

Conference Paper

Legitimacy and Symbolic Capital in the Field of *Kebaya*: A Case Study on Anne Avantie's *Kebaya* Show in Jakarta

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Abstract

Bourdieu's concepts of legitimacy and symbolic capital have provided invaluable insights for the structures of social relations. These concepts have been used by many researchers in many different fields. However, there is a lack of academic discussion using these two concepts to study the connection between legitimacy and the practice of symbolic capital in the field of *kebaya*. Referring to this fact, this study aims to fill the gap. Therefore, this project is intended to examine how legitimacy is gained by an Indonesian female *kebaya* designer, Anne Avantie, and how the symbolic capital operates in the field of *kebaya*. In an attempt to collect the data, a close observation on a *kebaya* show held by Anne Avantie had been done and some articles about her had been read. Meanwhile, this project applies a qualitative method. The research finding shows that Avantie initially received legitimacy as a *kebaya* designer from consumers and then followed by many other important parties such as politicians, many organizations and institutions. This success generates the symbolic capital that puts her as a *kebaya* trendsetter and enables her to change the doxa of *kebaya*.

Keywords: legitimacy, symbolic capital, doxa, field of *kebaya*

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1. Introduction

Bourdieu's theories of legitimacy and symbolic capital have been broadly used in different kinds of studies. However, there has been lack of discussion using these two theories in the field of *kebaya*. Therefore, this project aims to do some study using the concept of legitimacy and symbolic capital. This project has objectives to investigate how the refusal towards Anne Avantie has turned into her legitimacy as a *kebaya* designer and how she operates the symbolic capital after she gains legitimacy and domination in the field of *kebaya*.

The journey of *kebaya* has a long history. There have some versions of explanation about who introduced *kebaya* to Indonesia and how it came to Indonesia. According to Susilarti in Avantie (2012) *kebaya* was brought into Indonesia by the Islamic merchants in 18th century [1]. In her explanation, she divides the period of *kebaya* into five stages.

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First is *kebaya* before 18th century. Second is *kebaya* in 18th century to 19th century. Third is the era of *kebaya* Kartini. It is called *kebaya* Kartini since this *kebaya* was introduced by this Indonesian heroine. Fourth is the era of contemporary ethnic *kebaya* from the middle of 20th century

to 1980s. Fifth is the time of *kebaya* Anne Avantie. It started in the 21 century.

Since the emergence of Avantie as a *kebaya* designer, the models of *kebaya* have changed dramatically. Avantie has hybridized *kebaya* with other clothing patterns. The conventional *kebaya* rules that are applied to close female body have been deconstructed by her backless *kebaya* and nonsymmetrical *kebaya* sleeves. Since the presence of the hybrid *kebaya*, contestation in the field of *kebaya* has happened. The mainstream party who wanted to maintain the traditional *kebaya* model namely, *kebaya* encim, *kebaya* Kartini, and *kebaya* kutubaru disagreed with Avantie's idea in revitalizing *kebaya* patterns. Although Avantie was rejected by the legitimate party, she was accepted by the *kebaya* consumers. Hence, it is interesting to analyze how Avantie plays her role to get legitimacy and to operate the symbolic capital.

In order to provide some deep discussion for this project, a theoretical framework will be outlined to highlight the relevant theories for this study. After that, the research methodological approach will be presented. Finally, all data obtained will be analyzed and discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Concept of Legitimacy

Legitimacy is one of the concepts proposed by Bourdieu. This concept is closely related to the principle of field or field of power. Therefore, it is useful to discuss briefly the concept of field before discussing the concept of legitimacy.

A field is where social games take place and in a social game there are always agents who struggle. Agents are not isolated individuals. What they do influences each other and the structure of the field. An agent's positions can change and can be changed. Therefore a field is fluid. It is open to possibilities and potentials. According to Riley, Bourdieu sees social reality as made up fundamentally of fields, and social action as action in the fields [2].

