the issue of conservative tradition, both movies share similarities. Yet, they have different background, as *Mona Lisa Smile* is in a Western environment, and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* has an Eastern background. Conservatism is considered as proclivity to maintain what is already put in place in the society. The conservative classes are commonly religious ones. They keep to preserve tradition or religion and withstand any form of changes in social life that does not match the values they hold (Ramlan, 2005).

Meanwhile, in Western countries, Conservatism means a political philosophy that bears traditional values as different cultures embrace different established values. Some conservatives try to overcome the meaningful status quo without change, while others try to return to values from past times, or they are called the status quo ante (Burke, 1997).

From the statements above, it means that in Eastern and Western environment, conservatism refers to a tradition that preserves the old values from the society or culture. According to John Kekes (2001), conservatism is focused on the political arrangements that can bring the society members to live good lives. It needs the preservation of universal conditions of all good lives, social conditions that differs according to the societies, and individual conditions that show character differences and state of affairs.

Concerning the conservatism tradition found in both movies, it is interesting to analyze how conservative values or ideas are represented through the characters in *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*. Both characters in both movies, Anisa and Katherine who have the ideas of free thoughts, face the community who preserve their tradition, in which it refers to the conservatism. John Kekes' theory on conservatism is used in the analysis to explain that the group is conservative who intend to keep their traditions as it is. The ideas on conservatism is visible from skepticism about ideologies, pluralism about values, traditionalism about institutions, and pessimism about human perfectibility.

Some studies have been done related to both movies, such as *Feminism in Patriarchal Society is reflected in the main character of Perempuan Berkalung Sorban (Woman with a Turban)* by Farida Hannum Siagian. It discusses varieties of feminism ad how that in patriarchy form is represented by the main character Annisa in the movie analysed. The other research is *The Struggle of Katherine Watson For Getting Equal Rights Of Education In Mona Lisa Smile Movie* by Oknawiyanti and Ingestry Nunggil. This paper focuses on the main character, Katherine Watson and her acts, and applying an approach of liberal feminism. The third paper is *Representasi Perjuangan Perempuan dalam Movie "Mona Lisa Smile" (Studi Analisis Semiotika)*. It uses a representation theory and analyzes the struggles of women in the public sector. These three researches focus on feminism issues and their struggles, which is different from this research being done.

This study aims to reveal how conservatism ideas arise in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban (Woman with a Turban)* and *Mona Lisa Smile* movies which are represented through each character. As keeping the tradition is not always seen positively by some people, it interesting to figure out if there is positive side about it.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to John Kekes (2001), there are several ideas concerning conservatism; skepticism, pluralism, traditionalism, and pluralism. Skepticism means questioning attitude or doubt towards knowledge or belief; pluralism as a medium between absolutism (truth values or objectively real reality), and relativism (considering science, truth, and morality about culture, society, and historical context). Conservatism identifies the pluralism. It is something that ties traditions. Concerning traditionalism, conservatives must consider the traditional political and cultural institutions to restrain people's stand

and violent inclinations. Pessimism directs conservatives to deny the “Enlightenment Faith” in human perfectibility shared by liberals and socialists.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

A method of research is one procedure or technique in a study. This covers data collection, analysis, and interpretation that is proposed for the study (Creswell, 2016). This research uses qualitative method. Meanwhile, according to Lofland (1984), words and actions are forms of the primary data sources, while the secondary data sources are documents. The primary data sources are the dialogues from both movies being analyzed, while the secondary data sources are documents from books related to the analysis.

Lexy J. Moleong (2005) states that the data collection technique is a strategic way used by the researcher to collect data, which aims to get relevant and complete data. In this research, the documentation technique is used to gain all the data.

According to Bogdan and Taylor (1975), data analysis is the process of planning effort formally to find themes and formulate hypotheses as suggested by the data and an effort to assist with those themes and hypotheses. In this analysis, it is divided into steps. First, the sorted data concerning conservatism is identified in both movies. Then, the chosen data is analyzed using John Kekes’ theory of conservatism. The secondary data is used to uphold the main data. Finally, the result from this is compared.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Values of Conservatism in *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*

The values of conservatism in the movies are reflected into these four: Skepticism, Pluralism, Traditionalism, and Pessimism.

a. Skepticism

In *Mona Lisa Smile* movie, skepticism is seen through the characters who are suspicious to the way of thinking and behavior of the main character; Katherine.

President Carr: Do you? I've been getting some calls about your teaching methods, Katherine. They're a little unorthodox for Wellesley. We are traditionalists, Katherine.
00:48:28,739 -->00:49:01,270

Katherine: Yes, I noticed.

President Carr: So if you'd like to stay here

Katherine: Is that a question?

President Carr: More a discussion.

Katherine: About my staying here?

