

Femme-Castratrice in Si Manis Jembatan Ancol (2019)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to know how the lead female character in *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* (2019) fulfills the characteristics of a *femme-castratrice* and also to see the result that the lead character gets after she transforms into a female monster. To address the questions, I will use the monstrous-feminine theory as the main theory to be applied to Maryam as a victim of gender-based violence. From this theory, I want to show that the transformation of a *femme-castratrice* may occur by symbolic and literal castration. The symbolic castration means that the victim is castrated emotionally, whereas the literal castration means that the victim is physically abused. I connected the analysis with the abjection theory to show the result and resolution once the main female character is fully transformed into a *femme-castratrice*, which is a total banishment from the disturbed society, in a form of annihilation. In the end, it can be concluded that a *femme-castratrice* in *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* (2019) is considered an ambiguous character.

Keywords: *femme-castratrice*; transformation; symbolic castration; literal castration; abjection; ambiguous.

INTRODUCTION

In the Indonesian film industry, the horror film genre is considered a major cinematic genre in Indonesia. Andi Boediman as a managing partner of the Ideosource Film Fund (IFF) stated that in the past ten years there were four film genres that are considered the most favorable film genre. One of which is the horror film genre (Hasibuan, 2018). However, it seems that Indonesia mostly adopted the Horror of the Demonic sub genre as the foundation genre of most horror films (Rusdiati, 2010, p. 6).

After the New Order regime ended (1999), film-making in Indonesia became popular again, especially in the horror film genre section, until the present day. The reform horror films depicted the mystery in the present, as part of modern life. The main focus of the Reform horror films is no longer on the religious themes which emphasize the Islamic symbol and elements. Religious elements are optional for the filmmaker in the reform era in filmmaking, as Heeren mentioned that “the appearance of a *kyai* was no longer perceived as obligatory” (Contemporary Indonesian Film, 2012, p. 148). Even though ‘the religious elements’ are optional in filmmaking, there are several Indonesian horror films that still use the New Order format, where religious elements are necessary, especially for a *reboot* or a *remake* film from the New Order that is produced and distributed for the audiences in the Reform era (Heeren, 2012, 148-149).

Si Manis Jembatan Ancol (2019) is a remake film of the same title in 1973, influenced by the popular traditional folklore in Betawi (now Jakarta). Since it was a remake film from 1973, *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* (2019) still uses the traditional belief context as the background of the story regarding gender stereotypes. It emphasizes the social construction of womanhood as the “good” woman by describing the female character as a submissive and passive partner to the male characters, even though the filmmaker (Anggy Umbara) has modernized it by giving a different plot twist at the end. Regardless of the modern qualities of the story (plot), *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* (2019) still agrees with the traditional patriarchal perspective and expectations of women.

The first theory that I am going to use to analyze the film is the Monstrous-Feminine by Barbara Creed (1993). This will help identify the main female character in a chosen Indonesian horror film, based on the seven 'faces' or types of female monsters, one of which is the *Femme-Castratrice* (Creed, 1993, p.3). *Femme-Castratrice* can be defined as the abused woman who seeks revenge on men who have raped or abused her (Creed, 1993, p. 446). The representation of *femme-castratrice* in the horror film can be seen as the woman as the castrator and also as the woman as castrated being (Creed, 1993, p.444). The meaning 'castrated' can be understood both literally and symbolically.

In literal meaning, a castrated woman is often depicted as a victim in the film, where her body is 'repeatedly knifed' by men until it resembles a bleeding wound. Literal castration could be more than just a body that is repeatedly knifed. Rape and any other physical abuse that happens towards women is also considered a bleeding wound. On a symbolic level, a woman can be transformed into a monster because her rightful destiny has been robbed or taken away by force. Thus, she seeks revenge on men who have raped and mistreated her in some way. A woman's violent destructive urges arise from her failure to lead a 'normal' life in possession of friends and family, as a symbol that her rightful destiny (to own family and make friends) has been robbed.

The second theory that I am going to apply to the analysis is the Abjection theory. Abjection can be defined as individuals that fail to "respect borders, positions, rules", which 'disturbs identity, system, and order' (Creed, 1993, p. 50). The border may be classified as human and inhuman, normal and abnormal, good and evil, and also gender role; between femininity and masculinity (Creed, 1993, p. 58-59). Based on Creed's view, the figure of a woman as a monster is situated in a place that may threaten life and its stability, therefore it must be 'radically excluded from the society' (Creed, 1993, p. 53).

