

MUSICAL THEATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS: ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSES IN “DPR – MUSIKAL” (2021)

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ABSTRACT. “DPR - Musikal” is a highly acclaimed and ambitious musical theater video created by SkinnyIndonesian24 (Jovial da Lopez & Andovi da Lopez) that features a compelling environmental message. This piece depicts the contested meaning of nature and how it is influenced by different interests in the DPR. This research will examine the environmental politics discourses present in “DPR - Musikal” as an artistic creation that establishes a connection between environmental concerns and the notion of power. The research employed a qualitative approach and utilized Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Norman Fairclough. Data was gathered through video transcripts, direct interviews with informants (Jovial da Lopez), and additional documents. This research identifies two discourses in the piece: (1) sustainable development which reconciles the objectives of development agenda and environmental conservation, and (2) anti-capitalism which is identified through the narratives of land privatization, natural resources exploitation, and capitalism’s dominance in policy-making within the Indonesian parliament. These two discourses represent contrasting political thoughts, hence confirming incohesive solutions to the environmental problems. Although the producers condemn the dominance of business power and the exploitation of nature, they do not present a radical opposition to capitalism. Instead, they exhibit a lenient stance towards the development agenda, thus exemplifying the dominant influence of capitalist ideology within the musical theater production.

Keywords: DPR – Musikal; SkinnyIndonesian24; environmental politics; environmental discourse; musical theater

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, a musical theater video gained popularity and rose to the top of the YouTube trending list. Jovial and Andovi da Lopez, who run the well-known YouTube channel SkinnyIndonesian24, are the creators of the video, titled “DPR Musikal”. Numerous domestic media outlets reported on this project, including detik.com, which described it as an intriguing show that effectively conveyed criticism of the members of the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR) (Datikhot, 2021). Prominent Indonesian artist Iwan Fals expressed appreciation for this video on social media as well (VL, 2021). As of May 20, 2022, this video had garnered over seven million views. “DPR - Musical” depicts the story of Mawar, a freshly appointed young DPR member who fights for the approval of the Flora, Agriculture, and Forestry Bill (FAK Bill). However, her efforts were foiled by other DPR members.

Musical theater is a medium for conveying political criticism because this genre developed and was formed from satirical performances in Europe, such as ballad opera and musical comedy, to convey political commentary (Hales, 2009). Historically, musical playwrights have used this medium to criticize the government, for example in the famous musical theater “Les Misérables” (1980). In Indonesia, musical theater is also used to develop stories with socio-political themes, such as “Behind the Mist of the Country,” which tells the issue of regional elections, corruption, and racism (Antara, 2017). However, the popularity of this work cannot match that of “DPR - Musikal” which was

intensively discussed on social media and responded to by public figures.

In order to present criticism to parliament, theater artists can choose one of the many socio-political issues that exist in society. One example is the “Mock Parliament” theater, which criticized the representation of women in the Canadian parliamentary body (Bird, 1992). In the case of “DPR: Musical,” Jovial and Andovi made the decision to bring up environmental issues by telling the tale of how environmental policies are created. One of the FAK Bill’s clauses requires businesses to get consent from locals before engaging in any exploitation operations. Senior DPR members, or the antagonists, who owed their political campaigns to the businessmen who funded them, rejected the bill.

This piece illustrates how different interests challenge and shape our understanding of what “nature” means. Using a sequence of rhetorical words, Mawar sees nature as something that needs to be protected. Conversely, some members of the DPR perceive nature as a capital source and supports economic expansion. Different, changing ideas about nature can affect how environmental policy is put together. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend interpretive language and discourse related to environmental challenges, as stated by Hajer et al. (2005).

According to Norman Fairclough (2001), language (or texts in closed spaces) has a close relationship with the formation of discourse in open social spaces. This argument is based on Michel Foucault’s knowledge/power theory, which holds that the practice of power is intertwined with the operation

of knowledge (Miller, 1990). Through language, one can construct ideology as an established belief (Haryatmoko, 2016).

