

Power in Modern Javanese Short Stories

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Abstract This article analyzes sixteen short stories in modern Javanese literature. Those short stories were published between 2003 and 2005 in *Panjebar Semangat*, a Javanese weekly periodical in Surabaya. Using Anderson's concept of power in Java as the main theoretical framework, I delve into the sixteen short stories to understand how power operates after the 1998 Indonesia's Reformation. In addition, I also use Anderson's, Geertz's, and Magnis-Suseno's concepts of harmony in Javanese society as the second theoretical framework to analyze how the sixteen short stories reflect the relationship between the rulers and the people. The analysis shows that the sixteen short stories are loaded with the corrupt power causing disharmony in modern Javanese and Indonesian societies. The corrupt power in Indonesia did not only happen during the New Order regime but also in the Reformation Order regime. After the Reformation, people hoped that those in power would become much better in creating welfare, prosperity and justice for the people, but they were as corrupt as or even more corrupt than those during the New Order regime. The corruption of power has many manifestations which cause further distance between the rulers and the people, and thus creating disharmony in Javanese society. Since most authors of Javanese literature are from the ordinary people, they take side with the common people. Even though the analyzed short stories are far from being the voices of all people in Java, at least they represent the voice of the voiceless.

Keywords: Javanese Literature; Power; Manifestation of Power; Harmony; Disharmony

1. Introduction

In this paper, I analyze power in modern Javanese short stories from 2003-2005, published in *Panjebar Semangat*, a Javanese weekly periodical in Surabaya. The short stories analyzed are not randomly but deliberately chosen after careful readings. Indonesia underwent radical changes in 1998 with the collapse of the New Order regime under Soeharto and it affected many walks of life. Javanese short stories after 1998—the so-called Reformation year—show that power in Indonesia has many manifestations due to its corruption. The corrupt power has existed before 1998 (Priambodo et al., 2020) and this led to the civil movement to force Soeharto to step down. Even Rahman (2022) suggests that corruption was rampant during the New Order era. The New Order regime, however, always suppressed any critique and did what it could do to maintain its power for more than three decades.

Javanese literature, like Indonesian literature, reflects what is going on not only in Javanese society but also in Indonesian society in general. It is in this realm that I believe that literature reflects the spirit of the age. It is not that the short stories analyzed in this paper represent the voices of the Javanese people in general but, at least, what the authors voice may become a representation of what many members of

Received: March 20th 2025

Revised: April 04th 2025

Accepted: April 22 th 2025

Online Available : April 24 th 2025

Current ver: April 24 th 2025



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Javanese society voice about the power and the relationship between the leaders and the people after the Reformation. The short stories do not only talk about what has happened in society but also function as critique of power or authorities, as suggested by Eagleton (1976).

To understand power in modern Javanese society, including that of the time after the Reformation, we can compare it with the traditional one. Traditionally—this is what the Javanese people believe—Javanese society was a society that emphasized harmony or a situation where there was peace and no open conflict. This was so because people believed that those in power prioritized the prosperity and welfare of the people—regardless the results. Protests, let alone demonstrations, were rare. Instead, the Javanese people preferred being silent to confronting the authorities. Many Indonesian people thought that after the collapse of the New Order, Indonesia would become a more democratic and better country. In terms of democracy, there is no doubt that Indonesia is much more democratic and thus Indonesian people have more freedom. But it does not mean that the authorities are better than those during the New Order era because there is still a lot of corruption in the country. Power, seen from the people who hold it at any level, has many manifestations and those manifestations are not good ones. It is the intention of this paper to look at those manifestations of power in modern Javanese short stories.

2. Overview Of The Short Stories After 1998

1998 was one of the years of utmost importance in the history of Indonesia. Soeharto, who was perceived by many as an authoritarian ruler for more than three decades, stepped down from presidency. His stepping down made the Indonesian people euphoric and feel to have more freedom. This also affected Javanese authors in writing their short stories in which, among other things, they expressed more freedom that people have. Margono-Slamet (2021a) argues that many of the Javanese authors had started to write their works with strong criticism of the authorities even before 1998 when Soeharto was still in power. However, stronger criticism of power from Javanese authors can be seen clearly in short stories after 2000.