It is because women control the sadistic gaze towards men, as their target and victims, to take control and dominate the power that usually belongs to men. The threatening power of women may show the insecurity of the male imagination, which makes them must be ever on alert whenever the signs of the deadly *femme-castratrice* are present (Creed, 1993, p. 500-501). Therefore, the female character that is being an object of abject may be seen as an ambiguous character, because it both fascinates men's desire (as an object of possession), but also terrifies them at the same time that has to be eliminated or killed.

I will use the theory of the Monstrous-Feminine by Creed to analyze the causes that make the lead female character turn into a female monster-killer since it holds the basic characteristics to determine a female character could transform into a the *femme-castratrice*, which is the literal and symbolic meaning. It also helps me set the point of view in analyzing the character since it shows that the *femme-castratrice* (as in the heroine context) is shown to be justified in her actions as if she appears to win the audience's sympathy. Or in other words, her decision to seek revenge (castrates) on men is right because men are the cause who made her turn into a monster. Also, I will use the Abjection theory to analyze and understand better the result that may happen for the *femme-castratrice* that is portrayed in the film, since it has been said that the presence of the *femme-castratrice* is considered as an ambiguous character. Ambiguous as it will fascinate men, however still needs to be banished since it also terrifies them at the same moment.

MARYAM AS A *FEMME-CASTRATRICE* IN *SI MANIS JEMBATAN ANCOL* (2019)

It seems irrelevant to describe Maryam as the lead female character based on the traditional patriarchal belief since today's society is not as conservative as in the past. Women

are no longer forced to be supportive partners by only maintaining the household (as housewives). Nowadays, women have the opportunity and freedom to pursue anything they want, although it may not be as much as men. Sadly, this movie still depicts Maryam using the traditional concept, even though this movie is full of feminist issues regarding gender equality. So, I find that there is a new concept and perspective regarding women as portrayed in *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* (2019). I will show the new image of Maryam as a femme-castratrice in the new version of the movie *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* (2019).

2.1 Maryam's Transformation as Femme-Castratrice

In the film, Maryam needs to go through several stages to transform into a femme-castratrice. Before Maryam begins the transformation, she is depicted as a woman defined by the patriarchal society's construction, which makes her an object of desire for men (Chaudhuri, 2006, p. 5). Maryam's appearance is portrayed as a tall and slim-figure woman with a fair complexion. She also has long-wavy black hair that highlights the curves of her body. Since this is a remake movie that took place in 1973 settings, it seems that the standard beauty for women around the 1970s in Betawi (Jakarta) could be classified as tall and slim figured body, followed by fair complexion and long black hair, just like Maryam. Her daily outfit is mostly a red dress and a veil (kerudung). According to Herman Cerrato, in his book *The Meaning of Colors*, red is the best color to draw someone's attention, as it is a color where the eye looks first (2012, p. 4). The color red also symbolizes lust and sexual passion, which may give a 'sexier' look towards women (Cerrato, 2012, p. 4-5). Maryam is also depicted as a housewife, who used to spend all of her time inside the house, maintaining her household. During that time, she also got abusive behavior from her husband that slowly changed her personality, which transforms her into a femme-castratrice. Creed gives two characteristics on how a person (female) could turn into a femme-castratrice, which is the literal and symbolic castration level (p. 444).

2.1.1. Maryam's Symbolic Castration.

The first symbolic castration that has been done to Maryam, is when her husband mistreats and positions her as an unequal partner. Maryam is never perceived as Roy's wife, but rather to be seen as a person who gives a burden on him. For example, in the opening scene, when Maryam sits politely and waits for her husband to join the table. Instead of having breakfast together with Maryam, Roy decides to start eating breakfast by himself. This can be seen as a sign of how Roy disrespects Maryam. Usually, in Indonesia, it is common for the server (or maid), who eats after the employer (or landlord) finishes eating. In this case, I can see the resemblance in the scene.

Another example of how Roy sees Maryam, not as an equal partner can be seen in the difference between his interaction with the housemaid and also his business partner, who is also a woman. When talking to the housemaid, Roy never raises his voice. He often says 'thank you' and 'please', whenever he asks the housemaid to do something for him. This act can also be seen when Roy discusses a tender offer with his business partner. On the other hand, Roy often treats his wife (Maryam) in an impolite manner. Whenever they have a conversation to discuss something, Roy always raises his voice toward Maryam, as if she is his enemy. His voice seems full of anger and rage, whereas Maryam is speaking softly as if she tries to build an intimate communication with her husband. Besides yelling and raising his voice, Roy also calls his wife 'Kamu' (You). In Indonesia, the word 'Kamu' is considered an impolite nickname to be given to someone, especially for a wife. This small detail supports my statement that Roy symbolically castrates Maryam in terms of limiting her rights as an equal partner who deserves his love and kindness, as shown in the opening scene. He only tricks Maryam into marriage because he only loves her for her property (wealth).

