

Conference Paper

Power–Knowledge Possessed by the Puppeteers of Mask Puppet Show in Malang District

Tri Wahyuningtyas

Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang

ORCID:Tri Wahyuningtyas: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2076-0109>**Abstract**

This study describes the power and knowledge and the relationship between the two of the puppeteers of the mask puppet show in Malang district. This qualitative research used interview and observation to collect data, which were then analysed using the Foucault's genealogical method. The results showed that the puppeteers of the mask puppet show in Malang have more substantial knowledge orientation than other puppeteers. The puppeteers have obtained their power–knowledge by disciplining their body for several years, built from its social and environmental existence. The role of a puppeteer requires a person to not only have a spiritual strength but also a vision of directing and organising the show. The puppeteer's power–knowledge produces discourse that has autonomy and power.

Keywords: power–knowledge, power relationship, puppeteer

Corresponding Author:

Tri Wahyuningtyas

Tri.wahyuningtyas.fs@um.ac.id

Published: 1 March 2021

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

© Tri Wahyuningtyas. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ISOLEC Conference Committee.

1. Introduction

Mask puppet (in Javanese known as *Wayang Topeng*) is a drama-based show performed by dancers wearing masks not only to hide their faces, but it also aims to express essential and symbolic goals (Hidajat, 2008). In terms of the performance elements as well as to symbolize Malang people's life patterns. The Malang's *Wayang Topeng* show is led by a puppeteer who plays a vital role during the show. A puppeteer is the main power in a puppet show as both the performer and the director. As a director, the puppeteer arranges the show to be well accepted and appreciated by the audiences.

In its growth, the *Wayang Topeng* show in Malang district is spread over two distribution areas, eastern and southern regions. The eastern region consists of Jabung village, Tumpang village, Glagahdawa village, Precet village, Dampul village, and Gubugklagah village. Meanwhile, in the southern region, it includes Kedungmonggo village, Jatiguwi village, Jambuwer village, and Pijiombo village. Several places in the region are no longer active in carrying out *Wayang Topeng* shows. It is due to lack of regeneration, lack of interest in learning and exploring *Wayang Topeng*, and a lack of public appreciation

OPEN ACCESS

of the show. The influence of the lack of regeneration and appreciation of the Wayang Topeng show results in its lack of human resources (HR) in the Wayang Topeng show, especially in the puppeteer's role.

A Wayang Topeng must have adequate knowledge and skills to process, create, and produce a dance drama show where all the actors or dancers wear masks. The knowledge possessed by the puppeteer of Wayang Topeng Malang, including the *pocapan*, *suluk*, dance movements, stories and music, should be thoroughly mastered by the puppeteer, and that a puppeteer is the soul-giver of the puppet or its human actors (Van Groenendael, 1987). Apart from being the show's director, a puppeteer is also a person who has high spiritual abilities (often considered a shaman).

In reality, there are not many puppeteers of Wayang Topeng show in Malang district. However, the puppet show in Malang district are spread out in several places. The puppeteer's role as a real director who has spiritual power is very limited. From the researcher's observations, there are only 4 (four) puppeteers in two areas. They are in Tumpang Village (Mr. Soleh), Precet village (Mr. Kasan) and Kedungmonggo village (Mr. Kasnam and Mr. Poniran). It indicates that the role of a puppeteer is needed, because the puppeteer is the spirit of the Wayang Topeng show in Malang district.

Of the four puppeteers mentioned above, the one who has a dual role is Mr. Soleh (from Tumpang village) and that he was selected as a key informant in this study. The selection of Mr. Soleh was based on the knowledge and skills he possesses obtained by disciplining himself from artistic experience, both direct interactions built from his social and environmental existence. It creates comprehensive skills which make Mr. Soleh a recognized puppeteer.

This study observed the power-knowledge issues possessed by puppeteers of *Wayang Topeng* show in Malang district, which concludes the discourse of puppeteers having the autonomy and power. The study relates Foucault's genealogy method, which emphasizes body formation experienced by puppeteers of mask puppet show in Malang district. In view of genealogy, Foucault tried to show how power-knowledge relationships have roles to master, control, and subjugate the body of modern humans, in this case, a puppeteer, and tried to sit between power and discourse. (Foucault, 1997). This paper examines how the body (of the puppeteer) in *Wayang Topeng* show regulates and controls itself under the power represented by knowledge that is believed to be true.