My readings of the literary works published in *Panjebar Semangat* around that period, before and after 1998, show that there were many young authors writing their stories with new spirit: they were more courageous to express their criticism of power openly in their works, either in short stories, poems, or serial—which later some of them were published as the novel. It is not to state that those young writers dominated the representation of the voices of the people because senior writers were also still productive in producing literary works with strong criticism of the authorities (some senior authors included Djajus Pete, Esmiet, JFX Hoery, Krishna Mihardja, Suparto Brata, and Tamsir AS). It is important to note, however, that those young writers at the

time had the gut in bluntly expressing strong criticism of the authorities and the dissatisfaction of *wong cilik* or the ordinary people of Indonesia in their works. Those young writers—they are no longer young, among others were Ellissa, Kinatri, Sudadi, Suwardi Endraswara, Yaslan and many others. I read around one hundred short stories published from 2003 to 2005 which I elaborate in the Research Methodology section.

In terms of subject matters, Javanese short stories in those three years tell the lives of ordinary people in the countryside and all the problems they face. The topics range from—but not limited to—individual matters, family problems, romantic relationships, difficulties finding jobs, prices that keep arising, and many more. For example, in “Togel” (a kind of lottery) (*Panjebar Semangat* No. 1, 2004), Sudadi narrates the life of a poor man who struggles after the Indonesia’s Reformation Order. It is about a man winning the Togel lottery. In this short story, it is told that the Reformation Order does not make people live better but rather the opposite. It is more and more difficult for ordinary people to live their lives and many of them are forced to depend their fortunes on Togel coupons which appear to be scattered in villages. This short story is one of the examples that changes occurring in Indonesia have not led to a more beneficial situation for the people. Another example is “Langit Peteng” (“The Dark Sky”) (*Panjebar Semangat* No. 21, 2005), by Yaslan. This short story is very realistic and tells a young woman from a small, remote village in Java who goes to work to Saudi Arabia and must deal with wicked employers. The woman is forced to fulfill the sexual desires of her employers (the father and the son) and in the end she gets pregnant and is sent back to Indonesia.

Great changes in social and political lives in Indonesia since 1998 has had a tremendous impact on Javanese literature. While in the New Order era the number of authors who dared to include social criticism and criticism of the authorities in their works seemed to be very few, in the post-New Order era, the number of such authors had increased. Criticism of the authorities in their works sometimes is written bluntly, straight to the point. This is something we rarely read during the New Order era—except in a few years before the collapse of the New Order. This is what distinguishes the authors of the New Order era from the authors of the post-New Order era. Some authors seemed to even write ‘personal opinions’ in their works (which I discuss later). In other words, during the New Order era, not many authors dared to openly criticize the authorities but later they did.

The above illustration is a general picture of subject matters in modern Javanese short stories. Because of its very realistic nature—except for Jayus Pete’s works compiled in *Kreteg Emas Jurang Gupit* (2001), Krishna Miharja’s compiled in *Ratu* (1995), and some works by Suwardi Endraswara in *Jangka* (1994), it is expected that modern Javanese literary works—especially short stories—reflect what is happening in everyday

life. Javanese authors write topics related to issues of power, democratization, and relationship between the authorities and the people and all of these can be seen in the sixteen short stories selected in this paper. Before analyzing the short stories, I present the Javanese concept of power in Java and the concept of harmony in Javanese society as the theoretical framework to better understand the content of the short stories.

3. The Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this paper is the concept of power in Java by Anderson (1990), together with the concept of harmony in Javanese society by Anderson (1965), Geertz (1961) and Magnis-Suseno (1991). In terms of power, Anderson (1990) argues that power in Java is concrete, homogeneous, fixed in amount, and does not question legitimacy. It is also believed that power in Java is a gift or revelation from God. A ruler must often perform penance or fasting for a certain period to obtain this revelation. Often, the revelation takes the form of a *ndaru*, a kind of blue, bright, flying light that comes down from the sky to a person and enters his body (a *ndaru* enters a body of a woman is very rarely heard in Java). The person who receives the *ndaru* is then destined to become a ruler (see for example Widayat et al., 2024). Meanwhile, power in the West has abstract characteristics, comes from various sources, has no inherent boundaries, and is morally ambiguous.

Much has been written about the concept of power in Java by Indonesian scholars (Fahmi, 2021; Mokodenseho & Puspitaningrum, 2022; Permadi & Wahyudi, 2022; Nurwanto et al., 2022; and Rahmansyah et al., 2022) to mention some of them. They all indicate that they agree with Anderson when they discuss the concept of Javanese power. Koentjaraningrat (1984) does not completely reject Anderson's concept of power in Java. For him, power has to have three components, namely authority, legitimacy and charisma. To the best of my knowledge, almost every Javanese person is aware of how power operates. But it seems that only after Anderson has formulated his concept of Javanese power, most Indonesian scholars' discussion of power seems to agree with it for the sake of differentiating it from that of the Western concept.

