

THE DISCOURSE OF POLYGAMY IN THE FILM *BERBAGI SUAMI* (*LOVE FOR SHARE*) 2006

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ABSTRACT

Polygamy in the context of Indonesian society is frequently seen as an issue that is related to pro and contra attitudes shown by women in terms of how they respond to such marriage system. The issue of polygamy raised in this article is focusing on the discourse of polygamy built in this film, *Berbagi Suami* (*Love for Share*) (2006), through the study of the female central characters that experienced polygamous marriages. The aim is to reveal the discourse of polygamy in this film through Hall's constructionist approach and Foucault's discourse concept using descriptive analysis methods and semiology. The results of the analysis show that the discourse of polygamy in the Indonesian context is described as a matter of pros and cons that comes from women's responses to polygamous marriages. Despite the pros and cons, polygamous marriage is still seen as a complex marriage system that is detrimental to women. Women are represented as victims that are shown by the impacts obtained from polygamous marriages such as economic hardship, not getting the justice they deserve, physical abuse, exhausting physiological and physiological conditions, and social labeling.

Keywords: Polygamy, female central characters, women's responses to polygamous marriage, pros and cons, discourse

I. INTRODUCTION

Polygamy can be said to be an issue that is always interesting to talk about even though the results are always pro and contra, especially in the context of Indonesian society. The definition of pros and cons in this paper, specifically refers to the way women in Indonesia react to it, or in other words, coming from the attitude of women who undergo polygamous marriages. In one hand, polygamous marriage is said to be pro if it is addressed with the understanding that the polygamy system is a legal marriage system, both religiously and legally, so that this concept can be accepted by women. However, in the other hand, it is said to be contra, if it is addressed with the understanding that polygamy creates injustice for women, or considered to harm women because justice is an important concept that has always been a polemic in polygamy ([\[malang.ac.id\]\(http://malang.ac.id\)\). The same opinion was also expressed by Miptahudin in his research on Polygamy in the Marriage Law in Indonesia in the Perspective of Islamic Fiqih \(2015:1\) about the cracks in the household in society due to the concept of justice that has not been fully fulfilled by husbands who practice a polygamous marriage system, so that polygamy has become a matter of legal concern.](http://etheses.uin-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

Polygamy has actually been practiced since ancient times, when viewed etymologically, according to Ansyari (2010:85) and Sabiq (1997:169), polygamy comes from the Greek, which is a form of marriage that is carried out by more than one person that can be divided into two types, namely polyandry and polygyny. Polyandry is the marriage of a woman with more than one man, while polygyny is the marriage of a man with more than one woman. The meaning of

polygamy according to <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/polygamy> means marriage in which a spouse of either sex may have more than one mate at the same time. Ansyari (2010: 85) and Sabiq (1997: 169) reiterate that the polygamy system has actually been widely practiced by Arabs before Islam came. Nations that practice polygamy are the Arabs of Jahiliyah, Hebrews, and other countries that have also practiced polygamous culture including Russia, Poland, and Germany. This condition shows that this polygamy system is still widespread practiced among people who are not Muslims. In the Bible, it is not explained about the prohibition of polygamy, therefore it can be said that the polygamy system is actually a marriage system that is cultural in nature, but cannot be denied that it is very closely related to religion.

Polygamy in Indonesia has a basic regulation that has been regulated in the Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage in Article 3 paragraph 2 which reads "The court may give permission to a husband to have more than one wife if the parties concerned want" (www.hukumonline.com). The marriage law in Indonesia seeks to provide a legal protection as a step to regulate polygamous marriage which was previously so loose that it becomes complicated with the aim that the practice of polygamous marriage is not considered as perfunctory due to the concept of justice which is an important aspect in polygamous marriage. Cumulative conditions that must be met by husbands include the

obligation to ask permission to the court, being able to guarantee the needs of the wives, the guarantee that the husband can act fairly, and other conditions (Miptahudin, 2015:1).