An agent will seek for the legitimacy to secure his or her role in the field where he or she belongs. An agent's action in a field is directed towards his or her goal. Legitimacy is a crucial point that an agent must hold in order to validate his or her achievement and

to ensure his or her position in a field. The legitimacy of an agent is given by the other parties, for example a *kebaya* designer cannot assign himself or herself as a *kebaya* designer but he or she receives the legitimacy from public such as other designer, artists, politicians, journalist, photographers, and *kebaya* consumers.

2.2. The Concept of Symbolic Capital

In a simple word the concept of capital refers to the resources that an agent possess. Capitals are very crucial for gaining power and position. Bourdieu mentions four varieties of capitals. They are economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital. The four of them are closely related. This research, however, will only discuss one of them, the symbolic capital, the one which is needed to analyze the data of this study.

Webb, Schirato, and Danaher define symbolic capital as a form of capital or value that is not recognized as such. Prestige and a glowing reputation, for example operates as symbolic capital because they mean nothing in themselves but depend on people believing that someone possesses these qualities [3]. The practice of symbolic capital is in the form of symbolic violence. It is not a physical violence. It operates in a form of power relation such as treating others as subordinators. In the field of *kebaya*, the symbolic capital generally exercised by the legitimate designer who can dominate the field.

3. Methodology

This research is based upon field observation on Anne Avantie Fashion Show, on March 29, 2018 in Jakarta Convention Center. In order to provide more complete data for this study, I did some reading on Anne Avantie's autobiography and biography. Moreover, this study was conducted within the paradigm of cultural studies. The reason of choosing this paradigm is that cultural studies can embrace the practice of legitimacy and symbolic capital. In addition, this project uses an ethnography approach and library study. The intention of combining the two is to get more comprehensive data for this research.

4. Result and Discussion

Prior to 1998, Avantie was known as a fashion designer but not a kebaya designer. However, in late 1998, when she moved into the field of kebaya, she did not automatically have the legitimacy as a kebaya designer. She had to struggle to gain the legitimacy as she cannot appoint herself a kebaya designer. Although the mainstream designers refused Avantie's kebaya designs, kebaya consumers, especially models and artists were interested in Avantie's kebaya designs. Since Avantie moved kebaya from the position of traditional clothes into the popular and fashionable clothes, fashion consumers including Indonesian artists started to shift their fashion choices into kebaya. These new consumers were the first people who gave Avantie legitimacy as a kebaya designer. These people have influenced others including the lower class consumers to consume popular kebaya. Although these social climbers only imitate Avantie's kebaya designs, what they do proves Avantie's legitimacy.

After Avantie gained the legitimacy as a *kebaya* designer, she changed the structure of the field of *kebaya*. Now the dominant agent is not the mainstream *kebaya* designer, but Avantie. The mainstream models are not the truth of *kebaya* anymore. The various *kebaya* models introduced by Avantie have been accepted widely and have been taken for granted. As a result, the field of *kebaya* recognizes the new doxa of *kebaya* which is known as popular *kebaya* by Anne Avantie. Avantie who holds the consecration in the field of *kebaya* is now having the symbolic capital.

The observation conducted on Anne Avantie's *kebaya* show on 29 March 2018, in Jakarta Convention Center (JCC) proves that the field of *kebaya* is made up of hierarchical system of relations among many parties such as the key designers, politicians, artists, business people, and media people. Bourdieu and Wacquant argue that the field of fashion similar to other fields show a system of relations or it is said to think in terms of field is to think relationally [4]. In commenting to this point, Entwistle and Rocamora state in a fashion show, only legitimate players and selected people can enter the event [5].

Indeed, the hierarchical system of relations was visible in some degree during Anne Avantie *kebaya* show in JCC. The first point to note is that legitimacy as a distinguished *kebaya* designer plays an important role for choosing the area for the show. Avantie as a legitimate *kebaya* designer and a trendsetter was able to pay the higher rent to occupy the biggest space of the building for the catwalk theater. Second, the entrance to the show area created boundaries. The entrance for the VVIP (politicians such as the Minister of Maritime and Fisheries Affairs, Susi Pudjiastuti, Mrs. Jusuf Kalla, the

wife of Indonesian vice President) and VIP (close people to Avantie such as, her family members, close friends, the senior artist such as Titiek Puspa, Indonesian public figures such as Guruh Soekarno Putra, Najwa Shihab, Sukmawati Soekarno Putri) had a direct and an essay access to the seats. On the other hand, the ordinary people with the ordinary tickets had to line up for two hours before entering the site. The tickets were used to state the distinction between the groups of VVIP, VIP, or ordinary people.