Fairclough views discourse as a process of building and interpreting meaning that involves extensive social interaction (Fairclough, 2001). A discourse must experience repetition and habituation and be believed and practiced by a group of people over a certain period of time (Fairclough, 2003). For instance, the global discourse on environmental politics has evolved into sustainable development. The UN sponsored an international consensus that gave rise to this idea, which now serves as a policy guide for world nations.

Fairclough's discourse theory combines three dimensions of discourse, namely text, discursive practice, and social practice. The first dimension views texts as symbols shaped by social motivations. Humans choose their own linguistic structures and organizations that reflect how they construct their knowledge and social identity. In the second dimension, the process of text production and consumption reflects the producer's ideology and political orientation, as well as the interpretation of meanings (Fairclough, 1992). In the final dimension, Fairclough posits that the social conditions surrounding a discourse both shape it and influence it. The text production space is not a place that is sterile from ideology; for example, texts that marginalize workers represent the ideology of capitalistic society (Eriyanto, 2001).

Fairclough took inspiration from Althusser's theory of ideology, which revealed the existence of ideology, which was not seen as an abstract "idea," but something concrete, namely a socio-political system. Ideology shapes a person into a social subject with a certain social position while giving people the illusion that they are free agents. This process occurs in many institutions, from education and family to the legal realm (Fairclough, 1992).

Power also operates on environmental issues through specific human-environment interactions. Power in environmental issues comes from how actors regulate and change the conditions of natural resources or from certain forms of control over the environment. This can be seen from how European and American colonies controlled third-world countries and destroyed the local environment (Bryant, 1998).

In recent developments, environmental issues have been considered a public matter and occupy a significant position on the political agenda. The environment has become one of the important subjects most frequently contested in the arena of power following the growing public attention to various ecological crises, as well as the emergence of

environmental NGOs, green parties in Europe, and various ecological movements at the national and global levels. Some world countries are also starting to commit to various collaborations in handling the climate crisis as a central issue in diplomacy between countries. This shows how the environment has become a significant political agenda for industrialized countries (Carter, 2007).

We can use three categories of perspectives to understand the relationship between the environment and the concept of power. The first is actor-oriented, which sees power played by actors with full awareness. For example, companies carry out extraction activities for natural resources based on rational calculations. There are two types of actors who use their power in environmental politics, namely those who intervene in the environment and those who oppose this intervention (Svarstad et al., 2018).

The second category is Neo-Marxism, which emphasizes class relations and the interests of capitalism in environmental issues. The current economic structure has historically benefited some actors by accumulating capital, while the rest have not benefited. According to this perspective, the presence of the free market impoverishes and marginalizes farmers in Nigeria, demonstrating how social structures precede actors (Svarstad et al., 2018).

In the final category, known as post-structuralism, a multitude of actors create discourses that shape environmental issues, ensuring their widespread sharing and acceptance. This discursive power influences ways of thinking, public opinion, and policymaking. This phenomenon can be traced to how colonial powers attempted to legitimize territorial struggles by creating the discourse that local residents were stupid and incapable of managing their own territory in a sustainable manner (Svarstad et al., 2018).

"DPR - Musikal" is a theatrical piece with a significant political element as theater is a political arena in and of itself. This can be identified when the state uses its authority to control theatrical performances, such as through censorship and subsidies. On the other hand, there are a number of theatrical works that attempt to convey controversial political messages, for example, against the state. However, political aspects can also be found in works that are not considered controversial or radical so performances can be held safely. Although theater rarely triggers social change directly, it has the influence of shaping social beliefs and behavior to bring about specific political changes (Sinfield, 1991).

Musical theater is a theatrical performance that uses songs to tell a certain story with dialogue

inserts. In a song, there are generally two important elements that can be considered: music and lyrics. These two elements complement each other, such as how music organizes tone and rhythm while lyrics contain linguistic meanings that cannot be articulated by music (Mihalcea & Strapparava, 2012). Although music plays a role in evoking certain emotions, lyrics have greater power to trigger emotions and feelings in listeners (Stratton & Zalanowski, 1994). Therefore, in order to comprehend a song, this research focuses on its lyrics and linguistic elements.