President Carr: You'll have your formal review in May. Until then a little less modern art. Happy holidays. 00:48:28,739 -->00:49:01,270

In the scene above, President Carr, who is the principal at Wellesley, argues that Katherine's teaching method is not a common thing in Wellesley's academic culture. His act reflects that he intends to keep the teaching tradition in the campus. "So if you'd like to stay here" infers that he wants Katherine to follow what has been conducted in there.

Meanwhile, in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, Skepticism is seen through these dialogues.

Annisa: Saya, saya mau minta cerai, Umi.

Umi Syam: Istighfar Annisa astaghfirullah Allah , suami itu tidak mungkin menikah lagi kalau istri itu bisa memuaskan suami, Nisa.

(Annisa: I want to ask for divorce, Umi.

Umi Syam: Forgive me, God! Astaghfirullah, a husband would not ask for another marriage if the wife can satisfy the husband).

00:35:48--00:36:34

It happens when Annisa's husband, Syamsudin, asks to marry another woman; Annisa asks for a divorce to Syamsudin's mother. She says that "the husband would not ask for another marriage if the wife could provide full affection". Samsudin's mother has an opinion that men are never wrong and they have freedom to marry more than one wife.

b. Pluralism

In *Mona Lisa Smile*, pluralism is reflected in the scene when Professor Dunbar is teaching French in class at Wellesley. The acceptance of cultural mixing of French in American environment shows how pluralism emerges. The evidence is below:

Prof Dunbar: "*On a entendu des cris de loin, venant d'un bâtiment abandonné*" (We heard screams from afar, coming from an abandoned building) (01:18:42)

In the second movie, there is a scene when Annisa's mother is looking for her daughter.

Ibu Annisa (nyai): Sari Annisa mawujud?

(Annisa Mother: Is Annisa here?)

Santriwati: la nyai

(Students: She is not here).

Wa lā talbisul-ḥaqqā bil-bāḥili wa taktumul-ḥaqqā wa antum ta'lamūn (QS. 2:42) *allahuakbar allahuakbar Dan janganlah kamu campuradukkan kebenaran dengan kebatilan dan (janganlah) kamu sembunyikan kebenaran, sedangkan kamu mengetahuinya*

(Do not mix up the truth with falsehood and (do not) hide the truth while you know it.) (00:00:00--00:00:35).

The dialogues above exposes the verses of the Koran in Surah 2 (Al-Baqarah) verse 42 that becomes the leading source of a tradition taking place in the movie *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (*Woman with a Turban*). Relativism and absolutism are set up from the existing traditions. These traditions are strengthened by the Koran's textual verses which becomes a form of conservatism. Conservatives must not hide the truth. This means, referring to a wider context, they should practice it to the daily life and are not supposed to eliminate former tradition or practices just because something new appears. Further, the *pesantren* environment as set in this movie is familiar with the Arabic culture.

c. Traditionalism

In *Mona Lisa Smile* movie, form of traditionalism is shown in the scene when the students of Wellesley are playing game at Wellesley school.

Nancy: Go, go, go! Go, go! It's been going on since the late '80s.

Whoever wins is the first to marry!

00:23:05,133 -->00:23:31,700

The dialogues above signify that Wellesley tries to keep the tradition as it is considered worthy to be preserved. It is when someone wins the game, she is supposed to be the first to marry. The women at Wellesley are used to play the game. They compete to win the game.

In the second movie, traditionalism is seen in the scene where Annisa is having an argument with her mother.

Umi : Annisa, turun!! Berapa kali umi bilang anak perempuan itu tidak boleh pencilakan.

Annisa : Nisa ngga pencilakan, Nisa cuma naik kuda.

Umi : Itu namanya pencilakan.

Annisa : Itu Mas Reza sama Wildan boleh.

Umi : Mereka itu cah lanang rapopo.

(Umi: Annisa, get off! How many times did Umi say that girls shouldn't climb up?)

Annisa: I'm not climbing, I'm just riding a horse.

Umi: That's called climbing.

Annisa: That's what Mas Reza and Wildan are allowed to do.

Umi: It's okay as they're boys.)

00:02:41-00:03:20

The dialogues above signify that Annisa wants to act like her elder brother to ride a horse. Meanwhile, her mother says that a woman should not do that. In the society, it is not common for a woman to act like men, in this case, riding a horse. Women should be more polite and have gentle image. However, Annisa thinks that this is unfair and an old-fashioned way of perception.

d. Pessimism

Mona Lisa Smile movie reflects pessimism act as seen below when Amanda, one of Wellesley teachers, talks to Katherine about the students.

Amanda: Be careful. They can smell fear.

00:06:19,128 --> 00:06:23,673

From the utterance, Amanda shows that she is uncertain if Katherine can handle the students well. She reminds Katherine that “*They can smell fear*”. They refers to the students who can notice if the teacher may be not confident to them.