The next finding shows how the symbolic violence operates. This even was an exclusively enclosed show that only selected people were invited, only selected people could sit in the VVIP and VIP row, and only few selected invitees could sit close to Avantie. The rest of the invitees were excluded from the exclusive groups. This practice of dividing the invitees into groups based on their social status reproduced the boundary that exists around the field of *kebaya*. The other symbolic capital was exercised by the VVIP by leaving the show earlier. This misrecognition of the VVIP social position happened in this even.

The symbolic capital is generated from the accumulation of economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital. Entwistle and Rocamora stated that in Bourdieu's point of view capital deals with one's skills, knowledge, and connections, exchanged within the field to establish and reproduce one's position [6]. The other capitals are required to gain the symbolic capital. When the volume of economic capital expands, it would influence the volume of the other capital.

The other significant finding is that Avantie could ask a politician (Mrs. Susi Pudjiastuti) to be her *kebaya* model and came on stage to join the *kebaya* show. This description would suggest Avantie demonstrates influential symbolic capital. This symbolic capital puts her in the superior position. Thus, people would be proud to be part of her *kebaya* show. Therefore, a minister would enjoyed participating on her show. The Governor of Central Java, Mr. Ganjar Pranowo, was glad to take a selfie photo with Avantie.

Avantie, as a designer who does not have any fashion education background and as a *kebaya* designer who deconstructs the patterns of mainstream *kebaya* transforms this social capital into symbolic capital to protect her carrier. The presence and involvement of the VVIP and VIP invitees in her *kebaya* show were meant to strengthen her legitimacy as a *kebaya* designer since she changed the doxa of *kebaya*. She used the power of a politician to protect her. A politician's support was very important to hegemony the society for accepting the popular *kebaya* models as the taken for granted *kebaya*.

The pictures of those politicians on Avantie's IG account operate as her symbolic capital. The symbolic capital has been used as a powerful tool to widen her legitimacy as a *kebaya* designer. She gets advantages from her social relationships with those



Figure 1: Minister of Maritime and Fishery Affairs, Susi Pudjiastuti on stage for Avantie's *kebaya* show in Jakarta. (Document: taken form IG account @anneavantieheart, On June 20, 2019.)



Figure 2: The Governor of Central Jawa (on white shirt) and Avantie (second from the left). (Document: taken form IG account @anneavantieheart, On June 20, 2019.)

politicians. She has been on a top position as a *kebaya* trensetter for more than two decades.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the data reveal legitimacy is a crucial point for Avantie. Without legitimacy as a *kebaya* designer she could not accumulate the required capitals to operate the symbolic violence. This fieldwork confirms this *kebaya* show is a space that generates

symbolic capital and Avantie has used her symbolic capital to operate the symbolic violence.

The catwalk theater visibly keeps reproducing the relational positions and capital at play. Avantie's *kebaya* show is an event to demonstrate consecration. This show has a function to promote the work of Avantie, to show her productive innovation and creative ideas in order to influence people's fashion choices. In addition, this event shows that Anne Avantie's *kebaya* show articulates people's capital, position, and status. Social inequalities are exercised. A *kebaya* show is a space where empowerment and symbolic violence take place at the same time. This is a space that enables Avantie to learn about catwalk theater to develop her business and it is also a space that she transforms her economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital into the symbolic capital.

Avantie had successfully changed the doxa of *kebaya*. Her success eventually changed the structure of the *kebaya* field. She dominates the field of *kebaya* and her domination influences her position in other fields too, such as in the field of politics.

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