

Mysticism in the Local Stories "Ngrandhu" and "Sendang Mulya" (Niels Mulder's Mysticism Perspective)

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Abstrak

Beberapa cerita lokal di Kabupaten Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta merepresentasikan mistisisme Jawa. Dua cerita lokal di antaranya yaitu *Ngrandhu* dan *Sendang Mulya* dipilih untuk dianalisis dalam artikel ini. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan antropologi sastra terhadap mistisisme karya Niel Mulder, maka pertanyaan penelitian yang diajukan adalah: Bagaimana mistisisme Jawa direpresentasikan dalam cerita lokal *Ngrandhu* dan *Sendang Mulya*? Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan refleksi mistisisme Jawa dalam cerita-cerita lokal. Data diambil dari sesi wawancara dengan narasumber, kemudian data tersebut dianalisis menggunakan teknik deskriptif dan disajikan secara kualitatif. Berdasarkan analisis ditemukan bahwa mistisisme Jawa tercermin melalui keberadaan material, spiritual, dan moral dalam cerita tersebut. Keberadaan material meliputi mata air, pohon kapuk besar, sesaji dan rumah, sedangkan keberadaan spiritual diwujudkan dalam proses mandi, menyiapkan sesaji, dan menebang pohon sebagai ritualnya. Selain itu, keberadaan moral muncul dalam proses membangun rumah dan melestarikan mata air. Kajian lebih lanjut mengenai kepercayaan lokal seperti mistisisme di berbagai daerah dapat dilakukan lebih lanjut untuk mendapatkan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam dan penerimaan yang lebih luas terhadap bentuk kebudayaan yang berbeda.

Kata Kunci: cerita lokal, Kulon Progo, mistisisme

Abstract

Some local stories in Kulon Progo Regency, Yogyakarta represented Javanese mysticism. Two of those local stories namely *Ngrandhu* and *Sendang Mulya* were selected to be analyzed in this article. Applying a literary anthropology approach to Niel Mulder's mysticism, a proposed research question was: How is Javanese mysticism represented in *Ngrandhu* and *Sendang Mulya* local stories? This article aimed to describe Javanese mysticism reflection in local stories. The data were taken from interview sessions with resourceful people, then those data were analyzed using descriptive techniques and presented qualitatively. Based on the analysis, it was found that Javanese mysticism was reflected through material, spiritual and moral existences in the story. Material existence included the spring, the big kapok tree, offerings and a house, while spiritual existence took form in the process of bathing, preparing the offerings, and chopping down the tree as its rites. Moreover, moral existence appeared in the process of building the house and conserving the spring. Further study about local beliefs such as mysticism in different areas can be conducted more to gain a deeper understanding and broader acceptance of different cultures.

Keywords: Kulon Progo, local story, mysticism

INTRODUCTION

The fast development of technology nowadays does not merely eliminate mystical things in Java. Two indicators that prove the existence of mystical belief are the prevalence of popular horror movies playing in cinemas, as well as discussions at the HISKI literary association about horror literature. Liputan 6 online news on 1st June 2024 stated that horror movies have developed and have been watched by many people. It was reported that *KKN di Desa Penari* (2022) had more than 10 million viewers, *Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion* (2022) had more than 6,3 million viewers, *Seni Dino* (2023) had more than 4,8 million viewers, *Pengabdi Setan* (2017) had more than 4,2 million viewers, *Suzanna: Bernapas dalam Kubur* (2018) had more than 3,3 million viewers. In addition, the discussions of "Sastra Horor" have been held more than seven times. The results of the discussion can be viewed on YouTube under title "Tukar Tutar Sastra Horor" and it has been conducted more than ten times.

In a narrower scope, Kulon Progo as a district in Yogyakarta also has its mystical things that exist in many forms. Some of the mystical things are reflected in a tourist destination such as Goa Kiskendo (Fizar, 2023), with a place called "Kampung Mati" (Dewantara, 2023), with a mystical story (Putri, 2024). One of the forms which is rarely discussed in an academic field is the

local story. Local story, in this case, refers to a story that is transmitted orally from generation to generation (Rahim & Rahiem, 2021). Many studies have discussed the benefit of the local story (Lowery, et al, 2021; Mulatsih & Widharyanto, 2022; Saputri & Priyatni, 2021; Saragih, et al, 2020; Walters, 2023).