Historically, Javanese society placed the king at the center of everything (Sardiman, 1992). If the king was the center of everything, then the people had to voluntarily obey whatever decision the king made even if the king was a despot. People's obedience to the ruler led to a relationship like a patron-client relationship. The king as the patron had to be able to create the prosperity and welfare for the people. On the contrary, the people had to obey the king. This kind of relationship between rulers and people occurred across Southeast Asia, not only in Java (Scott, 1972).

Indonesia has now become a democratic country and theoretically traditional Javanese power no longer applies. However, it cannot be denied that many leaders in Indonesia, in any field and at any level, still apply this old or traditional concept of

power. Wicoyo, as quoted by Permadi and Wahyudi (2022), emphasizes that the domination of the executive institution over the legislative and judicative institutions in Indonesia is one realization of the traditional Javanese concept of power. This could mean that among the four pillars of democracy, executive power is still the most dominant. The president of Indonesia, the governor in each province and the executive officials under them have greater power than that of the legislative and judicative officials. In general, the people are aware that in today's Indonesia, rulers are the executive, excluding the other two.

For ordinary people, whether power is inherited (for example, a king's power), or obtained from asceticism (as in many *wayang* or puppet stories), or obtained through democratic elections, is not important. What is important is that whoever becomes a leader or ruler must be able to create welfare and prosperity for the people. Those in power must be able to create harmony in society (Anderson, 1965; Geertz, 1961; and Magnis-Suseno, 1991). For the people, rulers have legitimacy if they carry out their duties well, regardless of how they obtain their power. In terms of harmony in Javanese society, Anderson emphasizes that Javanese society is hierarchical, and each hierarchy has to function appropriately to create harmony. For Geertz, *rukun* is the key to a harmonious society. Geertz defines *rukun* as "an ideal standard for social relationships, meaning harmony, co-operation, unity of effort, minimization of conflicts" (1961, pp. 47-48). Meanwhile, Magnis-Suseno's concept of harmony is not different from those of Andersen's and Geertz's when he argues that Javanese society is hierarchical and if each rank or level functions appropriately, Javanese society will be in harmony. For him, it is harmony that is central to Javanese ethics. Harmony will be achieved if people are *rukun*, avoid conflicts, and do selfless deeds (*sepi ing pamrih rame ing gawe*). The above two concepts are extremely useful in understanding how Javanese power exists and operates and how those in power position themselves and function in society.

4. Research Methodology

The qualitative method was used in this research. The primary data were taken from the sixteen short stories in the Javanese language published in the span of three years, from 2003 to 2005 in *Panjebar Semangat*, a weekly periodical in the Javanese language in Surabaya. The analysis was conducted by using content analysis technique, focusing on describing, interpreting and analysing texts (Krippendorff, 2004). In this analysis, inductive technique was used, and pre-defined categories were avoided. Instead, categories were created from the emerging analyzed data (Kondracki, Wellman & Amundson, 2002) based on my interpretation. The analysis was focused on the manifestations of the corrupt power.

The choice of the sixteen short stories is not random. I had the intention of understanding how Javanese short story authors voice changes that happened after the

Reformation. Therefore, I read around 100 short stories in depth to specifically choose the ones containing issues of power in its various manifestations. While reading, I made notes and sorted out those short stories and finally I decided to choose 16 of them as the corpus of my research.

The next, I reread each of the sixteen short stories more carefully and intensively and quoted phrases, sentences, dialogues, or even paragraphs as the data and categorized them into different manifestations of power. Where necessary, I translated those quotations from the Javanese language into the English language. Thus, the translation from the Javanese into the English language is mine.

5. Discussion

The Short Stories In 2003

There are four short stories in 2003, namely “Kasurung Wuyung” (“Falling in Love”) by J.S. Hartanto, “Pak Mikir” (“Mr. Mikir”) by Kinatri, and “Tangise Si Jabang Bayi” (The Cry of the Baby” and “IMF” both by Sudadi.