2. Methods

This research uses qualitative research, in which the data are in the form of the words and actions of puppeteers of the mask puppet show in Malang District, which were explored through in-depth interviews and participants' observation. The oral data were obtained from informants, including Mr. Soleh Adi Pramono (67 years old), a puppeteer from Tumpang, Kasan (72 years old), a puppeteer from Precet village. The research uses Foucault's genealogy method which aims at describing: (1). the power-knowledge possessed by the puppeteers of *Wayang Topeng* show in Malang district. (2). the relationship between power and knowledge possessed by the puppeteer of mask puppet show in Malang district.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Practices of the power--knowledge by the puppeteers

Puppeteers of *Wayang Topeng* show is the director of the show and a person who has high spiritual strength. During the *Wayang Topeng* show, the puppeteer will not be able to perform a puppet drama all night long if they do not have the knowledge and a lot of experience as an artist of *Wayang Topeng* show. A puppeteer is the most dominant person to be the centre of attention in *Wayang Topeng* show and possesses a decisive role in the growth process of *Wayang Topeng*. Some people in Malang still believe in a puppeteer as people who have *kaweruh* (knowledge) and as artists (doers of art). The puppeteer as the ritual leader has the task of reciting prayers (mantras) of *suguh*, containing requests for safety, abundance of blessings, and *rejecting balak* (expelling dangers). This task is similar to that performed by *mandakat* (a shaman) in old Javanese times, reciting mantras and perfecting sacrifices; breaking chicken eggs into the *watu kulumpang* (sacred stone) and dripping the blood of the slaughtered chicken. In addition, it also conveys the history of the land of *perdikan*, by means of storytelling (telling stories) and closing with *sapatah* (curses). The form of *sapatah* is the same as a moral message that all citizens must obey, and for those who violate, they will suffer from a calamity (Hidajat, 2011).

The profession of being a puppeteer is based on a centuries-old tradition and always passed down orally, generally from a father to his son. Besides the knowledge and skills, they must master and comprehend the stories, music, dance movements, *suluk*, performance techniques, and supernatural knowledge involved in it. The knowledge

also includes special prayers and mantras, and specific procedures in terms of behaviour that give the puppeteer strength in facing important events in the community's lives, such as droughts and pests that threaten crops one's luck and success, or the puppeteer's luck itself. Kasan, a puppeteer of *Wayang Topeng* show from Precet village, Tumpang Malang sub-district, he mentioned that while carrying out spiritual activities, a puppeteer must be ready in any condition such as fulfilling one's *nadhar* (promise), conducting a *bersih desa*, or healing someone who is sick (personal interview, 2019). The knowledge of mantra has always been a strength for people who believe in puppeteer as a shaman (magically powerful person) who has supernatural powers to eliminate calamities that befall them. As with Hidajat (2015), the puppeteer of *Wayang Topeng* show must have spiritual strengths. The analogy is like advancing to the battlefield. All puppets rely heavily on the puppeteer. The smoothness and also the safety of the stage are determined by the size of the puppeteer's power. Puppeteers who do not have spiritual strengths can sometimes be harassed by people with higher knowledge, apart from that they are also harassed by the spirits of *pundhen* guards in that village. In Foucault's language, knowledge is everything which has been collected and decided as truth by a group of people (Martono, 2014). Meanwhile, a puppeteer's truth as someone 'powerful' is the product of the practices of power itself. The power-knowledge manifests itself in a discourse that creates truth arbitrarily for his sake (the puppeteer), thus knowledge creates reality (Wiradnyana, 2018).

Mr. Soleh (personal interview, 2019) stated that being the puppeteer of *Wayang Topeng* show can be achieved, mastered, and conducted in several ways. Firstly, one is called the true puppeteer because he has been destined and inherited to be a puppeteer from his generation such as his father/ grandfather or great-grandfather who were also a puppeteer, and that the knowledge given directly or indirectly is possessed by his children / grandchildren / great-grandchildren. Secondly, one is called the *cantrik puppeteer* (an apprentice) because he obtains the title from *pencantrikan* (learning from a mentor or senior) method. Usually, a prospective puppeteer learns from a senior puppeteer. A prospective puppeteer follows both ways through a learning process that is regulated by a senior puppeteer (can be a grandparent, a parent, or an elderly puppeteer).