The discussion of mysticism in many stories has been conducted until now. Some of them are described chronologically in the following. In 2020, mysticism in Aboriginal myth was discussed by Hiscock. In 2021, Tursunpulatovna explained the epics of Yusuf and Zulayko based on mystical interpretation. In 2022, Lestari discussed an adaptation novel entitled "Gerbang Dialog Danur" written by Risa Saraswati. In 2023, Ayuni (2024) applied Niels Mulder's theory of mysticism to analyze a myth of Kawi mountain. This article fills the gap in terms of the object of the study and the theory. Although Ayuni also applied Niels Mulder's theory, the object of the study is different. Ayuni has one object that is Kawi mountain myth, this article has two local stories from different area, namely Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta.

In Kulon Progo, there are also many local stories told orally by local people. This area was chosen due to its fast development in a culinary tourism destination (Mulyana & Yulianto, 2018; Rakhmawati & Utami, 2023). Some of them are "Kopi Ampirano", "Kopi Ingkar Janji", "Tumpeng Menoreh", "Omah Cantrik", "Puncak Saka", "Geblek Pari Nanggulan", and "Kopi Klothok Nanggulan". Besides, many tourism aspects have promising prospects after the building of the International airport (Brahmanto, 2020; Prayudi, 2020). Those tourism destinations and prospects do not ignore local wisdom reflected in the local stories of Kulon Progo.

Two of the local stories are *Ngrandhu* and *Sendang Mulya*. These two local stories are selected based on the existence of mysticism compared to other local stories in Kulon Progo. Based on Smith (2020), mysticism for Java people refers to lineages or esoteric sects within a religious tradition. Some aspects that belong to mysticism are immanent, transcendent, ultimate reality (unmanifested principle of all manifestation), supreme identity, Law and Dharma to achieve a final end. Previous studies about mysticism discussed local stories from different areas in Indonesia such as Gunung Kawi (Ayuni, 2024) or Java island (Anggraini & Raharjo, 2022). This study enriches the discussion especially in a specific region that is Kulon Progo.

Reflecting on the importance of local story discussion and the existence of mysticism, this article focuses more on answering a question: How is Javanese mysticism represented in *Ngrandhu* and *Sendang Mulya* local stories? In other words, it aims to describe Javanese mysticism reflected in two selected local stories. In addition to that, this study is done to enrich the discussion of mysticism in local stories and to introduce two local stories which also contain moral values from Kulon Progo, an area that is well-known today for its spots of tourism destination and culinary tourism. This article is also an effort to write down the summary of two local stories for future generations since the stories are transmitted orally.

METHOD

This study is classified as a qualitative one since the data and its analysis do not relate to statistical principles (Mohajan, 2018). The processes of data gathering, analysis and interpretation were done based on literary theories. The theories include oral literature, mysticism, and anthropology literature. Oral literature (Murphy, 1978) is defined as "a form of communication which uses words in speech in a highly stylized, artistic way" (p. 113). Lamusu (2020) also added that it contains the realities of life in a specific region and represents good and effective thoughts to be passed down to future generations.

Since the objects of the study were two local stories in relation to humanity, an anthropological literary approach was applied. It focused on literary works through structural analysis together with cultural and social context (Veniaty, 2023). There were two types of anthropology, namely physical and cultural. The cultural anthropology includes language, myths, religion, history, art, customs and particularly literary works (Ratna as cited in Ramadhanty et al., 2022). Anthropological literature was closely tied to mysticism. Javanese mysticism in local stories was read and understood by using anthropological literature in a way that the researcher analyzed the cultural and literary aspects (Beatty, 1999). Mulder (as cited in Mutaqin, 2014) defined mysticism as "the knowledge and the penetration of the universe to establish direct communication with 'the ultimate reality' or the divine through spiritual experiences and practices".