In “Kasurung Wuyung,” the corruption of power and authority is interwoven in the story of a married man selling meatballs who is tempted by another woman. But because of the hardships of his life, the meatball seller blames the authorities by saying: “Mendah sing mretikel negara gelem mikirake rakyat. Sekolah digratisake. Yen perlu nganti perguruan tinggi. Kareben rakyate pinter kabeh. (Ning nek rakyate pinter kabeh ... sing ndhuwuran terus arep minteri sapa?)” (*Panjebar Semangat* No. 28, 2003) [“It would be great if those who lead the country are willing to think about the ordinary people. Give us free education. If necessary, give us free education from the lowest level to college level so that all of us are smart. (But if we all are smart... how can those authorities trick us?)”]

“Pak Mikir” is the story of an ordinary person, Mr. Mikir, who is depressed because he thinks too much about the country that is messed up and there is no certainty in law, politics, or economy. Mr. Mikir, the main character, becomes sick and finally dies because of the burden of his thoughts. At the end of the story, Kinatri bluntly criticizes the state authorities by writing, “Dene pemerintah lan wakil rakyat padha sibuk ngurusi urusane dhewe-dhewe tanpa migatekake rakyat cilik maneh” (*Panjebar Semangat*, No. 21, 2003) [“The government and people’s representatives are busy taking care of their own affairs without paying attention to the ordinary people anymore.”]

“Tangise Si Jabang Bayi” tells a story about babies born in the wrong place: Indonesia. Those babies should not have been born in a country where there is no compassion because they will not find happiness. Indonesia is a rich country, but it fails to materialize prosperity and welfare for the people because its leaders are corrupt and

they only think about their own interests. The last short story, “IMF”, tells the story of how Indonesia is dictated by external (foreign) forces that the country cannot ignore so that the leaders sell the country which then causes the hardships for the ordinary people.

The Short Stories In 2004

There are eight short stories published in 2004, namely “Melik Nggendhong Lali” (“Greed Makes One Evil”) by Ellissa, “Wanita Kuru Anak Telu” (“A Skinny Woman with Three Children”) by Suharmono K., “Bondhet Dadi Cakil Rakyat” (“Bondet Becomes an Evil Ogre for the People”) by Sudadi, “Caleg” (The Legislative Contestant”) by Johanes Budi, “Lara” (“The Sickness”) by Sumono S.A., “Sepatu Boot” (“The Boots”) by Sudadi, “Nasibe Sang Konglomerat” (“The Fate of the Conglomerate”) by Eko Hartono and “Sukerta” (“Dirtiness”) by Suwardi Endraswara.

“Melik Nggendhong Lali” is a story about Marsam, a neighborhood chairman, who entitles to a power to find workers for a factory opened in his area. In the beginning, he is selfless, but later he starts asking for money from young people who apply for the job. He then becomes greedy and even manipulates data in the process of making the identity card. Marsam, a simple person at first, in the end turns into a person who forgets his origins and is very greedy.

“Wanita Kuru Anak Telu” tells the story of a mother who has three young children whose husband dies after falling from a 12-storeyed building while working as a construction worker. When the body is buried, there is a political party doing a campaign not far from the cemetery where the body is to be buried. There is a sharp contrast, i.e. the widow who is in grief on one hand and the gaiety of the process of election on the other. One thing is sure that general election, campaign, and other general election related activities often do not care about what happens to the poor, ordinary people.

Next, “Bondhet Dadi Cakil Rakyat” is a sharp criticism of legislators who have low morals and education. The word *cakil* in the Javanese language has a clear meaning to describe Bondhet. Cakil is a character in *wayang* (puppet) story in the form of an evil ogre and the word is chosen as a parody of *wakil* or representatives. Thus, this short story might be interpreted that there many contestants of the legislative institution who are bad or evil because they only think about their own interests.

The short story “Caleg” is about a legislative candidate who likes to give promises before being elected. It is not a secret in Indonesia that all political parties and all who run for a position always boast that they will make the country and the people better. This short story reflects the personality of candidates of the people’s representatives who should be role models for the community but in fact they just love boasting.

The short story “Lara” is about a society that is sick because of a sick country. The sickness of the society is caused by corrupt leaders who are never brought to justice. In this sick country, the people must be submissive and give in to the leaders.

Next, “Sepatu Boot” tells the story of a night patrol coordinator whose boots are broken, and he can’t afford to buy new ones. He then reports to Mr. Lurah (the village chief) to buy new shoes, but he does not have the funds to do so. Mr. Lurah then reports to Mr. Camat (the sub-district chief), but the sub-district does not have funds to buy new boots. In the end, Mr. Bupati (the district chief) hands over his old and unused boots to the night patrol coordinator. Kaki Bahu (literally means smelly feet), the night watch coordinator, is really happy to receive Mr. Bupati’s used boots. But the happiness lasts only for a short time. It turns into a feeling of sadness because Mr. Bupati’s boots smell disgusting and make everyone vomit. The used boots are full of disgusting larva.