Research on “DPR - Musikal” has been carried out with different approaches. Yolanda et al. (2022) explored how this work represents women in political spaces. Nabilah (2022) examines the discourse of social criticism in “DPR - Musikal” regarding work discipline, fraud, and the political system. These two studies use discourse analysis to uncover the discourse behind the “DPR - Musikal” from the perspective of communication science. This article will analyze the work from an environmental politics standpoint to identify any environmental commentary embedded within the artwork that critiques environmental concerns.

METHODS

This article uses qualitative methods and data collection techniques based on Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method. CDA consists of three dimensions, namely text at the micro level, discursive practice at the meso level, and social praxis at the macro level. In the text dimension, researchers explore how environmental discussions are formed through vocabulary, terms, and clause combinations spoken or sung by characters, as well as how the producers position themselves within the narrative. In the discursive practice dimension, this research explored the producer’s background, political orientation, and the process of interpreting meaning (Fairclough, 1992). In the last dimension, there are three aspects analyzed: the situation when the text is produced, the influence of political institutions, and the macro-context of the socio-political system, which determines the values and power that dominate (Eriyanto, 2001).

Qualitative methods require in-depth analysis of a research object. Therefore, primary data were collected in the form of “DPR - Musikal” transcripts, and face-to-face interviews with informants, namely Jovial and Lopez, who were selected based on their empirical knowledge and experience in producing the artworks. The interview was conducted on October 27, 2022, via Zoom Meeting. This research is also supported by secondary data in the form of mass media interviews, audio-visual media such as

podcasts, reaction videos, behind-the-scenes videos, and various written documents and news that can help the data triangulation process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

“DPR Musikal” is one of SkinnyIndonesian24’s most ambitious video projects as it costs hundreds of millions of rupiah. During the pre-production stage, Jovial and Andovi did not draw inspiration from other pieces of art, and instead explored their own personal concerns. Their worry about transactional politics—which requires DPR members to “repay” party or campaign donors in order to ensure that public policy consistently serves their interests—was the inspiration behind the story. To criticize the DPR, Jovial and Andovi used environmental issues, which they consider to be the most important and concerning issues in Indonesia and have an impact on all levels of society (Bisnis, 2021). This piece consists of five songs: “*Mengubah Indonesia*”, “*PR*”, “*Manusia Setengah Dewa*”, “*Dilema*”, and “*Pilihan Rakyat*” various dialogue inserts in between. The first song introduces Mawar, a fictional protagonist, who is a DPR member that demonstrated interest in environmental issues on the first day of her inauguration. The scene then moves to the DPR members’ meeting room, where Mawar introduces Draft Bill No. 24 of 2021 concerning Flora, Agriculture, and Forestry (FAK) in front of senior DPR members. However, her colleagues rejected the bill, which is expressed through the song “*PR*.” The following dialogue depicts a meeting between Mawar and Mr. Novan, the chairman of the DPR. Mr. Novan asks Mawar for not causing problems among other DPR members.

As the song “*Manusia Setengah Dewa*” goes on, Mawar recalls a moment from her early years in which her family was forcibly removed from their home while the government attempted to ruin their house using bulldozers. Jovial provided insight into the historical context of the narrative, which revolves around the incidence of oil palm development. Mawar’s family lives in a forest area where an oil palm plantation is being built. The company and government are carrying out evictions arbitrarily. Facing various pressures and rejections from DPR members, Mawar almost gives up, which is expressed in the song “*Dilema*.” In the next dialogue, the senior members persuaded Mawar to revise several articles of the FAK Bill that endangered the company. Nevertheless, Mawar did not simply lose control. In her concluding song, “*Pilihan Rakyat*,” Mawar expresses her idealistic belief to consistently advocate for the rights of marginalized individuals. Based on “DPR – Musikal” fictional story, this

study identified environmental discourses—sustainable development and anti-capitalism—that surfaced through three elements of Fairclough’s discourse.

A. Sustainable Development and the Development versus Environmental Preservation Dichotomy

Mawar’s environmental bill demonstrates how her principles align with the objectives of both economic growth and environmental preservation. The philosophy behind the FAK Bill’s first article is that “a good and healthy living environment is a human right of every Indonesian citizen.” Another article states that companies must “obtain permission from local residents.” The FAK Bill does not completely challenge the existence of companies and only imposes tighter regulations on industrial operations.