Meanwhile, in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* movie, pessimism is shown from the dialogues below.

Annisa: Kapan aku boleh kuliah.

Syamsudin: Kok mikirin kuliah tu ngapain? Hidup kamu itu sekarang sudah enak nungguin suami pulang, jadi mantu kyai, dihormati orang.

Annisa: Aku mau kuliah aku bisa edan kalo hidup sama kamu kaya gini.

(Annisa: When can I go to college?)

Syamsudin: Why are you thinking about going to college? Your life is already good now, waiting for your husband to come home, being a kyai's daughter-in-law, and being respected by people.

Annisa: I want to go to college, I can be crazy if I live with you like this.)

00:26:07--00:27:02

Syamsudin's statement “*Why are you thinking about going to college?*” is a pessimistic attitude toward his wife, as he thinks that she is considered not able to continue the education. She is already in a good condition and has a good status; the wife of a rich man. There is nothing more to be achieved.

Comparison of Conservative Values in *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*

Referring to John Kekes' ideas, in the discussion of Skepticism, in both movies, the character Katherine and Annisa receives suspicion act from the other characters, namely President Carr and Syamsudin's mother. The distinctive concern is that in the first movie, President Carr focuses on the teaching method, while in the other movie, Syamsudin's mother assumes that Annisa has not been a good wife yet, that makes Syamsudin, her son, asks for marriage with another woman.

Concerning Pluralism idea, both movies show how mixing culture happen. However, in the Western culture at Wellesley college where French is studied, the language is not applied in daily life. It is different from Arabic in *pesantren* community as happen in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, that the practice of religion teaching is commonly sounded to the students in *pesantren* to be practiced in daily life.

The idea of Traditionalism reflects the tradition values hold by the community. In Wellesley environment, they hold a view on how the female students' main goal is to get married with a good partner. It means, no matter how high their education is, a marriage to a good partner is still their main achievement. Meanwhile, in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, there is a tradition on how women should behave politely according to the culture's standard, which is different from men, who have more freedom in their move.

The final idea reflected in both movies is pessimism. Here, both characters in both movies, namely Amanda and Syamsudin, perform pessimistic acts to Katherine and Annisa. Katherine is considered being fear of the situation, while Annisa is considered not capable to study at college, as she is a woman, and the better way to her is keep staying at home as a wife.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The characters in both movies *Mona Lisa Smile* and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* manifest the four ideas offered by John Kekes about Conservatism. Although in both movies, the main characters themselves are more in the position to be against the tradition, yet, the overall scenes indicate that each character has their own reason in maintaining the tradition.

Being skeptical may be one way to be not easily influenced by any negative impact from outside. Pluralism bridges traditions which are considered deserving to be tolerated and has a good value to each era. Traditionalism form in maintaining the good old values

is related to each culture's tradition that is still believed by most community. Finally, some characters are found to be pessimistic to the other characters' ability in performing or working on any act. Overall, being conservative to the tradition as shown by the characters in the movies is worth preserved.

The researchers suggest other researches to be done using other theories and approaches, in the scope of such as sociology or psychology, especially in a form of comparative study.

REFERENCES

- Bogdan, R., & Taylor, S. J. (1975). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Bandung: Remadja Karya.
- Bramantyo, H. (Director). (2009). *Perempuan berkalung sorban* [Film]. Starvision.
- Burke, E. (1997). *Reflections on the revolution in France*. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W. (2016). *Research design: Pendekatan metode kualitatif, kuantitatif dan campuran* (4th ed.). Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Kekes, J. (2001). *Case of conservatism*. Cornell University Press.
- Klarer, M. (2004). *An introduction to literary studies*. Routledge.
- Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. H. (1984). *Analyzing social settings*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Meleong, L. J. (2005). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Newell, M. (Director). (2003). *Mona Lisa Smile* [Film]. Columbia Pictures.
- Oknawiyanti, I. N. (2016). *The struggle of Katherine Watson for getting equal right of education in Mona Lisa Smile movie* (Skripsi Sarjana, Universitas Brawijaya).
- Rahma, F. (2017). *Representasi perjuangan perempuan dalam movie "Mona Lisa Smile"* (Skripsi, Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar).
- Ramlan, S. (2005). *Memahami ilmu politik*. Jakarta: Grasindo.
- Saran, A. K. (1965). Sociology of knowledge and traditional thought. *Sociological Bulletin*, 14(1).
- Shils, E. (1981). *Tradition*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Siagian, F. H., Dirgeyasa, I. W., & Hartoyo, I. (2018). Feminism in patriarchal society reflected in the main character of *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* movie. *Linguistica*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.24114/jalu.v7i3.13287>