The issue of Polygamy in Indonesia for some time can be said to have been experiencing "attenuation", in the sense that this issue has not really come to the surface. This is allegedly caused by several factors. Among them is the first factor, that the polygamous marriage system is principally related to very personal matters, meaning that polygamy is considered as a choice in the life of the individual itself and not be a problem for others. Other people do not need to interfere in dealing with people who want to practice polygamy because it is included in the private sphere. The second factor was in the New Order era, where Law PP10/1974 was implemented for civil servants, specifically for male civil servants, that they are not to have more than one wife, and if they violate, then they are subject to sanctions. Law PP10/1974 which was enacted during the New Order era was a policy that was formed from an attitude against the practice of polygamy for a specific purpose, as was the case when the Family Planning (KB) program was implemented only to reduce the booming number of populations. According to Indonesia – Views, PP10 and the Self-Esteem of Indonesian Women quoted from <http://www.hamline.edu>, Law PP10/1974 was established not to defend women but actually to prevent corruption on the grounds that if civil

servants have more than one wife, then the necessities of life will automatically increase and this will trigger the emergence of corruption among civil servants just to meet the needs of their wives.

The above condition shows that polygamy is politicized as an effort by the government to prevent corruption among civil servants. This can be said that Law PP10/1974 which was issued by the government was able to construct the understanding of the Indonesian people to comply with the policy and indirectly lead the public not to practice polygamous marriages. The third factor, still related to the New Order era, is the lack of press freedom to raise things that were considered, perhaps, unimportant, such as the issue of polygamy, so that the public naturally did not take much interest in the issue. Unlike what can be seen today, the proliferation of infotainment (information about the world of entertainment) and media containing various news can be enjoyed by people who are increasingly intelligent but still curious about news that is principle, sensitive and personal, such as polygamy. Not to mention the fact that there are news reporting by the mass media about public figures who happen to practice the polygamous marriage system, for example as quoted from the online daily detiknews dated November 30, 2006 regarding public figures who practice polygamous marriage. The public figures referred to include celebrities, religious figures, businessman, government officials, political party officials, people's representatives, and many more,

although they personally chose not to publish it (<https://news.detik.com>). Therefore, due to the influence of the media and community leaders who practice it, the issue of polygamy has finally spread widely among the public as public consumption which then gives rise to various interpretations.

Based on the background of the problems described above, the issue of polygamy has become a material for scientific study that can be seen from various objects of study, and one of them is seen from the film media. One of the films that clearly raises the issue of polygamy is a film entitled *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share), directed by Nia Dinata. Film *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share) is an Indonesian film with a drama genre released on March 23, 2006, which raises the issue of polygamy from the point of view of three central female characters. The issue of polygamy was indeed widely discussed when entering the mid-2000s because it was triggered by a lot of news about community leaders who were polygamous. The description of polygamy presented in this film involves three female central characters who are living a polygamous life but with three different character dimensions, namely physiological, sociological and psychological dimensions. The three female characters in this film are Jajang C. Noer (Salma), Shanty (Siti), and Dominique Agisca Diyose (Ming). *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share) is produced by Kalyana Shira Film in collaboration with French production house, Wallworks. The film was awarded the

Golden Orchid Award for Best Foreign Language Film at the Hawaii Film Festival, United States, and Movie of the Year from the Guardians e-Awards in 2007.

The film *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share) is divided into three story segments, namely Salma's story, Siti's story and Ming's story. This film tells the story of three women who live polygamous lives from different ages, social and ethnic backgrounds. Salma, played by Jajang C. Noer representing a woman in her 50s, has a Betawi culture background with a high social status because of her profession as an obstetrician. She has to live a polygamous life because of her husband, who is a businessman and also a politician, without her knowledge and consent, has two wives. At first Salma did not accept the way her husband had treated her by practicing polygamous marriage, but as time went on she finally tried to get over it and get used to the polygamous life for the sake of Nadim (played by Wingky Wiriawan), her only son, even though she still felt disappointed in her husband. *"Ten years have passed, but I have not recovered from the disappointment."* (*Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share): 2006). In contrast to the character Siti, played by Shanty, the story is about a young woman in her 30s who comes from a village in Java. Siti came to Jakarta with the intention of working and taking a beauty course to improve her standard of living. She also stays at the place of Pak Lik, her uncle (played by Lukman Sardi) who turns out to have two wives and lives at home. Seeing his young

niece Siti, made Siti's uncle want to make her his third wife. At first Siti was reluctant to become her uncle's third wife, but after being persuaded by her uncle's wives, she finally agreed. *"I didn't know that my uncle wanted to marry me, I feel bad for you, my aunts."* (*Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share) : 2006)

Meanwhile, Ming, played by actress Dominique Agisca Diyose, tells the story of a beautiful woman of Chinese descent, about 19 years old, who works at a roast duck restaurant owned by Koh Abun (played by Tio Pakusadewo) who is not a relative at all. In contrast to the two previous characters, Ming actually feels happy living a polygamous life with Koh Abun because Koh Abun fulfills all her wants and needs, starting from buying her an apartment to a private vehicle so that her social status automatically increases even though she has to be stealthy so that Koh Abun's wife does not know. *"I'm tired of living a hard life, I'm happy with Koh Abun, he understands me very well."* (*Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share): 2006) Although in the end Ming had to accept the fact that polygamy did not guarantee her rights as a wife, even if only as a second wife. Koh Abun even left her just like that to America with his wife and two children after the green card they had applied for a long time passed.

