

## Discourse on Myths & Suicide Fatalities in Sumelang Seagrass Film

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the discourse of myth and suicide fatality depicted in the film Lamun Sumelang. Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis theory is used in this study and based on the results of the analysis, the film Lamun Sumelang basically interprets the myth as a belief that develops among the people in Gunung Kidul and becomes a cultural culture even though the myth cannot be proven scientifically. The myth of pulung gantung is considered a bad omen. Meanwhile, suicide fatality in the film Lamun Sumelang is depicted as a manifestation of despair, loneliness, and giving up on circumstances. However, on the other hand, it also illustrates the desire for other people's attention to the situation at hand.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Gunungkidul has the highest suicide rate in Indonesia, according to the World Health Organization. Gunungkidul Regency has a suicide rate of 9 per 100,000 people per year, which is significantly higher than the Jakarta average of less than 2 per 100,000 people per year. Since 2020, the number of suicide cases in the Gunung Kidul area of Yogyakarta has increased rapidly. Data from the Gunungkidul Police shows that there were at least 38 suicide cases from the end of 2021 to the end of 2022. This figure increased drastically from the previous year of 29 cases, including 26 special cases. The case was by hanging and three cases by ingesting poison. Although various efforts have been made by institutions and the government to prevent it, suicide by hanging has become common in Gunungkidul (Lucas, 2021).

In Gunungkidul, the average age of people who commit suicide ranges from 51 to 90 years old and 41 percent of those who commit suicide by hanging. The people of Gunungkidul believe that the phenomenon of suicide is related to the legend of Pulung Gantung, which is a reddish light that falls from the sky and falls on the roof of the resident's house, which is considered a sign that the resident will soon end his life by hanging himself. There are not a few religious and cultural figures, especially cloud people, who can accurately describe the form and nature of the pulung. Based on word of mouth, it is shaped like a light at night blue and slightly reddish-yellow, resembling a circle of falling stars.

This legend is also discussed in the Story of Java and other references, believed to be around the 15th to 16th centuries in the late Majapahit era, Majapahit soldiers in their escape against the Demak Sultanate, wanted to follow in the footsteps of the King, namely Brawijaya V who was believed to be free from worldly bonds (died) or in Hindu beliefs called "Muksa". Many of them commit mass suicide, but not all of them can "Mukso" so that something in the form of a fireball appears which is basically a manifestation of the khodam of heirlooms that are hidden and angry because they cannot "mukso" and cannot be reborn.

"Ketiban Pulung hanging" is considered a sign of imminent death. The local community believes that a person will usually be obsessed with doing an action he likes before ending his life. Sometimes the obsession with doing the action he likes is carried out in a location where he will end his life. Some of the survivors of the Hanging Pulung told that there was an old man who took him to a location. In many cases encountered, if the perpetrator hangs himself facing west, then the next perpetrator will come from the west as well.

The myth of Pulung Gantung has been transformed into a story that has been passed down from generation to generation that surrounds its culture (Kurzweil, 2010). The high suicide rate, for some people, is not only due to Pulung Gantung but also for various other reasons such as depression due to family problems, financial problems or loneliness factors (Al-Husain, 2005). This is as represented in the film *Lamun Sumelang*, elderly residents choose to commit suicide for the reasons mentioned earlier.

*Lamun Sumelang*, which in Indonesian means "If or Was-was" is a short film that tells the story of Agus, a middle-aged man who seeks to heal his

daughter who has been sick for some time. In his efforts, Agus was faced with dilemmas and demands to move quickly. He was willing to do anything, including obeying the conditions of the shaman to find seven people as a tumbal and in his search, Agus often stayed silent in the forest while staring at the sky waiting for the arrival of the "Hanging Pulung" then rushed to help them meet their death faster. Agus can also communicate with the spirit that is his back. Communication with spirits about the anxiety of life and debates about life and death and the secrets behind it among spirits become colors (Larasati & Indriyani, 2022).