The second symbolic castration happens when Maryam seems unable to make choices or decisions herself. As a grown-up woman, I think she may decide everything she wants, rather than waiting for someone else's agreement. However, Maryam is often depicted as a vulnerable person that cannot have rights in decision-making. She has to ask for her husband's permission in order to do something she likes. For example, when she wants to order a painting of her father's portrait, she has to ask her husband's permission before she could tell the painter. In my opinion, Maryam supposedly can do anything she wants for the decoration of her house. Another example is when she finds her dead cat. Instead of calling the cops, she chooses to sit down and wait for her husband to come home first. In my opinion, this situation is rather urgent and needs immediate action to take, since there is someone that does burglary inside the house and kills her cat. However, Maryam can only sit on the staircase, crying, and patiently waiting for her husband to arrive home.

On the contrary, there is a scene that indicates how Maryam has her own choices and decisions to make. For example, when she decides to hang the oil painting by herself. This scene happens after Maryam comes home from the painter's house. She goes inside and immediately hangs the painting on the desired wall (living room). In this scene, she does not have to ask her husband to help her decide the layout or the proper place for her to hang the painting. She does it by her own choice. In other words, Maryam is actually capable of doing the things she likes without asking others' permission. However, her husband makes her unable to do so. He limits Maryam's capability in order to make decisions.

Lastly, the third symbolic castration is when Maryam loses her best friend, as a symbol that her right on gaining friendship is being limited. As a housewife, Maryam spends most of her time at home. Thus, her social interactions only occur with her pet, a black cat named Cleo. Maryam seems to have to swallow a bitter pill when she finds out Cleo has been decapitated because of her husband's fault, which was that he could not pay his debt in time. Maryam is also limited in making friends of the opposite gender. After Cleo's death, Maryam finds comfort whenever she is around Yudha, the painter who lives next door. Since they often spend time together, their relationship grows closer than friends but not yet a lover. However, it seems like their intimate friendship actually becomes a disaster for Maryam and Roy. Her husband, who is consumed by jealousy, accuses her as an unfaithful wife since Maryam used to spend her spare time with Yudha. When her husband accused her as an unfaithful wife, Maryam once again lost her chance to have her rightful destiny to make friends and maintain a friendship with Yudha. She had done everything to make sure that her relationship with Yudha was purely just a best friend, but her husband still accuses her of something she did not do.

It is clear how Maryam can grow a violent destructive urge toward her husband and other male characters in the movie that have done bad things for her since she cannot have a normal life in possession of friends and especially a family (marriage) that match with her expectations. She is emotionally unfulfilled. It seems that love and marriage are not enough for Maryam as a married woman. Possession of a friend is also important for her, yet her husband makes her unable to have it since her husband has symbolically castrated her and taken away her dreams and desire (Creed, 1993, p. 444).

2.1.2. Maryam's Literal Castration.

In literal meaning, 'a castrated woman is often depicted as a victim in the film, where her body is repeatedly knifed until it resembles a bleeding wound' (Creed, 1993, p. 444). If symbolic castration discusses emotional wounds, literal castration talks more about the physical

wound that a woman can get from men's behavior. Maryam encountered two times of literal castration that was caused by her husband's fault.

The first literal castration happens when Maryam is kidnapped and got rape by several men, who are the loan shark's subordinates. The rape scene is filmed in such a way that Maryam becomes a complete and total victim. Maryam is outnumbered by 4-5 men. She is hunted down in a pack, degraded, humiliated, and tortured. They even restrain her during the rapes. She is so badly beaten and seems like there is no possibility that she may fight back. Maryam is portrayed as a weak and passive object for the male character's sexual desire, as stated by Becker (1999), 'women in the patriarchal society are dependent, vulnerable, pliant, weak, emotional and empathetic' (p. 27). This scene perfectly shows the traditional perspective of the active male and the passive female in relation to power, even though the way they hold and strain Maryam shows as if she was a threat to them.

Luckily, Maryam can get herself out of the building. She gathers her last strength to fight back those who take advantage of her. She runs out of the building, which leads her to the bridge. Unfortunately, she gets caught again by the loan shark's subordinates. This is where the second literal castration occurs. In this scene, Maryam is stabbed by one of the loan shark's subordinates who is angry since he does not get the chance to take advantage (to rape) of her in the old building. In this context, Maryam eventually has a literal bleeding wound as she was beaten and stabbed in the stomach by the loan shark's subordinates. Later, after she was lying unconscious, her body was thrown into the river below, as if to erase their act of killing Maryam.