The learning process takes quite long and goes through some processes starting from the prospective apprentice learns about music, dance, how to play *keprak*, and studies about how the *Wayang Topeng* show is prepared by becoming a carrier of *gamelan* (music instruments) and setting up the dancers or characters. This *cantrik* system is carried out for a long time, in which the goal is to mature the prospective

puppeteers' attitude and behaviour, mentality, and artistic skills. The long period of time of becoming a puppeteer has made his whole life devoted to following the senior puppeteers' directions. During the conditions and situations of *pecantrikan* (learning), a puppeteer does not only explore the technical aspects of art. A senior puppeteer puts their apprentice's position as an adopted child or a family member. Therefore, the socialization process as a member of the community continues. While becoming an apprentice of Mr. Tirtowinoto (the grandfather), Mr. Soleh was taught how a puppeteer should act and behave in society. In seeking knowledge (*ngelmu*), Mr. Soleh had to do ascetic practices and "mutih" fasting for one month to develop the inner strength of being a puppeteer. When an apprentice receives several mantras, he must observe abstinence in all things (*sesirik*), eat nothing but dry rice without side dishes ('mutih' fasting), go nowhere to remain in prayer (*panyuwun*) and concentrate on the holy (*cipta hening*). This is also done by the puppeteers from Cirebon, in which being a puppeteer is not only about physically fasting, but it should also reach at the mental level. The simplest *tirakat* (struggle) is *sedawu*, which is fasting and not eating anything until ten o'clock and is done every day for 7 (seven) successive days without sleeping. This ritual is called *mati geni* (Nurasih, Nunung, 2014). Foucault's view shows that disciplining the body (for junior puppeteer or apprentice) can be carried out by controlling knowledge / discourse which is embodied in the rules given by the senior puppeteer (grandfather Tirtowinoto). This control is not realized by each individual (like Mr. Soleh). The more the individuals feel free, the more they actually get under control over the discourse of power (developed from Foucault's thoughts in Eriyanto, 2001).

One day, a senior puppeteer named Mr. Tirtowinoto decided to share some of his knowledge with his apprentices. This knowledge can be in the form of mantras which, if uttered by the puppeteer before the show begins, will surely succeed in captivating the audience's attention, or it is a spell to ward off evil's influences. The power of senior puppeteer as the teacher in imparting magical knowledge to apprentices is a story learned from his father or grandfather. When performed, it is believed that it will bring a good influence. The apprentice's control or isolation (or junior puppeteer) 's body is produced by knowledge to conquer it. Knowledge and political mastery of the body (for the apprentices) is a cross between power-knowledge relationship, which is localized in the body to form its obedience to be subdued, transformed, improved, and utilized.

In the above observations, Mr. Soleh, a puppeteer of *Wayang Topeng* show, is now a power source by treating people or society as subjects and mastering it with his knowledge. It is the domination of power over knowledge resulting from the learning process with various experiences for so long both in the social environment of its

existence and the community which makes Mr. Soleh and other puppeteers become qualified puppeteers both as directors and people who have spiritual strengths. In Foucault's language, it can be said as "power technology" (political technology of the body), which is the conquest of the body, mind, willingness, and drive from individuals who give birth to humans as objects of knowledge as a truth that forms a new person (based on Foucault's view, 1997), also taken from his paper.

3.2. The power-knowledge relationship of the puppeteer of mask puppet show

In the previous chapter, it has been explained that knowledge and political mastery of the junior puppeteer (apprentice) taught by the senior puppeteer (mentor) has shaped the power over the apprentice's political life to discipline the body of the puppeteer in *Wayang Topeng* show. The power of a puppeteer, intentionally or not, has been producing knowledge that disciplines his own body. With this power, the puppeteer directly or indirectly forms knowledge reproduced regularly and systematically during his role as the puppeteer or the shaman. It can be observed when Mr. Soleh, the puppeteer, acts as a director in a *Wayang Topeng* show. His knowledge of aesthetics and artistry has convinced him to become an accomplished puppeteer. It is evident from the many awards achieved by Mr. Sholeh both regionally and nationally. One of his awards was from the Governor of East Java and the opportunity to participate in and demonstrate his knowledge and skills in packaging *Wayang Topeng* shows at the International Panji Festival from 2017 to 2019. The belief people put to Mr. Soleh's ability has also made him the chairman of the Indonesian Puppeteers Association in Malang district, Malang city, and Batu city.

In the form of the public's belief in a puppeteer, knowledge has been ingrained for years and resulted in tremendous power in believing in a puppeteer's dual roles. The community put their trust in Mr. Sholeh as the *ruwat* puppeteer, or a puppeteer who is believed to be able to expel someone's "*sukerta*" (something that causes bad luck) by performing the *ruwatan* ritual, so that people who have *sukerta* can avoid distress or disaster. Every month, Mr. Soleh holds a *ruwatan* at his hermitage to facilitate those who want to get it rid of their bad luck. From this dual role, Mr. Sholeh mobilized knowledge of power to influence a person or society. This knowledge has the effect of a great power which moves the society. This is where Foucault's power relationship works and emphasizes that knowledge produces power. Power is everywhere, so it is not centralized. Power is not ownership but strategy, and it works through normalization and

regulation. It does not work through oppressive practices. Lastly, power is productive (Foucault, 2017). It is also quoted from Pakarti's writing, that basically, the practices of the puppeteer's power relationship with knowledge as power in the community occur through regulating, ordering, and correcting new puppeteers' or the community's practices.