Although the film *Seaplane Sumelang* evokes ghosts from the spirits of the dead, this film does not seem horror at all. In fact, the chats from the ghosts sometimes seem funny and bitter. This film by Ravacana also managed to become the winner of the best short film story at the 2019 MAYA Cup (Afahmi, 2019).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Myth or in Greek *Muthos* is a traditional story that is passed down from generation to generation, from one generation to the next in an area (Wadiji, 2011). Myths that develop in a community group are not necessarily the same as other community groups, this can happen because the culture that is socialized is also different (Yunis, 2014). Historical stories that are considered to really happen in a community group can only be considered a fairy tale to other community groups.

Iswidayati (2007) describes myths as the history or history of society at that time. Levi-Strauss in Yunis (2014) explains that in myths there are primitive logics and basic principles of traditional individual thought. Traditional societies have a natural logic of thinking because they are not disturbed by the culture of virtual technology, which is different from modern society. Myths are conveyed through language, language is a tool or means of communication in conveying a message. Mythical stories are generally expressed orally and are sometimes expressed in magical ways or things, so that the content of the story cannot be scientifically accounted for (Humaeni, 2016).

On the other hand, myth (Roland Barthes, 1972) is interpreted as mythological speech not only in the form of oral speech, but speech that can be in the form of writing, photography, film, scientific reports, sports, performances, advertisements, paintings. According to Hunter, as quoted by Tihami, arguing that myths are "a sacred narrative explaining how the World and people came to be in their present form" emphasizes that myths are sacred folk tales and contain magical properties about how the world and society arrived at their present form (Ismanto, 2006).

Generally, suicide occurs due to factors from the psychology of the individual who commits the act, this means that suicide is considered a personal act. The act of suicide is also generally considered an act that is carried out without the influence of others and is considered a person's mental disorder. However, it is not only psychological factors from a person that are behind the occurrence of suicide, there are many other factors that cause it, one of which is factors from outside the individual, namely the social factor.

Stengel (in Al-Husayn, 2005) describes that the act of suicide is an act that occurs because it is closely related to the social factors of the individual who commits it, each individual cannot be separated from the social systems that bind him where the individual is. It is stated that suicide is a very reckless act where all religions prohibit this action, but also suicide as a complex secret in a social life (Darmaningtyas, 2002).

Suicide events in one region are different from another, this is due to differences in factors and social systems in each region. So that in the event of suicide, there are social factors behind this occurrence. As Durkheim (in Ritzer, 2012) explains, the difference in the level of social facts caused by different collective consciousness in a society, affects the difference in suicide rates in society. In each region, the community has a different collective consciousness, which means that each region has a different social current. The social current will later determine whether individuals in the community commit suicide or not. Changes in collective consciousness will affect changes in social currents, which ultimately results in changes in suicide (Mulyani & Eridiana, 2018). In Gunung Kidul, there is a myth of "Pulung Hanging" which is still believed by some people to be the cause of the high suicide rate in Gunungkidul.

Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis helps explore how discourse is used to dominate the social order and power imbalances between groups, as well as how dominated groups use discourse as a tool of resistance (Ramadhan & Herman, 2021).

Critical Discourse Analysis according to Fairclough involves three dimensions: text, discursive practices, and social praxis. First, texts include various linguistic forms such as sounds, writing, images, as well as elements such as vocabulary, grammar, and rhetoric. Second, discursive practices focus on the creation and consumption of texts, as well as the relationship between the production and interpretation of texts, with a focus on how power plays a role. Third, social praxis is related to broader socio-cultural goals and networks, where texts shape and are influenced by social events (Haryatmoko, 2017).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research adheres to the constructivism paradigm based on Weber's thought that social reality is not singular and objective, but relative and socially constructed (Eriyanto, 2006). The researcher then chose a qualitative approach in this study because referring to Noor, qualitative research is a process to create understanding through investigations related to social phenomena or human problems. Sugiyono added that this understanding is in the form of meaning behind social phenomena, every word or action is believed to have meaning. Including complex social interactions (Naurah & Siregar, 2023).

To ensure that the data of this study is collected systematically and accurately, the researcher applies observation and documentation techniques. The researcher documented by studying the Sumelang Seagrass film through search and search. Observation is carried out by directly observing the film, especially in parts related to the topic being researched. The data collected was then analyzed based on the model adopted such as determining the time or duration of the scene in the film that is relevant to the research topic.