2.2. *Femme-Castratrice* considered as Ambiguous.

Previously, the discussion mainly focused on Maryam as a castrated woman which can be seen through the symbolic and literal castration that she has encountered. In this subchapter, the discussion will elaborate more on Maryam as the castrated-female castrator, known as the *femme-castratrice*. In traditional belief, a woman is perceived as an inferior being, a powerless individual who is supposed to be ruled by men. As stated by Becker (1999), 'women in the patriarchal society are dependent, vulnerable, pliant, weak, emotional and empathetic' (p. 27). However, it seems that the definition may not suitable for a *femme-castratrice*. As stated by Creed (1993), 'the *femme-castratrice* controls the sadistic gaze' (p. 563). In other words, the positions are now changing, as well as their object since she has the control to rule and punish them (Mulvey, 1975).

The presence of a *femme-castratrice* may trigger and shows men's insecurity since they 'must be ever alert whenever the signs of the deadly *femme-castratrice* are present' (Creed, 1993, p. 500-501). It means that men are now perceived as inferior beings in front of the *femme-castratrice* since women now possess the power as a castrator to dominate or take control of the power that usually belongs to men. However, even though men are perceived as inferior beings, the *femme-castratrice* herself cannot be claimed as a superior being yet. Creed mentioned that a *femme-castratrice* 'may be seen as an ambiguous character because it both fascinates men and terrifies them at the same time.' (Creed, 1993, p. 14). Therefore, a *femme-castratrice* can be both a superior and inferior being in this context.

2.2.1. Maryam's Superior Side

A woman as *femme-castratrice* is traditionally represented as a castrator in two contexts, 'as a slasher and a heroine' (Creed, 1993, p. 457). In my opinion, it is more suitable to analyze Maryam as a heroine in this context because she does not show any psychotic tendencies from the beginning of the film. As a heroine, Maryam is represented as a resourceful,

independent, yet dangerous woman (Creed, 1993, p. 460). It is shown when she prepares her strategy to hunt down the loan shark's subordinates in a small hut near the river. She practices her throwing skills on a scarecrow that she makes herself. She also practices making booby traps using a simple tool. She does everything by herself as if to show the audience that Maryam is indeed an independent and strong woman. In my opinion, Maryam as a *femme-castratrice* is a superior character. She is now given masculine traits, such as courage, strength, and independence. It is different from the previous Maryam when she is a victim. The previous Maryam mostly holds feminine traits, which makes her depicted as a weak and vulnerable housewife. Compared with the new Maryam, she is now depicted as a powerful individual that has the ability to possess the power that usually belongs to men. According to Creed, a *femme-castratrice* as a heroine usually engages in castration when dispatching her victim, literal or symbolic (p. 458-459). Based on the film, I found that Maryam actually castrates the male character (loan shark's subordinates) on a symbolic level. Maryam always kills her victim when their genitals are exposed, or when it is erected. However, she does not 'cut' or literally castrate it, as if to trigger the male castration anxiety (the fear of castration), which makes her depicted as a powerful *femme-castratrice*.

The first symbolic castration that Maryam does, is when she kills Pras, one of the loan shark's subordinates. One night, when Pras is out playing cards, he sees a beautiful lady (Maryam) walking in front of him. He immediately takes an initiative to drive her home, hoping he would take advantage of her since he is aroused by her beauty. His face when he sees Maryam tells that he is about to ravish Maryam. In the movie, Maryam asks him to pull over when they are on the bridge. At first, Pras refuses her order because he still wants to take her home and get his 'payment' (sex). Maryam insists and at that moment she reveals herself and kills Pras by strangling him to death.

The second symbolic castration that Maryam does, is when she kills Gun, another loan shark's subordinate. In the movie, Gun is driving his Jeep near the woods. He stopped by for a moment to pee under the tree. After he pulls down the zipper and is about to pee, he hears a burst of scary laughter inside the woods. When he tries to search for the sound, Maryam suddenly appears in the distance in front of him. Gun immediately runs to the car hoping it could save him from Maryam, without fixing his zipper, and pulls up his pants. Unfortunately, Maryam is faster than him. She chases after him and kills him using a sharp stem booby trap, which she has prepared before.