Mulder (2001) divided mysticism into four concepts, namely: existence, journey, motif, and goal. The existence of mysticism refers to the fundamental nature that includes material, spiritual and moral dimensions. This existence is also called the "true self" or "inner self" that is connected to the divine. It can be seen from an individual's understanding of the divine, moral values and relationship with the world. The journey deals with the process of spiritual growth. In Java, it takes the form of spiritual transformation and self-purification. The motif is the patterns or themes which drive the mystic's journey. It can be positive or negative. Self-realization is an example of a positive motif, while egoism is an example of the negative motif. The goal refers to the ultimate objective. For Javanese people it is called "manunggaling kawula Gusti". It means gaining a state of unity with the divine. This study focused more on the existence of mysticism which included moral, material and spiritual dimensions.

The sources of the data were old people who lived in Ngrandhu and Sendang Mulya villages. Their oral stories were then transcribed by students who had their community service in January 2024 after the interview session. The interview was based on qualitative research (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). The researcher used three stages of the data analysis technique developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the first stage, the unnecessary data were eliminated and the researcher was left with the relevant and selected data from the transcription or field notes. In this case, the local stories that were retold by the resource persons and any other relevant information regarding the function and the values of the stories were selected. After that, the selected data were displayed or organized in such a way that it helped the researcher draw conclusions. The final stage allowed the researcher to interpret and draw conclusions based on the data gathered regarding the narrative structure and the values of the local stories.

Since the most possible language used by the resource persons in retelling the local stories was the local language (Javanese), the translation process was a significant process done in the research (Appell, 2014). The translation was both intelligible and faithful to the original text. There were six main activities, namely: recording, transcribing, cataloguing, translating, and cultural dictionary.

Descriptive data analysis was a method used in this study. Roza et al. (2020) stated that the descriptive method deals with actual problems or phenomena that are further interpreted accurately in a rational way. In this study, the descriptive method was done through several steps: 1) reading the transcription of the stories, 2) selecting data which were appropriate to the theories, 3) analyzing the selected data in forms of discourse, sentences, or phrases that contained Mulder's mysticism concepts, and 4) concluding the results of the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Summary of *Sendang Mulya* Story

Before having the results of the analysis, the summary of two selected stories is written. The story of *Sendang Mulya* began with a spring that was found in 1951. It was a small one; not as big as it is today. One day, a young person who suffered from an illness came to the spring. He has gone to several places and had some treatments from different people but the illness could not be cured. He then drank the water of Sendang Mulya spring and took a bath. The miracle happened since he did not suffer again and his illness was gone. This news spread in many places. In short, many people went to Sendang Mulya. They believed that after drinking the water or taking a bath they would get the fortune that they wished. Some people came to Sendang Mulya to have a child and some wished good luck. They often drank the water or washed their faces. People who lived near Sendang Mulya also believed in the existence of magical creatures who took care of the spring. The creatures maintained the purity of the spring and the cleanliness around the spring. Today, people near Sendang Mulya use the water to be drunk or to sanitize. Even in the dry season, this spring provides enough water for people who live near the spring and who come to the spring to pray.

Summary of *Ngrandhu* Story

The story of *Ngrandhu* is different from *Sendang Mulya*. In the past after the independence of Indonesia, there lived a religious student who was wise. People did not know his name but they witnessed his wisdom. He was a student of Kyai whose heart was pure and generous. One day Kyai gave an important task to the student since he was the best among all and Kyai believed that the student could replace him when he was gone. He asked the student to find an area where the big kapok tree grew, and asked him to chop down the tree. The student then went to some places. Although he was tired, he kept searching. He walked to some areas but he could not find the tree. After years passed by with a long, challenging and difficult journey, he finally found an area with a huge kapok tree. Its leaves were wide. At that time, people still believed that big kapok trees were sacred and could not be chopped down. The person who chopped the tree would get bad luck. The student saw some people who lived near the tree. He negotiated and asked their permission to chop down the tree. He tried and finally made it. That area became a place for many people to live a wonderful life. The kapok tree in Kulon Progo is usually called "Randhu", a root name of *Ngrandhu*.