The data was then analyzed using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis technique which argued that critical discourse analysis encompasses three dimensions, namely linguistic text which includes sounds, writing, images, and their combinations (vocabulary, grammar, syntax, metaphorical structure, rhetoric). Then, discursive practices that involve any kind of production and consumption of texts include linking the two processes or existing interpretations. Finally, social praxis is often embedded with broad socio-cultural goals, networks, and praxis. In this dimension, social events and intertextual understanding begin to take on the role that texts and social praxis influence and shape each other (Haryatmoko, 2017).

The data analysis in this study goes through three stages, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Fadli, 2021). The data reduction process was carried out by breaking the film into smaller scenes to make it easier to identify scenes that are relevant to the myth and fatality of suicide and other related variables. The qualitative data of the research is presented in various forms ranging from brief descriptions, infographics, and correlations between categories to facilitate understanding and planning of further actions. Summarizing and concluding the screening points from the previous stage, namely the presentation of data is the last stage to answer the formulation of research problems.

## **RESEARCH RESULT**

### ***Textual Dimension (Microstructural)***

Based on Fairclough's theory, a text can basically be described and analyzed from three elements, namely representation, relationships, and identity (Sulaeman & Mustofa, 2022). Researchers in this stage focus on discussing the outline of the myths and fatalities of suicide represented in the film *Lamun Sumelang* both through the experiences of the characters and the symbols in the film.

#### *Representation*

This aspect examines the text by looking at what the use of language by a person, group, event and activity is shown in the text. In this aspect, there are two options, namely at the level of vocabulary used to display a certain reality and at the grammar level describing the use of language such as how actors are part of the myth and fatality of suicide.

Some of the vocabulary aspects contained in the *Sumelang Seagrass Film* include vocabulary that contains experiential value, namely the repetition of words (rewording), namely "luntang-lantung" as in the dialogue of Jiman, one of the spirits in Scene 2. This sentence makes life difficult, has no job, and goes around the village without a clear direction.

Other vocabulary contained has lexical meanings in the form of homonyms, which are words that have the same sound and shape in lexicons, but have different meanings. This can be seen in the dialogue in scene 10, minute 11:05, which reads "Until when do you press it? Until Ningsih tears up the corpse of life?" (When do you want to arrive? Until Ningsih is like a living undead?). The phrase "undead" in this dialogue refers to a state in which a person is

physically alive, but does not have the ability or power to do what a living being is supposed to do.

In the relational aspect, the use of informal sentences shows that there is an emotional closeness between the speaker and the interlocutor (Kristina, 2020). The spirits in this film have a close relationship because of Agus's victim which is the reason why they are always together on various occasions as the dialogue excerpt below:

*Tuminten: Lah wes pitu iki! (It's been seven!)*

*Jiman: Halah, mong akeh enam kok! opo kudu pitu po? (Halah, only six! It must be seven?)*

*Sum: Kuwi syarat soko dukune (Those are the requirements of the shaman)*

*Jiman: La meng kok aku tetep ora percoyo (But why do I still not believe it, yes)*

At the grammatical level (grammatical meaning), it refers to the meaning that is formed after the sentence is connected. Below are some sentences that are considered grammatically relevant related to mythological discourse and suicide fatalities.

*Jare dukunmu, kowe kudu mateni uwong dingo nulungi anakmu kae  
(Your shaman said, you have to kill people to heal your child)*

The sentence illustrates that the subject of the perpetrator is not very clear, even though the subject in question is the shaman, but through the intermediary "you" or Agus. Meanwhile, the object is a child who is sick. In addition to containing experiential meaning, this sentence also reflects relational values, which indicates the existence of a hierarchy of authority between the speaker and the speaking partner. In this case, the shaman has the power to order "you" (Agus) to commit murder for the sake of his child's recovery.

The sentence "Let me be the tumbal" was said by Marni (Agus's wife) who was willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of her son's recovery, or in other words, she wanted to be the last tumbal. In context, the meaning of the sentence is that Marni wants to sacrifice herself as one of the seven tumbal requested by the shaman, in the hope that Ningsih the child can recover. This sentence contains a grammatical meaning that can be understood as paraphrasing.