The short story “Nasibe Sang Konglomerat” is about a conglomerate who is severely ill and facing death. He cannot speak but can hear what other people are saying. He is deeply sad because the people who are close to him, i.e. his fellow conglomerates, officials of the country, and his own family, only want his wealth. Not one of them pray for his recovery. Even many of them already have a plan about what they will do to control his assets if he dies. The officials who do collusion with him are hypocritical. Those who are honest and care for him are the poor people whom he once helped or gave donations. Only those poor people pray for him.

Lastly, the short story “Sukerta” is about an ordinary man, Mr. Pokal, who suffers from a stomachache. He wants to meet an official, Mr. Sukerta. When they were kids, Mr. Pokal and Mr. Sukerta were close friends. Mr. Pokal is convinced that he will recover from his stomachache if he defecates at Mr. Sukerta’s office. Of course, he cannot get to his office to meet with the official. Before getting to Mr. Sukerta’s, he must face fierce security guards who torture him so that he must be taken to the hospital for treatment. While being tortured by the security guards, Mr. Pokal farts, and its smell reaches Mr. Sukerta who then is fainted because of the disgusting smell. He then is taken to the hospital after smelling the disgusting gas coming from Mr. Pokal’s stomach. Mr. Pokal’s illness is contagious to Mr. Sukerta and he has the same illness with the same smell. In this short story, there is an interesting dialogue between Mr. Pokal and his son, particularly when Mr. Pokal wants to meet Mr. Sukerta. But his son says that it is not easy to meet a high and important official and he must go through a proper procedure or system:

“Usul marang Pak Dhukuh. Awake dhewe ki urip diwengku negara tenan, dudu ethok-ethokan Pak. Dadi, kabeh mawa sistem.”

“Sistem embel gedhes. Sistem sing nguntungake kroni, dudu awake dhewe. Embuh ah, bayi wingi sore ki dijak rembugan cen ngono kuwi. Guyon!”

(Endraswara, *Panjebar Semangat* No. 39, 2004).

[“Give Mr. Dukuh the suggestion that the country really take care of us, not just pretending to do so. By doing so, everything has a system.”

“Bullshit with the system. The system only benefits cronies, not us the ordinary people. I don’t give a damn! You’re just a kid and you don’t know anything. It’s not a joke!”]

The Short Stories In 2005

Meanwhile, the five short stories published in 2005 are “Calon Lurah Warikun” (“Warikun the Village Chief Candidate”) by Yan Tohari, “Aktor” (“Actor”) by Sumono S.A., “Trima Lengser” (“It’s Better to Step Down”) by Sudadi, and “Srengenge Isih Kaya Wingi” (“The Sun Is Still Like It Was Yesterday”) by Danang Te Arifal.

“Calon Lurah Warikun” is a story of a village youth with high formal education, namely Warikun, who wants to run for the *lurah* (village chief). He believes that the people of his village want to have a good leader. But he loses the election to another candidate, Santosa, who only graduates from elementary school but is very rich. The people of Bulurejo village prefer Santosa who distributes money before the election. At the end of the story, Warikun goes away to a place where no one knows because he is angry and ashamed that he cannot become the village head.

“Aktor”, the next story, is about an actor who in his prime can do anything and act arbitrarily on stage and is sure to be respected and feared by many people. But due to the changes in the order, in the end he is forgotten by the crowd, and he feels lonely, without a friend. He wants to become a stage star again by writing some scripts and screenplays. When his comeback attempt seems to succeed, he dies on the stage in front of the audience.

Next, “Trima Lengser” tells the story of a junior high school principal, Mr. Kirman, who chooses to resign from his position because he is under pressure from his superior who colludes with the *camat* or sub-district chief whose son does not pass the entrance exam at the junior high school where he works. Prior to his resignation, Mr. Kirman’s superior encourages that anyone not to be accepted as a new student if they do not comply with the criteria that have been set. But it is even Mr. Kirman’s superior himself who finally gives the order to admit Mr. Camat’s son but Mr. Kirman refuses. Mr. Kirman’s refusal makes his boss angry. The superior makes the rules but he himself breaks them. Therefore, in the end Mr. Kirman chooses to resign and become a regular teacher.