On the other hand, the antagonist characters who reject the FAK Bill argue that these particular articles will hurt the nation’s economy and make things harder for extractive industries. They present environmental protection programs as inherently antagonistic to the objectives of human well-being, drawing a distinction between them and economic progress.

Angel: So that’s how it is Mawar. Now you understand that some of your bill’s articles make things difficult for them, you know.

Mawar: Yes, I understand, ma’am.

Juki: OK, let me explain, Mawar. If we make things difficult for them, they will leave. If they leave, the people will lose their jobs. (People will) get upset again. We do this for the people too. Do you understand?¹

The FAK Bill is presented as a compromise that resolves this dichotomy. The bill’s provisions and Mawar’s opinions align with the concept of sustainable development, which aims to strike a balance between the needs of development and environmental preservation.

The dichotomous narrative of development vs. the environment is basically a big debate that influences various policies in the world. On the one hand, economic development is seen as an interest that is difficult to ignore in the industrial era because of its great benefits for expanding employment and welfare (Bartik, 1994). However, critics argue that the development agenda threatens environmental conservation and perpetuates a capitalistic economy (Osorio et al., 2005). These opposing ideas have led to the emergence of sustainable development, which has become a global discourse.

Sustainable development seeks to compromise the current capitalistic political-economic system with an environmental protection agenda through programs and legal policy directions. Sustainable development posits that we must accommodate diverse human interests to ensure a sustainable world for future generations (Carter, 2007). In order to bridge the dichotomy of development and the environment, sustainable development offers a solution through regulatory directives formulated by a team of legal experts at the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), some of whom recommend that member countries “provide information to people affected by activities [natural extraction]” and “ensuring that conservation is treated equally with... development activities” (WCED, 1987). The articles contained in the FAK Bill are in line with the contents of the WCED document.

Jovial as the “DPR – Musikal” producer presents himself as a proponent of Mawar’s ideas of striking a balance between the goals for development and conservation. This is evident from the video’s final chapter, which present Mawar as an example for the viewers to follow. The goal of the production is to encourage viewers to emulate Mawar figures (Friends of ICW, 2021). In order to lessen the ecological impact of economic activity, Jovial believes that there must be “a balance between the good and the bad.”

“In oil mining companies, many people depend on their livelihoods to be able to eat and send their children to school... If you close down the company, hundreds of thousands of people will be laid off. The wheels of the economy will immediately mess up, people will lose their jobs... no matter how evil the business is, it provides a living for a lot of people. But what this business must be aware of is that the balance between good and bad must be maintained.” (Jovial, 27 October 2022)

Jovial’s compromise perspective on regulated state development projects was shaped by his upbringing. He observed an environmental management system with stringent corporate restrictions throughout his six years in Denmark. Denmark implements extreme environmental tax policies (eco-taxes) for industrial activities. Denmark imposes a carbon tax of up to \$13 per ton of CO₂ (Yglesias, 2015). Denmark’s energy policy follows, although not entirely, the principles of free-market environmentalism (Wang, Moreno-Casas, & Huerta de Soto, 2021). Jovial does not dispute that corporations can be tasked with managing natural resources, as is the case in Denmark, as long as stringent guidelines are in place to minimize ecological dangers.

¹This dialogue appears at 28:42.

As seen by the country's enormous GDP growth and economic growth between 1990 and 2014, Indonesia has pursued ambitious development, but this has not kept up with the country's declining capital stock for natural resources (Kurniawan & Managi, 2018). While the Indonesian government started demonstrating support for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) after 2015, actions like the adoption of a Presidential Decree on TPB (Sustainable Development Goals) were at odds with other measures that encouraged natural resource exploitation (Sari et al., 2022). One example of such a measure was the Belt and Road Initiative, which requires damages to Sumatran forest areas to be covered (Sloan, Alamgir, Campbell, Setyawati, & Laurance, 2019).

The empirical gap in the implementation of sustainable development between Denmark and Indonesia is the social context behind the discourse embedded in the work "DPR: Musical." The producer uses a text about the disagreement between pro-development players and Mawar—who presents the FAK Bill as a compromise that strikes a balance between the development and natural resource conservation agendas—to illustrate his pro-sustainable development narrative.