*Jiman: Ojo Gus, ndeloken kae Parmin, gaweane ngurusi sawah uwong, nek uripe mung ngono-ngono wae, malah kepengen modar!*

*(Don't Gus, look at Parmin, his job is only to take care of other people's fields, that's why his life is like that- just like that, he wants to die)*

The sentence has a grammatical meaning which is referred to as preconception and refers to a meaning that comes from a certain assumption or assumption. The sentence spoken by Jiman is meaningful as a suggestion to Agus to avoid working for others because it is not useful and ends up like Parmin.

The combination of sentences has a meaning as a reality formed through language by connecting one sentence with another child of the sentence. These

interconnected meanings produce the narrative of the film. For example, Scenes 1 and 2 show the story "Pulung Gantung" with Agus waiting for his arrival and depicted as a fireball object with a tail that resembles a shooting star. In this film, the fireball falls near a person planning to commit suicide, while people in Gunungkidul think the fireball falls on the house of the suicide perpetrator over the suicide location. Agus himself followed the direction of the fireball and found a person who was planning to commit suicide and then he helped the person so that he could meet the requirements of 7 tumbal from the shaman.

In this sequence, it is also shown that the suicide victim was given a cigarette by Agus to hide his actions so that others thought that the victim was indeed committing suicide while smoking (releasing stress). It is said that cigarettes are a form of offering for someone who has passed away or as a means of communication with the spirit, as explained by Mohamad Sobary, a cultural scholar and essay writer (JPPN.com).

The fatality of suicide is depicted differently in this scene, people who die because they actually committed suicide are shown as curious spirits or wandering spirits and symbolized by the presence of a rope around their necks like a grandfather in front of Agus's house. Meanwhile, the 4 people killed by Agus can still communicate and do not become curious spirits and do not find a rope around their necks as emphasized in Scene 3.

Scene 4 shows that Agus has managed to collect 6 tumbal and needs 1 more tumbal to qualify from the shaman. It can be seen that Agus and Marni believe in the shaman for their child's recovery. However, Ningsih then experienced a seizure which was further explained in scene 5 like epilepsy. Agus and Marni looked anxious and felt helpless, plus the difficult economic problems so that leaving healing to alternative medicine became something they could strive for.

Scene 6 shows Agus sowing white rice and flowers in his yard. According to Javanese myth, what Agus did was a ritual of throwing away bad luck and was believed to ward off bad things and efforts to ask for salvation (Chariris, 2020).

Scene 8 shows the spirits communicating with Agus where the content of the conversation is dominated by the reality of life. Parmin asked to be reunited with his son as a reward for Agus's actions to him. Instead of granting, Agus chose to leave and leave the spirits.

Scene 10 depicts Marni being anxious because all the efforts made seem to have yielded nothing and rather than Ningsih having to continue to suffer, it is better to just transfer her illness and let herself bear the pain and suffering. Marni's request made Agus even more immersed in his dilemma.

Marni secretly decides to be the last victim as shown in Scene 11. Agus, who realized this, tried to stop even though he was still haunted by the dilemma of letting his wife live or letting his son die because he could not meet the requirements of the shaman. There was a split among the spirits, some supported Agus to kill Marni and some forbade Agus. The scene in the scene ended up hanging without explaining Marni's survival.

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### *Text Identity*

The personality of the text identifies with the relationship of the parties in the exchange of the text that determines the state of the reader. The element of identity in the text analysis of the film *Seaplane Sumelang* depicts the identity of Agus's family and the spirits that accompany him.

Agus's family reflects the social condition of the people of Gunungkidul who mostly live in poverty, depressed in helplessness, but are faced with the reality of life. The pain suffered by Ningsih can be cured if she gets the right treatment by going to a hospital or other health services. The limitations of economics and science are factors for Agus and his family to choose the wrong path.

The spirits reflect the suicide factors by the people of Gunungkidul due to loneliness in old age as experienced by Parmin, health problems such as those experienced by Sum, unhealthy lifestyles such as Jiman, and deep sadness due to the abandonment of a life partner as experienced by Pon.

### *Discourse Practice Dimensions*

Discourse practice is a dimension related to the process of producing and consuming texts. Text creators, namely screenwriters, carry out the text production process and readers or viewers of the film *Lamun Sumelang* consume it depending on their experience, knowledge and social context. This allows readers or viewers to accept and criticize the work or the screenwriter's ability to create a text that is able to provide understanding and convince many people (Nurani, 2020).

The film *Lamun Sumelang* criticizes the emergence of mythical discourse and suicide fatality where the production team tries to convey that the suicide rate in Gunungkidul is related to the myth of "Pulung Gantung". But still try to rationally explain the suicide factors starting from economic problems, health, and the psychological condition of each character. The audience's response is in line with the production team's goal, which is to provide understanding and an invitation for reflection, as well as motivate them to be more optimistic and wise in living life. This film also tries to foster a sense of care for the people closest to them and the surrounding environment to prevent the phenomenon of suicide in the future. This can be seen through various comments from viewers of the *Sumelang Seagrass* film on the Ravacana Youtube Channel as follows.

*This true story is indeed clearly real in the people of Gunung Kidul, the belief in the shamans there who like to exploit the patient's underdevelopment is an irony in itself. Poverty and underdevelopment are the fuel for the rampant suicide phenomenon there. How important is the support system in the family and knowledge is also of course (@denissetianto7781).*

Or other comments, namely

*How poverty becomes the trigger for the loss of reason, a disease that eats away at the mind, heart, conscience and humanity, to the point of relying on human beings who are satanic allies who are considered capable of providing a way out, how much they get is only a waste of money, and poverty is so arrogant that it takes away everything that is left, even a piece of soul. A great appreciation for all those involved in the Sumelang Seagrass (@septianaoctokusumo8551) frame.*

The results of the text consumption show various speculations regarding the ending of the film. Whether Marni was really killed or not, what was Ningsih's fate. At the end of the film, only Agus is shown seeing the spirit of the child while Agus' wife is not shown, thus creating a plot twist. Other speculations began to emerge because Agus could only see the spirits killed by him.

### ***Sociocultural Dimensions Practice***

The theoretical basis of discourse analysis is based on several historical developments in social theory and philosophy of knowledge, thus making historical, social and ideological factors the main source in the framework of critical discourse analysis (Masitoh, 2020). This aspect intends to dismantle the interconnectedness and inter-influencing relationship between the innate patterns in the eyes of the public and the texts made in relation to the discourse of myths and fatalities in the film Seagrass Sumelang. Sociocultural practice is a form of investigation that is identified with a setting outside the text and a setting combining the philosophies and beliefs of individuals who take part in framing the text (Eriyanto, 2006).

### ***Circumstantial***

Eriyanto argues that a text is produced in a distinctive or unique condition or atmosphere so that a text can be different from other texts. If the text is understood as part of an action, then it is actually a form of response to a certain social context.

People know Gunung Kidul as a place with various beautiful tourist destinations, especially the beaches, behind this actually Gunung Kidul has a dark side that some people do not know. Based on the confession of the local community, suicide has been going on for quite a long time and has almost become a kind of habit or tradition in the area.

For example, in the book "Pulung Gantung" by Darmaningtyas, according to the records of the Gunung Kidul Police between 1980-1990 there were 167 cases. Meanwhile, according to the records of the Gunung Kidul Police, between 2001-2011 there were 314 cases and then in 2012: 40, 2013: 29, 2014: 14, 2015: 33 and surprisingly in early 2016 there were said to have been 6 suicide incidents. Most suicide cases in Gunungkidul take place by hanging. Among the 258 cases

between 1991 and 2001, 174 cases or 64% were carried out by hanging (Budhi & Daksinarga, 2017).

The poverty level in Gunung Kidul district is very concerning, as happened in Pakel Hamlet, Saptosari District, Gunung Kidul. Most of the houses in the area are on limestone ridges. If there is a slightly flat valley land, the land tends to be used for agricultural land because almost all residents depend on it for their livelihood as rainfed farmers. The area experiences drought every dry season, although the PDAM pipe that digs water from the Ngobaran spring is only one kilometer west of Pakel Hamlet. To buy water alone, it is not uncommon for them to have to sell livestock or trees, buildings, which are their savings, and sometimes they have to enter into joint ventures with other residents (Budhi & Daksinarga, 2017).