The dominance factor of Mr. Soleh in the puppeteer's environment and the community can determine who is in power and who is controlled. Foucault views that power is very important because it is used to determine and construct subjectively and create realities for the purposes and interests of power domination or dominating power. The existence of pressures, energy, material, thoughts, enjoyment, and so on are more controlled by the dominant ideology that applies in society's social context. This is what happens to the puppeteers because the existence of a dominant ideology can control and create power without the public realizing it (Foucault, 2017).

Using Foucault's genealogy, it can be seen that a puppeteer rules himself or others through knowledge. In these observations, knowledge becomes a source of power by treating people/ society as subjects and mastering subjects with knowledge (Suharnadji, 2010). This, of course, could be achieved by understanding the knowledge obtained from discourse, considering that this knowledge is the truth and also in accordance with people's beliefs. Therefore, the knowledge will be indirectly used in forming new puppeteers. Besides, this knowledge is operationalized to other subjects who have the same culture and cultural area. Automatically, the knowledge that is also a power will control the subject to act according to the believed knowledge and truth.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

The puppeteer's power of mask puppet show is always actualized through knowledge, and the puppeteer's knowledge always has a powerful effect. The dual role of the puppeteer, as a director as well as a person who has spiritual power, becomes the power over the domination of power over himself to other people and the society. The domination of the puppeteer's power of knowledge is able to influence all aspects of community's life, including the values created to control new puppeteers and the society. The application of the knowledge and skills of a puppeteer becomes a symbol of power in the formation of *Wayang Topeng* shows that have quality expressions and creations with high aesthetic and artistic senses. The integrity of the mastery of the senses, thoughts and intentions of the puppeteer makes the quality of the puppeteers in Malang district to be taken into account for puppeteers coming from other regions.

References

- [1] Eriyanto, E.. (2001). *Analisis Wacana*. Yogyakarta: LKis.
- [2] Eriyanto, E.. (2003). *Analisis Wacana: Pengantar Analisis Teks Media*. Yogyakarta: LKiS.
- [3] Foucault, M. (1997). *Disiplin Tubuh (Bengkel Individu Modern)*. Yogyakarta: LKIS.
- [4] Foucault, M. (2017). *Power/Knowledge*. Yogyakarta: Narasi-Pustaka Prometheus.
- [5] Hidajat, R. (2008). *Wayang Topeng Malang*. Malang: Gantar Gumelar.
- [6] Hidajat, R. (2011). *Wayang Topeng Malang; Struktural dan simbolik Seni Pertunjukan di Malang Jawa Timur*. Malang: Gantar Gumelar.
- [7] Martono, N. (2014). *Sosiologi Pendidikan Michel Foucault, Pengetahuan, Kekuasaan, Disiplin, Hukuman dan Seksualitas*. Jakarta: PT. Radja Grafindo Persada.
- [8] Suharnadji, S. (2010). Arkeologi Pengetahuan Michel Foucault. In *Anatomi Perkembangan Teori Sosial* (B. Suryanto and M. K. Amal Eds.). Yogyakarta: Aditya Media Publishing.
- [9] Wiradnyana, K. (2018). *Michel Foucault: Arkeologi Pengetahuan dan Pengetahuan Arkeologi*. Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.
- [10] Hidajat, R. (2015). Ideologi Estetika Dalang Wayang Topeng Malang. *Jurnal Seni Budaya Mudra*, vol. 3, issue 1, p. 1-12.
- [11] Nurasih, N. (2014). Proses Pewarisan Dalang Topeng Cirebon. *Jurnal Ilmiah Seni Makalangan*, vol. 1, issue 1
- [12] Pakarti, D., Kabayantini, N. L. and Krisna, I. G. N. *Relasi Kuasa Dalam Perubahan Seni Tari Gandrung, di desa Kemiren, kecamatan Glagah kabupaten Banyuwangi*. Retrieved from <https://ojs.unud.ac.id/index.php/sorot/article/download/60832/3510>.
- [13] Setyobudi, I. (2011). *Feminisme Penari*, Jakarta:Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia,