

The Sun, The Moon, and The Earth: A Screenplay Focusing on the Depth of Mid-Life Crisis in the Eye of an Indonesian Housewife

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ABSTRACT

This creative work focuses on empowering Indonesian housewives, particularly those navigating transformative life challenges in their middle years. It champions complete autonomy in life decisions, ambitions, and goals, countering societal and familial expectations. The work also aims to highlight the vibrancy and aspirations of middle-aged women, combating societal invisibility and fostering a broader understanding of their diverse experiences. This work also seeks to present perspectives from marginalized groups, emphasizing middle-aged women often overlooked by society, through Indonesian cinema. The creative thesis aspires to inspire gender equality by amplifying women's experiences and advocating for their rights while challenging and reshaping traditional gender norms. Ultimately, this screenplay aims to influence perceptions both within the film industry and broader society, fostering an inclusive environment that values and encourages aspirations regardless of age or gender.

Keywords: Indonesian cinema, Indonesian housewife, middle-life crisis, screenplay, traditional gender norms, transformative learning

INTRODUCTION

The mid-life crisis is an important turning point characterized by the restructuring of time and the formulation of new perceptions of self, time, and death (Rawat and Srivastava, 2020). This transformative phenomenon typically occurs in middle age, prompting individuals to become more reflective and self-evaluated. They begin to change in response to the needs that triggered the crisis, including great changes in psyche, attitudes, values, behavior, fear, and anxiety of death, and emotional turmoil (Rawat and Srivastava, 2020, p. 496). Rawat and Srivastava further note that individuals experiencing a mid-life crisis become profoundly aware of their mortality and the speed at which life passes, leading them to reassess their accomplishments and unfulfilled goals (2020, p. 498). This period often involves balancing multiple aspects of life, coping with physical changes, and facing emotional challenges.

Historically, the concept of the mid-life crisis was largely associated with men, reinforcing gender hierarchies and excluding women from the narrative of midlife reinvention. However, feminist scholars like Carol Gilligan, Grace Baruch, and Rosalind Barnet have redefined the mid-life crisis as a universal developmental stage, emphasizing that it results from adherence to traditional gender roles and advocating for both men and women to reimagine their lives (Schmidt, 2020, p. 6-9). This shift reflects the changing social norms and economic conditions that influence midlife experiences for both genders, challenging the double standard in aging and highlighting the need for a more inclusive understanding of this life stage (Schmidt, 2020, p. 27).

In Indonesian society, the mid-life crisis for women is further compounded by traditional gender roles that prioritize women's roles as wives and mothers, often at the expense of their ambitions and dreams (Retnaningsih, 2013, p. 19-20). These societal expectations can trigger midlife crises for Indonesian women, as they navigate the pressures of fulfilling these roles while potentially sacrificing their desires. By focusing on the experiences of middle-aged

Indonesian women, this screenplay aims to raise awareness of their faces and inspire them to pursue personal growth and fulfillment despite societal constraints.

This work aims to demonstrate that societal pressures and discriminatory gender norms significantly influence women in Indonesia to settle down early and perceive their worth primarily through marriage, housekeeping, and childbearing. This often leads to a midlife crisis filled with regrets and dilemmas, which can be resolved through transformative decisions and determination. In this narrative, Mentari develops a midlife crisis because her relationship does not fulfill her, and she misses a major goal she wants to achieve. She overcomes this crisis by making life-changing decisions.

My creative work focuses on empowering Indonesian women, particularly those facing transformative challenges in their middle years. It advocates for complete autonomy in life decisions, ambitions, and goals, countering societal and familial expectations. The primary goal is to highlight the aspirations of middle-aged women, combating societal invisibility, and fostering a broader understanding of their experiences. A study by Liechty and Yarnal (2010) highlights that older women feel a profound sense of injustice in their aging journey, pointing to societal pressures on appearance that disproportionately affect women. This supports Gullette's (1997) claim that cultural perceptions of aging, rather than the natural process, shape women's experiences. The conflict arises from the disparity between societal standards of beauty and the internal changes women undergo as they age, leading to frustration. Additionally, this work aims to showcase perspectives from marginalized groups, focusing on middle-aged women who often find themselves overlooked in society. Through Indonesian cinema, it seeks to inspire support for gender equality by amplifying women's experiences and challenging traditional gender norms. Its goal is to foster an inclusive environment where aspirations are valued regardless of age or gender. This screenplay aspires not only to create cinematic narratives but also to influence societal perceptions and promote gender equality.