### *Institutional*

The institutional level examines how organizational institutions influence discourse production practices. The institution can come from within the filmmaker of Lamun Sumelang, which in this case is Ravacana. In addition, the external factors of the text creator determine the production process of the Sumelang Seagrass film text.

The film Seagrass Sumelang is the second work to receive special funds from the Yogyakarta Special Region Cultural Office after the film Tilik. In the funding program, the proposals that passed were considered from several aspects such as, (a) spatial, geographical, social or cultural; (b) human character in Yogyakarta, namely the way of living, socializing, and surviving in the city; (c) an understanding of the socio-cultural atmosphere in Yogyakarta, and (d) the suitability of the themes raised in the film (Kustanto et al., 2019).

External factors that affect the production of the Sumelang Seagrass film are the actors such as Freddy Rotterdam who previously starred in several feature films such as *The East and Mecca I'm Coming*, Retno Yunitawati who plays Mrs. Mas Pur in the soap opera *Tukang Ojek Pengkolan*. Other actors such as Nunung Deni Puspitasari, Ikun Sri Kuncoro, Like Suyanto, and Tuminten also captivated the audience with their strong roles.

### *Social*

The social level looks at a wider scope of how social developments occur in society when the film Seagrass Sumelang is produced until its release. The diversity of languages, ethnicities, customs, and cultures in Indonesia is a plus point of this country. This diversity has given birth to many beliefs in Indonesia which, although not necessarily true, are very important for some groups of people such as myths that are inseparable from the collective life of the community. Therefore, myths are a guideline for the community in acting and communicating (Khosiah & Habibi, 2019).

This film was released during the Covid-19 Pandemic, where at that time the situation was very unfavorable because many people experienced mental health problems as a result of the pandemic. In the PDSKJI (Indonesian Psychiatric Specialist Association) survey, as many as 6644 people mostly experienced depression during the covid-19 period, which was 72.9% and of the

total data on depressed people, 52% thought about suicide or wanted to hurt themselves (PDSKJI, 2021). On the micro aspect, the film *Lamun Sumelang* reflects the social situation in 2021, where many struggle to face and fight the anxiety and depression that arises.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The *Sumelang Seagrass* film produced by Ravacana is included in the category of fiction films with the drama and tragedy genres because the focus of the film is to highlight the human interest side with the aim of providing an experience as experienced by Agus. Living in poverty and difficulty accessing health services. The film is analyzed using Norman Fairclough's critical discourse with a focus on three dimensions, namely linguistic texts, discourse practis, and sociocultural. Based on the results of the analysis, the film covers research aspects ranging from representation, relationships, situational identity, social, and intertextuality.

The discourse on the myth and fatality of suicide in the film *Lamun Sumelang* aims to provide a promotive and preventive approach that can change the way of view, become a material for reflection and learning, and foster a sense of concern for the closest people or the environment to avoid suicide and the recurrence of similar actions in the future. It is hoped that through this film, the community, especially in the Gunungkidul area, can create a more developed socio-cultural life without forgetting and still respecting cultural values, as well as being wiser in living life.

## ADVANCED RESEARCH

The film *\*Lamun Sumelang\** serves as a rich text for advanced research within the framework of Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, particularly in examining the interplay between linguistic structures, discourse practices, and sociocultural influences in shaping narratives of poverty, mental health, and fatalism. A deeper exploration can focus on the semiotic construction of myth surrounding suicide in Gunungkidul, analyzing how cinematic elements—such as visual metaphors, dialogue, and character arcs—reinforce or challenge entrenched cultural beliefs. Additionally, intertextuality in the film can be scrutinized to trace its engagement with historical, literary, and socio-political discourses that perpetuate or disrupt narratives of despair. From a socio-pragmatic perspective, the film's reception among different audiences, including local communities and mental health advocates, can be examined to assess its impact in shifting public discourse toward a more progressive and preventive approach to suicide. By situating the film within the broader landscape of Indonesian social cinema, this research can contribute to discussions on how media serves as both a reflection of societal struggles and an intervention tool for social change.

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