B. Anti-Capitalism and Capitalist Domination in Parliament

The Mawar family's flashback scene is a crucial narrative element in "DPR - Musical." In Kalimantan, palm oil firms are forcing Mawar's family to leave their property. This incident set off Mawar's fight against the private sector's exploitation practices, which commodify unbounded natural wealth and shield those who are the targets of such practices. "DPR - Musical" makes an effort to illustrate how those who have historically relied on nature always end up losing out because of the goals of government-backed capitalism.

The anti-capitalism discourse is a popular discourse in ecological thinking because of its emancipatory character (Dobson, 2000) and resistance to free market economic accumulation (Carter, 2007). The current global ecological catastrophe is a result of capitalism, which promotes the privatization of natural resources in order to maximize profits and promote rapid economic growth (Foster, 2002).

The portrayal of the displacement of indigenous people by palm oil firms in "DPR - Musical" is indicative of the neo-Marxist perspective, which holds that power operates on a global level through the involvement of multinational corporations and organizations (Svarstad et al., 2018). Jovial gave the example of the American fast-food chain Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), as an illustration of a company

that received a government expansion authorization to open hundreds of locations that required the supply of palm oil, which led to the eviction of Mawar's family. He uses a text about the disagreement between pro-development DPR members and Mawar to illustrate his pro-sustainable development narrative.

The producers expressed strong anti-capitalist sentiments in earlier interviews. Andovi criticized businesspeople who engage in coal and oil production because their goal is to accumulate wealth and reap profits quickly, even at the expense of the environment (Daniel Mananta Network, 2021).

The political system and public policy are significantly influenced by the economic power of the capitalist elite (Holcombe, 2015). They can finance government officials to maintain power (Whitfield, Lars, Therkildsen, & Kjaer, 2015) and lead to clientelistic relations between the two parties (Ebenau, Bruff, & May, 2015). This relationship is depicted in the last scene of "DPR - Musical" features a conversation between a senior DPR member and a businessman who earlier provided funding for the council member's campaign. This scene demonstrates how businessespeople intervene in policies that pose a danger to their business in order to collect debts from council members.

The antagonist characters in "DPR - Musical" was crafted with a strong capitalist background. Juki, one of senior DPR members, works as a commissioner for an agricultural company, one of which deals with palm oil and frequently encounters AMDAL issues (DPR - Musical, 2021a). Another character, Januari, comes from a wealthy business-oriented family and has numerous conglomerate colleagues (DPR Musical, 2021b, 2021c). Jovial condemns the dominance of businesspeople within the DPR and uses characters like these to illustrate how DPR members' connections and backgrounds affect the policies they establish.

"DPR - Musical's" anti-capitalist discourse is a reflection of capitalism's triumph in Indonesia rather than something that just appears out of nowhere. In October 2020, during the pre-production of "DPR - Musical", political tensions in Indonesia were high because of the Omnibus Law's ratification. The goal of the Omnibus Law is to simplify company activities in Indonesia and help the country meet its goals for economic development (Sembiring, Fatimah, & Widyaningsih, 2020). Within the environmental domain, the Omnibus Law combines three separate laws with provisions aimed at making it easier for entrepreneurs to get permits for environmental extraction activities (Kompas, 2020). This law is a prime illustration of how DPR policies serve the interests of capitalism.

C. Critical Review of Discourse Construction

The two discourses that are present in “DPR - Musical” represent opposing political ideas. Sustainable development stands on the right side of the political spectrum because of its compromising ideas on capitalism. In essence, sustainable development’s line of reasoning supports both the objectives of environmental preservation and the free-market “sustainable growth” agenda (Hopwood, Mellor, & O’Brien, 2005; Tulloch & Neilson, 2014).