MIDLIFE CRISIS THEORY

The midlife crisis involves personal turmoil and sudden lifestyle changes due to aging, physical decline, or feeling trapped in certain roles (Wong et al., 2012b). Common triggers include physical aging, menopause, empty nest syndrome, juggling multiple roles, and career changes. These crises often stem from inappropriate life conditions, like relationship issues or workplace problems (Dunaeva, 2020b). Midlife crisis impacts men and women differently, often being more transformative for women due to societal treatment based on age and gender norms (Schmidt, 2020). Women's roles as caretakers and their societal expectations often trap them in predefined roles, naturalizing their place in the home (Schmidt, 2020). This limits their career aspirations and enforces harmful gender norms.

Empty Nest Syndrome

Empty nest syndrome, a term from the 1880s, describes midlife changes when children leave home, leading to a loss of purpose for women (Schmidt, 2020). This syndrome can increase depression, physical symptoms related to menopause, and decline in mood and sexual activity (Bougea et al., 2020).

Impact on Relationships

Midlife crises often affect women's relationships. Many women redefine their gender roles, leaving marriages and reentering the workforce (Schmidt, 2020). They often regret early marriages influenced by societal norms, which prioritize young age for marriage and motherhood to avoid menopause (Schmidt, 2020).

Application to Mentari's Story

In the narrative, Mentari's midlife crisis involves her unfulfilling marriage and her buried dream of becoming a businesswoman. She married Dimas due to parental pressure, sacrificing her career aspirations. This aligns with societal beliefs that women's happiness lies in marriage (Retnaningsih, 2013). When her daughter Bumi leaves for law school, Mentari experiences empty nest syndrome, leading to loneliness and depression. This crisis drives her to pursue her long-lost career dream.

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY

Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, originating from adult education, focuses on how individuals experience profound changes in their beliefs and perspectives. The theory emphasizes critical self-reflection and a shift in understanding the world. According to Mezirow, "Learning is a process of utilizing prior interpretations to construct new or revised interpretations of one's experiences and using this as a guide to action" (Fleming, 2018, p. 122). This process can be intentional, accidental, or unconscious, and is driven by a sense of unease when existing interpretations no longer fit. Mezirow's framework includes two dimensions: habits of mind and points of view. Habits of mind are fundamental views that shape how we perceive and interpret events, including ideological, psychological, epistemic, philosophical, aesthetic, and moral-ethical dimensions. Points of view relate to specific perspectives that develop from these mental habits, guiding our actions and often remaining unquestioned.

Process of Transformation

Transformative learning involves critical reflection triggered by experiences that challenge our frames of reference. This process includes several phases:

1. Disorienting Dilemma: A problem or life event causes a fundamental questioning of one's perspectives (Fleming, 2018, p. 124).
2. Emotional Disturbance: Feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame arise, leading to self-examination and critical assessment of assumptions.
3. Recognition of Discontent: Understanding that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared, prompting changes in roles or actions (Fleming, 2018, p. 123).
4. Exploring Options: Examining new roles, relationships, and actions, and planning a course of action.
5. Building Competence and Confidence: Implementing new plans and gaining confidence in new roles.
6. Reintegration: Adopting new perspectives and integrating them into one's life, leading to a new, more satisfying lifestyle.

Application to Mentari's Story

In Mentari's narrative, her midlife crisis involves feeling trapped as a housewife, experiencing empty nest syndrome, and dealing with an incompatible marriage. She resolves these issues by pursuing her dream of becoming a businesswoman, reflecting Mezirow's transformative learning process. This journey aligns with the idea that a career or job offers positive insurance against complete absorption in family life (Schmidt, 2020, p. 35). Mentari's transformation culminates in her decision to divorce Dimas, prioritizing her business goals over an unfulfilling marriage.

CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

The genre of this creative work is Drama. Drama, as mentioned in the introduction, focuses on portraying realistic characters and topics. Following this trait, I intend to depict characters, conflicts, and settings that readers can relate to and understand. In this screenplay, I plan to utilize motifs, recurring elements that hold symbolic or conceptual meaning. Unlike themes, which are abstract ideas, motifs are specific objects or events. For example, in Shakespeare's "Macbeth," Lady Macbeth's obsession with washing her hands is a motif symbolizing her guilt (Evelyn, 2022). I will incorporate motifs by using Mentari's hobby of cooking as a means for her to escape the loneliness she feels in her life.

Secondly, I plan to use flashbacks, a literary device that recounts past events related to the main story. Flashbacks can provide background information or reveal a character's trauma. For instance, the film "Memento" uses flashbacks to reveal events leading up to the protagonist's amnesia (Evelyn, 2022). In my screenplay, flashbacks will explore Mentari's middle-aged crisis by delving into her moments with Bumi, highlighting her loneliness stemming from empty nest syndrome. Additionally, flashbacks will help illustrate how Mentari begins to piece together clues indicating Dimas's infidelity.