II. RESEARCH PURPOSE

Referring to the synopsis of the film *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share) (2006) above, the lives of women who experience polygamous marriages are

the problem identified in this research with the limitation of the problem focusing on the study of the three female central characters who undergo the practice of polygamous marriage and how they respond to it. Polygamy in Indonesia is seen as a marriage system that is often detrimental to women because most of the time this marriage system is considered to be under the control of patriarchal culture. However, realize it or not, there is another side to polygamy which is often ignored, namely that in reality, not all women reject this marriage system even though they completely understand the consequences. This is where the importance of discourse analysis in this film lies, which is to see how the discourse of polygamy in the Indonesian context is widely understood through the study of the three female central characters in responding to polygamous marriages. Based on the identification and limitation of the problems mentioned, the purpose of this research is to show the discourse of polygamy in relation to women's responses to polygamous marriages in this film using Hall's constructionist approach and Foucault's concept of discourse.

III. METHOD AND THEORETICAL BASIS

The research method applied in this study is descriptive analysis with library research techniques and semiology. Semiology offers a very complete analytical tool to analyze images and then explore how they work in relation to a wider system of meaning. The most important tool

in semiology is the 'sign', because semiology itself means the study of signs. As Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson say in (Rose, 2001:71) that "human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for something other than itself, and the people inhabiting culture busy themselves making sense of those 'signs'". In summary, it means that human-made culture is a system of signs, each of which means something other than itself, and people as meaning seekers are busying themselves in interpreting these signs. Semiology describes and explains how signs can be rational or reasonable which is one of its main strengths. Semiotic analysis requires the dissemination of a collection of concepts that produces a detailed account of the precise way in which the meaning can be generated. This can be done by looking at signs and the process of forming the meaning of the sign as proposed by Gillian Dyer (Rose, 2001: 75). Semiotics in film is a scientific study or analytical method for examining signs in the context of scenarios, images, texts and scenes in films into something that can be interpreted (<https://sipadu.isi-ska.ac.id>). Another source mention that semiotic theory is very important because the language system is a symbol or sign full of signifiers and the signified (<https://pps.unj.ac.id>). Therefore, the analysis of the polygamy discourse in relation to women's responses to polygamous marriages in this film will be carried out by applying semiotic theory in films as the research method by looking at the signs in the dialogue which is the language spoken

by the central female characters who experience polygamy.

In order to understand the polygamy discourse in relation to women's responses to polygamous marriages developed in this film, it is important to first see how polygamy experienced by women is represented. Representation is a set of concepts that connects language and meaning, which means that the main understanding of representation theory is the use of language to convey something meaningful to others. Representation is the most important part of the process by which meanings are produced and exchanged between group members in a culture. Representation is interpreting the concept that is in our minds by using language. Stuart Hall explicitly defines representation as a process of producing meaning by using language (Media, 2017:16). Of the three representational approaches proposed by Hall, namely reflective, intentional and constructionist (Anggraini: 2015), the constructionist approach is considered more relevant in relation to this study, which is a text that can be interpreted based on the construction of meaning from the language used between characters. Regarding the discourse on polygamy in relation to women's responses to polygamous marriages built in the film *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share) (2006), a discourse concept is needed as proposed by Foucault in Bagus Takwin's *The Roots of Ideology: An Introduction to Ideological Studies from Plato to Bourdieu* (2003: 109), which states that every discourse formed is related to periodization, so

that it can be ascertained that the discourses that appear carry their respective truths and cannot be interpreted as absolute truths. In other words, discourse is not a representation of the actual reality due to the variety of human thought patterns in interpreting truth. These two aspects of the theoretical basis will be used to answer the problem formulation in order to obtain conclusions from the problems raised related to the discourse of polygamy in relation to women's responses to polygamous marriages.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