According to the Brundtland Report’s concept of sustainable development, the terms “development” and “needs” are emphasized, stressing economic development as the primary human need (Tulloch & Neilson, 2014). Sustainable Development’s goal of environmental conservation will remain unfulfilled as long as economic growth principles persist. The words “growth” or “development” themselves reflect a capitalistic economy that ultimately perpetuates the exploitation of the Earth. Apart from that, sustainable development is characterized by anthropocentrism, which opposes the destruction of nature for the sake of ensuring human survival. Protection of nature is driven by the motivation to make efficient use of resources by humans, not by nature itself (Osorio, Lobato, & Castillo, 2005).

Some scholars, including Daniel Wagman and Arturo Escobar, critique sustainable development as a concept fueled by a capital accumulation system. Thus, in order to guarantee capital accumulation and economic expansion, this agenda places a strong emphasis on “sustaining development.” Arturo Escobar also criticized how this paradigm allows efficient commercialization and capitalization of the environment (Castro, 2004).

The second discourse, anti-capitalism, is associated with the left of the political spectrum due to its opposition to natural resource exploitations that result in environmental damage and local resident displacement. This narrative aligns with Neo-Marxist perspectives. Furthermore, a message of resistance to capitalism’s hegemony is conveyed via the antagonist characters’ evolution, which has roots in business families and their collusive behaviors with coal companies. The producers also oppose intervention by business interests in parliament because it obstruct the establishment of ideal environmental policies for society.

The lack of coherence in the formation of this discourse results in solutions that are inconsistent. Producers should offer fundamental resistance to capitalism, including the economic development agenda, in order to effectively communicate the significance of preventing business interference in parliamentary affairs and opposing the extensive exploitation of natural resources. Nevertheless,

producers exhibit a willingness to make concessions when it comes to the development agenda and delegate the responsibility of managing natural resources to the private sector, despite the necessity for stringent restrictions to mitigate potential environmental harm. These conflicting solutions indicate the producers’ absence of systematic thinking about environmental issues.

The inconsistent articulation of this work begs the question of what kind of truth it is attempting to establish. Leftist scholars, who consider the sustainable development discourse to be an expansion of the capitalist agenda, may interpret the producers’ adherence to the development agenda in this piece as a hidden expression of capitalist ideology. Although the producers openly declare their opposition to capitalism, their inclination to make compromises regarding regulated extractive practices implies a potential inseparability from the dominant hegemony of capitalism.

In essence, capitalism is a concept that is ingrained in and dominating public areas. This is because, in the late capitalist era, industry has always controlled the rationality (“reason”) of modern society. Jurgen Habermas contends that capitalist elites construct public space and “reason” to pursue their interests (Kellner, 2000). Intellectual “hijacking” occurs in a number of extensively consumed popular shows and products. Here, “DPR-Musikal” is another example of how capitalism subverts society by promoting acceptance of a development agenda that will never be able to confront environmental problems.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable development and anti-capitalism are the two discourses present in “DPR – Musikal”. First, the text recognizes the sustainable development discourse in relation to the FAK Bill, which proposes a resolution that reconciles the objectives of development agenda and environmental conservation. The text producers favor Mawar’s narrative, which compromises on a more regulated development agenda. This viewpoint is shaped by the social context and experience of producers, who discovered an empirical difference between natural resource management regulations in Denmark and Indonesia. Second, the anti-capitalism discourse appears in the “DPR - Musikal” story about the privatization of property by the palm oil company which led to Mawar family’s expulsion, displaying the debate against capitalism and illustrates how it operates on a worldwide scale. Producers also expressed concerns regarding the prevalence of capitalism’s influence in the policy formulation process, which impeded

the passage of environmental policies and signified capitalism's triumph in Indonesia via the ratification of the Omnibus Law. These two discourses are on opposite ends of the political spectrum, leading to an incoherent solution. In spite of their desire to support efforts to stop the exploitation of nature and the dominance of economic interests in politics, producers do not present a radical alternative that would fundamentally challenge capitalism. Instead, the producer demonstrates compromise attitudes toward the development agenda, reflecting the prevalence of capitalist thought in "DPR - Musikal." Essentially, capitalism is an idea that dominates and is deeply embedded in public areas. Intellectual 'hijacking' manifests itself in numerous consumed products and popular entertainment shows. In this case, "DPR - Musikal" is also a product of capitalism, which distorts people's "reason" by encouraging acceptance of a development agenda that will never solve ecological issues.

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