Thirdly, I plan to incorporate comic relief, a literary device that introduces humorous or lighthearted elements within a serious or emotionally intense narrative (Editorial Team & Author Editorial Team, 2023). In a Drama screenplay, comic relief provides a contrast to serious themes, offering a temporary distraction from the intensity of the storyline. I will use comic relief through side characters Bu Ida and Satria, whose behavior and conversations with Mentari will provide moments of levity.

Lastly, I plan to use montage, a film technique involving a sequence of images to tell a partial or complete story. The word "montage" comes from the French word "monter," meaning "to mount" or "to link" (Evelyn, 2022). Montages typically consist of quick cuts, no dialogue, narrative, music, and supers. I will use this technique to showcase Mentari's routine, which has become monotonous and repetitive, and her new routine that aligns with her passions and brings her happiness.

Two works that have greatly inspired my screenplay are "Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap" and "Imperfect." "Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap" is a drama that explores family problems within the context of Batak culture (IMDB: Ratings, Reviews, and Where to Watch the Best Movies & TV Shows, n.d.). One major conflict involves a character named Sarma, who sacrifices her dreams to fulfill her duty as a daughter. This conflict inspired me to create a screenplay focused on women being restricted due to their gender. "Imperfect" addresses the pressures women face regarding beauty standards in Indonesia (IMDB: Ratings, Reviews, and Where to Watch the Best Movies & TV Shows, n.d.). The film highlights how societal pressures can impact women's self-perception and behavior, which inspired me to explore the perspective of middle-aged women dealing with similar issues.

Both "Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap" and "Imperfect" share similarities with my plot centered around Mentari, highlighting prevalent social issues concerning Indonesian women and the antagonistic forces of men and societal norms. These works delve into societal constraints imposed on women, focusing on their agency, desires, and societal expectations. They depict male figures as antagonists perpetuating oppressive attitudes and behaviors towards women. The main antagonists in all three narratives extend beyond individual men, encompassing societal constructs that endorse and perpetuate gender-based discrimination and patriarchal expectations. Mentari's antagonist, Dimas, mirrors these oppressive forces, representing a system that devalues women's autonomy and aspirations.

The main difference between these two works and my plot is that Mentari, as a middle-aged main character, focuses on the challenges faced by a woman in her late 40s. Her story revolves around her struggle to break free from a stifling marriage, her quest for independence, and her journey toward self-discovery and liberation. Unlike the youthful group of siblings in "Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap" or the body image issues in "Imperfect," my plot centers on a woman's midlife crisis and her desire to reclaim agency and happiness in a life dominated by societal expectations and mistreatment within her marriage.

Premise and Creative Principle

Mentari, a housewife in her 40s living in a modest suburban home, faces a midlife crisis when her daughter moves out for college, and her relationship with her husband deteriorates. Mentari's midlife crisis begins when she realizes her primary responsibility, caring for her daughter Bumi, is no longer required. Confronting her broken relationship with her husband, Dimas, she slowly descends into depression. This exploration highlights the struggles of Indonesian middle-aged women, marginalized by societal norms and familial expectations.

Synopsis

Mentari, a woman feeling trapped in the role of a full-time housewife, seeks liberation from her monotonous daily life. She faces rejection and indifference when she reaches out to her daughter who is too busy with college, her busy husband who cares only about himself, her brother who always avoids her for personal reasons, and friends who cannot understand her. Finally, she turns to her passion for cooking, hoping to find solace. Her culinary skills impress the neighborhood mothers, sparking the idea of turning her hobby into a business. However, conflicts arise when her husband, Dimas, steals her earnings and cheats on her. And Bu Ida, her friend sabotages her rising business's reputation. Then after facing confrontations, Mentari seeks guidance from her brother, who reveals his life as someone who struggles with jobs, Mentari gains support, and thus the new trust between them is forged. With newfound strength, she resolves to confront her marital issues with open communication. Empowered by the deep conversation with her daughter and fueled by her brother's encouragement, Mentari decides to divorce her husband and embark on a new journey. Joining forces with her brother, they launch a successful food business, symbolizing Mentari's liberation and newfound independence.

Characters

Mentari Cahya

Age: 40 years old

This is the protagonist, Mentari is the mother of Bumi, a sister to Satria, and a wife to Dimas. She has dark brown hair with slight grayish strands, white skin, and some wrinkles on her features. Mentari is a housewife who has a history of being raised traditionally which creates a rift in the relationship between herself and her brother, Satria. The traditional upbringing in Indonesia was to favor sons more than daughters. Upon being restricted to a position that is only appropriate for women who are married and a mother, she found happiness when Bumi was born, even when her marriage was already in a bad state from the beginning. But it soon changed when Bumi moved away and it triggered her mid-life crisis in the form of empty nest syndrome, followed by the need to face the unhappy marriage she has with Dimas. This triggers a series of events that leads her to revive the buried passion of the past, which is having a career as a businesswoman.