As previously stated, these three female characters come from different social and cultural backgrounds but face the same problem, which is as women living polygamous lives, but the difference between these three central female characters lies in the attitude of each of the central character in responding to their polygamous situation, some accept and some do not accept or having objection to polygamy (pros and cons). It can be seen from the background and story of the central female characters in the film *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share) (2006) that this film does not raise the issue of polygamy related to one particular belief or group or only seen from one woman's point of view. This picture can clearly be seen in the differences in the dimensions of the characters and the attitudes of the three female central characters. The characters are Salma, a pious and steadfast female doctor, then Siti, a village woman who is described as a "nrimo"

person (in Javanese, “nrimo” means accepting all circumstances), and Ming, a beautiful modern Indonesian woman of Chinese descent. In terms of physiological, psychological and sociological they are different but their problems are all the same. In addition, the difference lies in the attitude of each character in responding to these conditions, namely that some are forced to accept, some are resigned, and some are happy to live a polygamous life. It is clear that the tolerant and submissive attitude shown by the characters of Salma and Siti is a form of the attitude of women who are obviously against polygamy because they actually do not accept, in other words, they object to such treatment. On the contrary, the Ming character who is happy with polygamy shows the attitude of women who are pro to polygamy because polygamy brings benefits for women in terms of material that can be fulfilled. From the description of these central characters, it can be said that either women feel compelled or even accepting polygamy is due to a situation with various reasons. Some of the reasons are for the sake of their children, in order to maintain the status as a legal first wife, in order to raise the standard of living, and in order to obtain protection from men.

Films show or describe the scope of human life with various life problems they face. Based on the constructionist representational approach between meaning and language, it can be said that the film *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share) gives shape to the issue of polygamy as part of a complex culture,

but its existence can clearly be practiced by every level of society who wants it, free from all forms of personal attributes such as race, ethnicity, religion, and social status, so that polygamy is not really a problem for one particular group, nor is it a national issue and has nothing to do with the issue of belief, although in reality its implementation often cannot be separated from religious law. Visually, in this film, this is shown when Salma is invited to a “Women Talk Show” as a speaker on women's issues, confronted by Professor Ani, another speaker who is against polygamy even though both are Muslim women who adhere to the teachings of Islam. The host of the show asked Salma, “*Are there any feelings of jealousy or rebellion all this time to your husband?*” Salma replied, “*At first there was, but over time, that feeling is lost because I always return to my belief and live as a good Muslim woman.*” Professor Ani, the other guest speaker that was mentioned early on, expressed her opinion which seemed to contradict against what Salma believed regarding polygamy. “*I believe that religion can't be interpreted or taken literally. Yes, maybe time in the past, many women were displaced by war. The main issue is, don't let religion be used as a justification for men who can't control their lust.*” (Berbagi Suami: 2006). Based on these dialogue quotes, it is emphasized that the practice of polygamy is purely an individual choice that must be interpreted or responded to by the individual itself. In the sense that whether she accepts or not with the

implementation of the practice of polygamous marriage in her household, complete with all kinds of requirements in accordance with applicable laws, as well as with various consequences that can be detrimental to women, and especially those relating to aspects of justice.

It can be clearly said that the issue of polygamy will always lead to pros and cons because it relates to an attitude of acceptance or not, because throughout the storyline of this film, this is frequently emphasized. The description of polygamy in this film shows implicitly the attitude of the community who wants polygamy policies to be enforced as a personal choice, but still obtain legal protection if someone is judged to meet the requirements to implement the practice of polygamous marriage, which is certainly not easy. The film *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share) (2006) criticizes the issue of polygamy from a woman's point of view because women who experience it certainly feel as victims of the practice. In addition to explaining about polygamy itself, this film also describes the impact of the practice of polygamy. For example, polygamy can cause difficulties in meeting the necessities of life, as experienced by the character Siti, who was made the third wife by her uncle, who already has two wives and only works as a film crew driver. As a result of these conditions, they have to live a very unstable economic life. Then another impact is the inability to take care of more than one wife. This is experienced by the character Pak Haji (played by El Manik), Salma's husband, who in the end feels

the consequences when he has to treat his wives fairly. His actions indirectly impacted on Salma's life, who did not receive the justice she deserved as the first wife in her household. When Salma's husband had a stroke, he advised Nadim, his son from Salma, that if he wanted to get married in the future, to only have one wife, "*If you get married, just one, okay?*". (Berbagi Suami: 2006) Then the next impact is having many children but economically unstable. Again, depicted by the character Siti who lives at home with her uncle's wives who are pregnant intermittently that they have to bear many children, "*Pak lik's wives are both pregnant, I have to take care of the children ..*" (Berbagi Suami: 2006) and also seen on when mbak Sri, Pak Lik's first wife, complained of fatigue due to her pregnancy being so close to her previous pregnancy that she was tired of always taking care of the children, "*Unbelievable! You're the youngest wife here, but why am I the one who's pregnant? I'm tired of having to take care of a child all the time*". (Berbagi Suami: 2006)