The stories of *Ngrandhu* and *Sendang Mulya* were orally told by resourceful people who lived in Kulon Progo. In the Javanese language, they told it to young generations in a way that storytelling was delivered. This indicates that both stories are in line with Lamusu's (2020) definition of oral literature. In addition, those stories also contained realities of life that represented good thoughts. As both stories are a part of cultural aspects of the anthropological field (Ratna as cited in Ramadhanty et al., 2022), they had mystical aspects through the effort to communicate with "the ultimate reality" or the divine through spiritual experiences and practices" (Mulder, 2001).

Mysticism in *Sendang Mulya* Story

In the *Sendang Mulya* story, the discovery of a water source is said to be very significant in the healing of human characters. The water source that was found was initially small, then in the process, based on the relationship between humans and nature where humans took care of the water source, Sendang Mulya became larger than before. Nature is represented through a water

source which was then named Sendang Mulya. The relationship between humans and nature that is closely intertwined and is also narrated by the maintenance of the spring which is getting bigger. In addition, a thanksgiving ceremony is also held as a form of harmony between the surrounding residents and the spring.

The existence of nature in the story of Sendang Mulya is not only physical. The existence of nature is also metaphysical. This is closely related to the belief of the people around Sendang Mulya in the existence of invisible creatures who help maintain the sustainability of the Sendang Mulya water source. In real terms, the surrounding community also helped improve the building where the water source is located as well as the surrounding environment. The buildings and environment around the spring are currently much better than in previous years.

The first story entitled *Sendang Mulya* had material, spiritual and moral dimensions as the proofs of mysticism existence. The material dimension which referred to physical things that could be seen was reflected through the existence of a physical spring in Sendang Mulya village. People can see its physical existence in Sendang Mulya village. The water of the spring still flows out even during the dry season although the volume of the water differs between the dry and rainy seasons.

The spiritual dimension took form not only in the belief of the local people of Sendang Mulya village but also in their practices. As reflected in *Sendang Mulya* story, a young person who had an illness that could not be cured with many treatments drank the water and took a bath. His actions led to the fact that his illness was cured. In consequence, Sendang Mulya villagers then believed that the water of the spring was a medium to cure illness. As the story spread out, many people visited the spring and completed some practices such as drinking the water, dropping the water into their meal and taking a bath with the water in order to cure their illness. They even believed that the spring could also grant their wishes. People who lived near Sendang Mulya also believed the existence of some magical creatures who took care of the spring. The creatures maintained the cleanliness and the purity of the spring. This spring became tourism destination since one of the causes was local people's spiritual dimension.

The moral dimension includes five key points, namely spiritual practices, harmonization with natural relations, ethical and ideological components, syncretic nature, and focus on individual spiritual experience (Pamungkas, et al., 2024; Smith, 2020). Spiritual practices refer to activities or rituals such as fasting so that Javanese people can decrease the negative energy. Harmonization with natural relations deals with encompassing individual and community including astral beings and spirits. Ethical and ideological components take forms in religious and cultural practices as ways to respect local wisdom and heritage. Syncretic nature is blending elements from Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity. The last is focus on individual spiritual experience which personal exploration is allowed. In *Sendang Mulya* story, the discussion about ethical and ideological components is elaborated.

One of ethical components that local people had took form in maintaining and conserving the natural spring. As mentioned before, in the beginning when the spring was found, it was so small. Local people built a hut in 2019 then rebuilt a better form of bricked hut in 2024. Two pictures below were taken from google map. The first picture was taken in 2019 and the second was captured in 2024. It can be seen that the building to protect the spring in 2019 was different from 2024. The picture taken in 2024 shows more appropriate building and area than the picture taken in 2019. Local people also maintained its environment so that the area became cleaner and greener. Here is the link that contains the directions to go to the place based on Google map: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/JQogQ5X7xTstxZmu6>.