Another symbolic castration that Maryam does, which shows men's vulnerability when their genitals are exposed, is when Maryam kills Jaka. In this scene, Maryam actually castrates him in his very vulnerable situation, which is when he takes a bath, or in other words when he is naked. As a symbolic meaning, being naked means that there is nothing to hide, also 'revealing something previously hidden' (Utriainen, 2014, p. 136). In my opinion, Maryam successfully makes Jaka eventually show his true emotion as something that was previously hidden, which is fear. This emphasizes that Maryam as a castrator is a superior being since she can make her victim (which is men) feel weak, vulnerable, and emotional, which is often depicted on women as inferior beings. The positions have changed. Based on a *femme-castratrice* perspective, I can conclude that males are now the weak and vulnerable victims. They are also perceived as an object of fear since she has the control to rule over them through punishment.

2.2.2. Maryam's Inferior Side

Being a *femme-castratrice* that may be perceived as superior (since it may evoke men's insecurity), ironically shows the fact that Maryam is still depicted as an inferior being. This can be seen clearly from Maryam's appearance as a *femme-castratrice*, which still uses the patriarchal perspectives. As a monster, her appearance is far from grotesque or scary, but rather

‘good looking’ or beautiful. Maryam still wears her red dress, which in my opinion symbolizes courage, strength, and rage, as mentioned by Cerrato in his book *The Meaning of Colors* (2012, p. 4). However, it turns out that her dress indicates her as a sexual object for men. For example, as I have mentioned in 2.2.1, her appearance as a ghost only makes them aroused. Also, usually female monsters have messy hair to complete their scary look, but Maryam apparently manages her long-curly hair in a good condition. This seems justified that *femme-castratrice* is an ambiguous character since she still attracts and terrifies men at the moment (Creed, 1993, p. 14).

The other thing that indicates Maryam as an inferior being is when the director of the movie needs to eliminate her at the end of the film. According to Creed (1993), there are two resolutions proposed in the horror film when a woman suddenly turns into a deadly *femme-castratrice*. The first thing is to reconstitute their feminine gender as masculine since they held men’s traits in the horror film that can defeat their enemy, or (the second one) is simply to eliminate or kill the *femme-castratrice* at the end of the movie (*Monstrous-Feminine*, p. 573). In this film, the director of *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* (2019) chose to simply kill Maryam at the end of the movie, because she was considered as the object of abjection (abjection). In this case, I think Maryam is believed to disrupt the gender role border, as well as the life stability that applies to the society based on the movie. Maryam has successfully transformed into a *femme-castratrice* that possessed the power and male dominance that once ruled her. She becomes the ‘folk devil’ that everybody talks about. For them, it is safer if Maryam is cast out from the village, so they can live their life peacefully. It is also because they believe that the dead and the undead cannot live together. Maryam is considered as the individual that fails to respect the rule that the people in the village are still believed in.

Based on the scene above, Maryam is eliminated by the people, especially men, because her presence gives them anxiety and a sense of insecurity. However, Maryam is only a woman that once was treated poorly by men before she transformed into a *femme-castratrice*. Since they (men) are afraid of Maryam, who violates the gender border, it indicates that the male characters felt that Maryam was too powerful, so that they have to get rid or kill Maryam again. This symbolizes Maryam's power and freedom only given temporarily. At the end of her life, men still have to rule and control the power, which makes her position stick with the idea of woman as an inferior being.

In my opinion, this ending may show the failed attempt from the director to restore the image of Maryam with a new perspective as a strong and independent heroine. The director’s decision to kill Maryam for the second time only makes her portrayed as an ambiguous character since she goes back and forth from a superior yet still considered as an inferior character in the end.

CONCLUSION

In *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* (2019) Maryam has experienced symbolic and literal castration, which later transforms her into a *femme-castratrice*. Her symbolic castration happens once she got married to her husband. Instead of having a loving husband and having a happy family, she often gets verbal abuse from her husband. She also has to accept her fate when she cannot gain a friendship with her beloved pet and her best friend due to her husband’s fault. Her lack of having and maintaining family and friendship gives her destructive urges to seek revenge (castrate) since her dreams and desires are taken away forcefully. Being a *femme-castratrice* does give Maryam the power to seek revenge as she is now depicted as a superior being. However, it only makes her character considered as an ambiguous being since she has also shown her inferiority. Because she is now perceived as a powerful individual that may threaten the life and stability of men, she has to be banished from society. At the end of the story, she is killed by her own husband as a form of elimination.

Although the latest *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* (2019) film seems to be promoting an alternate perspective of women with power, in the end, the notion of patriarchal domination can be seen through the resolution which Maryam has experienced at the end of the movie, which is the elimination, as if to show that woman may have power, but only temporarily. Men still need to gain power and control over women. Regarding the *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* (2019) film's achievements and the audience's positive reception concerning the film, it can be considered that the film succeeds in gaining the audience's attention. However, on the other hand, the film not only succeeds in raising the issue of gender equality and women with power but also shows the persistence of patriarchal domination.

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