The impact of polygamy cannot be separated also from the labeling of women such as scorn and blasphemy, negative prejudice and even physical abuse or violence, because not all people can respond to the problem of polygamy properly or wisely. One of these impacts is experienced by the character Ming who is suddenly slapped by Koh Abun's first wife, Cik Linda (played by Ira Maya Sopha) and their young adult daughters in the apartment that Koh Abun gave her after they

investigated for a long time that it turned out that Ming had secretly become a "mistress" wife of Koh Abun's. *"My dad used to be in love with a widow but he dumped her too you know! ..."* (Berbagi Suami: 2006). Referring to the word 'widow' that Koh Abun's daughter said towards Ming when she and her mother physically assaulted Ming in her apartment has a negative stigma in the context of Indonesian society. According to Lyn Parker, a professor at the University of Western Australia, in her paper entitled "The Stigmatization of Widows and Divorcées (Widows) in Indonesian Society", said that the stigmatization of widows can be analyzed from the institution of marriage. This institution stigmatizes that ideally, a woman should get married, and anything outside of that is wrong. This is also used to strengthen the marriage law. With the existence of these various institutions, it creates a stigma that divorce is not appropriate. The stigma attached to women who are divorced or widowed is not only associated with social status and its economics, but also with its sexuality. Ethnographic research on the marital experiences of men and women shows that divorced women and widows bear a much heavier burden of stigma than men. (<https://www.cnnindonesia.com/gaya-hidup/20230424180645-277-941614/mengapa-stigma-negatif-melekat-pada-janda>).

From the constructionist approach seen from the dialogues and how the meaning of polygamy is produced through language, it is found that polygamy is an issue that is in the private sphere

although it remains a polemic of pros and cons in the context of the Indonesian society, in terms of the way these women respond to their polygamous marriages. The practice of polygamous marriages can also have undesirable effects as described in this film in the form of economic difficulties, not getting the justice they deserve, physiological and psychological conditions that are exhausting for women due to the large number of children that must be supported if they do not have an established economic condition, including physical abuse and social labeling.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The discourse of polygamy still reaps the pros and cons in the context of Indonesian society, especially for women, because women respond to it in different ways, there are women who accept and there are those who are forced to accept even though they actually object to polygamous marriages. This diverse response from women is due to a situation with various reasons. Some of the reasons are for the sake of their children, for maintaining the status as a legal first wife, for raising the standard of living, and for obtaining protection from men. Another reason to the diverse response of women could be caused by the aspect of justice which is an important aspect that cannot be ignored in polygamous marriages. The practice of polygamous marriage has an undesirable impact that is twice that of monogamous marriage as described in this film.

Women who experience the practice of polygamous marriage, regardless of the pros and cons, will always face various consequences, even for women who understand that polygamy is justified by both religious law and marriage law, will still bring about internal conflicts for themselves. This is related to women's understanding of the concept of love which is very closely related to marriage and fidelity, so for women, polygamy is an act that is psychologically painful as experienced by the character Salma. Women's understanding of the concept of love according to de Beauvoir (2014: 521) is different from men. For women, love is not only loyalty, but also a total surrender of body and soul, selflessly and without expecting anything in return, so it can be said that this could be one of the reasons why women still find it difficult to accept the polygamous marriage system.

The findings obtained above can also be seen as a message to be conveyed to those who decide to practice polygamy, to really think about and consider all forms of consequences that will be faced in the future. Thus, it can be indicated that in the film *Berbagi Suami* (Love for Share) (2006), despite the pros and cons, and how women respond to it, polygamous marriage is still seen as a complex marriage system that is detrimental to women. Women are represented as victims that are shown by the impacts obtained from polygamous marriages such as economic hardship, not getting the justice they deserve, physical abuse,

exhausting psychological and physiological conditions, and also social labelling.

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