Picture 1. Sendang Mulya in 2019 (source: google map picture)



Picture 2. Sendang Mulya in 2024 (source: google map picture)

Mysticism in *Ngrandhu* Story

In contrast to the *Sendang Mulya* story, in the *Ngrandhu* story, the search for a very large kapok (cottonwood) tree is the main goal of the "santri" character. The naming of the Ngrandhu area also comes from the origin of the kapok tree. Nature represented in the large kapok tree is also discussed not only as a setting. Apart from the narrative about the origin of the santri and their characterization, the randhu tree is the center of the origin of the Ngrandhu area. This shows that the surrounding community still adheres to local wisdom, namely naming areas based on special characteristics concerning the existence of nature. Similarly, the Sendang Mulya story which is also taken as the name of the area from the existence of the sendang is one of the important manifestations of the existence of the natural environment.

The second story entitled *Ngrandhu* also had mysticism existence in forms of material, spiritual and moral dimensions. Material dimension referred to physical things that could be seen was reflected through the existence of the kapok tree and offerings. The kapok tree was a proof of material dimension which referred to physical thing that could be seen including some offerings that were made on special days or occasions. In Java language, the offerings are usually called "*slametan*". The physical dimension of *slametan* is in form of food such as boiled egg, "*gudhangan*" various vegetables mix with coconut and spices, and rice. This rite begins with a prayer which is led by a religious man. Many people gather and pray together. After completing the prayer, they eat the food together. This event also connects to their spiritual dimension where they believe that the offerings and prayer will bring good luck for all people who live in *Ngrandhu* village. They also believe that the rituals that they usually conduct regularly can avoid disaster or negative occurrence.

Tradition in Ngrandhu Village

Interesting part which is taken from *Ngrandhu* story is the relation of moral dimension in form of its syncretic nature. There was blending elements of "Kejawen" and Islam. Javanese people believed that a big kapok tree could not be chopped down. They believed that those who chopped down the tree would get a bad luck. The tree was viewed as a sacred thing for them and in the past no one was brave enough to do so. On the contrary, this story also contained Islamic contents based on its' content and characters. The main character of *Ngrandhu* story is "santri" – a student who studies Islam religion. Besides, other character is also mentioned that is a "Kyai" – a respectful old man who knows Islam well. Both characters are a representation of Islamic value. The content of this story that contained an action of chopping down the tree represented Muslim value where people need to believe in God only. Meanwhile, the main character did not directly chopped down the tree, he also approached local people and asked their permission. His actions of approaching local people and asked their permission could be categorized as Javanese value so called "unggah ungguh". Thus, it strengthened the syncretic nature where "Kejawen" or Javanese and Islam values mixed into one.

Moreover, moral existence was also reflected in the story. It deals with spiritual practices, harmonization with natural relations, ethical and ideological components, syncretic nature, and focus on individual spiritual experience. This story more underlines spiritual practices, ethical components, syncretic nature and individual spiritual experience. The spiritual practices could be seen in the Javanese ceremony called "*slametan*" that has been mentioned before; it was conducted in some occasions. In other aspect that is the ethical and ideological components, the main character did not chop down the tree directly. He asked local people's permission that was considered to have ethical component. The purpose of chopping down the tree was for the good of many people so that they could live in the area. Then they together also built many houses after that. Those actions were reflection of ideological component since they dealt with togetherness. In addition, the main character showed his individual spiritual experience. He believed that he could find the tree and try his best so that he could chop down the tree.

CONCLUSION

It is worth noting that all existence of mysticism connects to the divine. The actions that show individual's understanding of the divine may vary. In these two local stories, the actions of preparing the offerings and maintaining the spring including its surrounding are their reflection of

spiritual existence. Both story also underline the persistence of the main character. The first story shows the main character's persistence to find a way to cure his illness while the second story tells the main character's persistence to look for the tree and to chop it down. Both main characters have their journey as a process of their spiritual growth which requires self-purification and transformation. This self-realization tends to have positive motif as the main characters' goal is for other people's goodness. In a nutshell, material existence takes form in the spring, the kapok tree and the offerings. For spiritual existence, the belief of local people about the usefulness of the spring and conducting some prayer sessions. Moreover, moral existence appeared in the process of building the house, its syncretic nature and conserving the spring. In nutshell, both stories *Sendang Mulya* and *Ngrandhu* stories underline mysticism aspects not only the physical appearance of the spring and the tree, but they also reflect local people's belief of metaphysical things. It implies to widen our understanding of local wisdom reflected in their local stories.

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