Dimas Cahya

Age: 55 years old

This is the antagonist, Dimas is the father of Bumi and the husband of Mentari, and he's an office worker. He has balding black hair with grayish strands, slightly tanned skin, and slight stubbles. Dimas is a domineering and traditional man, embodying patriarchal ideals deeply ingrained in Indonesian society. He only sees Mentari as someone who should be a good obedient housewife who has to take care of everything relating to the household. He tends to be neglectful towards Mentari and that neglect increases as Mentari bore him a daughter instead of a son that's why he's not connected with Bumi. He is a businessman who is failing to stabilize his income and due to this, he becomes temperamental. In the story, he becomes Mentari's biggest obstacle because he does not wish Mentari to be superior to him and doesn't need him anymore in terms of finances.

Bumi Dari Cahya

Age: 18 years old

Bumi is the daughter of Dimas and Mentari, the only child and daughter of the Cahya Family. She has long dark brown hair and white skin. She is a caring daughter to Mentari as she is closer to her than Dimas, but as she starts college and moves out of the house, her time with her mother becomes limited due to her packed schedule in law school. Bumi always wishes that her mother would prioritize her happiness and wants, even when it means not following what her father wanted.

Satria Dewa Andreas

Age: 36 years old

Satria is the younger brother of Mentari. He has long brown hair, clean shaven, and has white skin. Having a history of being raised traditionally, creates a rift in the relationship between Satria and his sister, Mentari. Satria was raised spoiled as his parents tended to favor him the most and wanted him to be successful, but it led to failures due to him being spoiled and choosing to rely on his parents. Realizing his incapacibilities of having well-off careers, Satria never wanted to admit it to Mentari due to shame.

Bu Ida

Age: 50 years old

Bu Ida is the head or leader of the neighborhood mothers' gathering usually reserved for the mothers such as Mentari, in the neighborhood. She has black hair and usually puts her hair in a traditional bun, wears heavy makeup, and always uses her signature bright red lipstick. She is notoriously known to be a heavy gossip and always wants to be the talk of the neighborhood hence the jealousy of Mentari's popularity. She never liked Mentari due to the things that she is not, such as being beautiful and having great cooking skills.

Conflict

There are two conflicts in my creative work, Man vs. Self and Man vs. Society. Firstly, Man vs. Self is a conflict involving introspection, and a character struggles with their own morality, vices, sense of self, and goals (Evelyn, 2022). This will be portrayed by events in which Mentari who is having internal conflicts between being a housewife and a businesswoman, becomes persistent as her midlife crisis worsens when her empty nest syndrome is triggered and she is forced to face the unhappy marriage she used to ignore. Secondly, it's a Man vs. Society conflict and according to an article in the Literary Device site (Evelyn, 2022), it's a conflict where the character could be facing off against oppressive governments, the general public, or cultural norms. This will be portrayed through Mentari who is a middle-aged woman being rejected by society's norms as she wishes to go after her ambitions of having careers and businesses, as the norms of society think that a woman of her age should focus on being a mother and a wife to her husband. The characters that will represent society's side are Dimas as the main antagonist and Bu Ida the supporting character.

CONCLUSION

This creative work aims to raise awareness of the struggles Indonesian housewives face during midlife crises, influenced by gender imbalance and societal expectations. Midlife crises, as discussed, involve profound self-reflection and transformation. While men often deal with career and financial issues, women typically grapple with family roles and societal pressures (Dunaeva, 2020b; Rawat & Srivastava, 2020). In Indonesia, restrictive gender roles exacerbate the midlife crisis for women, who are valued primarily as wives and mothers, leading to dissatisfaction and crisis when personal ambitions are suppressed (Retnaningsih, 2013). The story of Mentari, an Indonesian housewife experiencing a midlife crisis triggered by her daughter's departure, highlights these issues. Mentari's journey from a housewife to a businesswoman, and her decision to pursue a divorce, reflects her struggle against societal norms and her quest for personal fulfillment.

This creative work provided insights into the transformative nature of midlife crises, which prompt individuals to reassess their lives and make significant changes. Historically seen as a male phenomenon, contemporary views recognize its universal impact, with women facing unique challenges due to societal norms. By focusing on Indonesian middle-aged women, the work emphasizes the feminist concept of midlife as a new path for women, marking the end of motherhood but the beginning of career opportunities.

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