The last short story, “Srengene Isih Kaya Wingi” tells the story of a drink seller, Kang Karjo, who almost gets hit by a speeding car driven by Mr. Bejo, the new

chairman of the House of Representatives. During the campaign, while drinking at Kang Karjo's, Mr. Bejo boasts that he runs for a member of the Regional House of Representatives because he cares for the people like Kang Karjo. But after he is elected and becomes the chairman of the House of Representatives, Mr. Bejo no longer remembers his promises. As for Kang Karjo, he is aware that whoever wins the election will not change his fortune. Kang Karjo remains a poor drink seller who has to sweat to meet the needs of his family.

Manifestations Of Power

I found that the authors of the sixteen short stories (it is important to note that Sudadi contributes five short stories out of sixteen) experienced the euphoria of freedom as other members of society did due to the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998. They chose the topic that used to be a taboo to write during the heyday of the New Order, i.e. the corrupt power and sharp criticism of the authorities. It is important to emphasize that the corruption is not limited to stealing money from the people and country but also being dishonest and morally wrong.

In general, these sixteen short stories show that power (and those who hold it) has moved away from the ideal power in the Javanese society, meaning that the current authorities no longer care about the ordinary people. In a paternalistic society like the Javanese society, the existence of a leader is very important, whether he is a formal or an informal one. Leaders are role models; those who give a sense of security and well-being. With a good leader, the Javanese people will be able to materialize a harmonious situation, and this harmony is the ideal condition that the Javanese people want.

I found that the sixteen short stories expressing issues of power and the relationship between the ruler and the people have the same big theme, namely that power is corrupt and this corruption distances the rulers from their people and thus creates disharmony because power does not function as it should. The people in these short stories are the lowest social groups in the social strata of the country: people who have little education (or even no formal education at all), are poor, and are always marginalized. On the other spectrum, the corrupt power can be seen in the executive officials and their cronies, legislative officials, judicative officials, or even political parties' leaders who always try to get the most votes in every election, but then they leave behind the people who have voted for them soon after the election is over.

For the authors of the sixteen short stories, power in Indonesia does not seem to have a positive value at all. If authors are considered key informants of their society (Phillips, 1987), then this is what the current society thinks about power and those who hold it. The dark side of power at the top level with its many manifestations alienates the rulers or leaders from their own people. The rulers as patrons no longer fulfill their duties. They do not provide protection and welfare to the people. Those rulers only

protect and pursue their own interests. Therefore, Javanese society (and Indonesian society in general) is no longer harmonious because there is at least one hierarchy in the social structure that does not do its duty appropriately, as formulated by Anderson (1965), Geertz (1961), and Magnis-Suseno (1991). From the point of view of the people, the democratization that Indonesia has been building is misdirected. Democracy is supposed to put the people first. In Indonesia, however, this does not yet happen. The winner of the election tends to get the most profit. The adage that winner takes all is meaningless for the people because power exists only for the sake of the rulers and their cronies. The real winner in a democratic country must have been the people. But this has not happened in Indonesia. This kind of change that Indonesia has been experiencing is not what the people want.

In the patron-client bond perspective (Scott, 1972), the patron's legitimacy—as discussed above—depends on how much protection and well-being the patron provides to the client. However, the Javanese community (and the Indonesian community in general) feel that what is given by the leaders tends to be less and less. Instead, the rulers take more and more for themselves and their cronies. How much the rulers take profit for themselves is not explicitly expressed in modern Javanese short stories. However, the authors of Javanese literature in general understand what is going on so that their short stories reflect the reality.

If the rulers do not fulfill their duties and keep demanding that the people remain faithful or loyal, this will surely make the legitimacy of the rulers decrease. It is true that the leaders will keep holding their positions because they win the election and are legally entitled to hold their position. However, for the people, the rulers or leaders are no longer real leaders who should be respected and obeyed. The paternalistic Javanese society needs a leader who can be a role model, who can give protection and welfare. But if the leader is corrupt—in its many manifestations—the people will be apathetic or even rebel. In other words, the people are actually against them. This condition will impact the relationship between the rulers and the people because the rulers will be further away from their own people. In the end, it will be difficult to create a harmonious society.

To materialize a harmonious Javanese society, therefore, the leaders or the authorities must fulfill their obligations, that is, the position they hold should ensure the safety and well-being of all people. The people must receive or get their rights. If the rulers can fulfill this, their legitimacy will be high and make the people faithful and respectful to them. There is something not matching here: on one hand, many of those in power still think about power in the old perspective but, on the other, they do not act like what wise kings in the old days did to their people. I leave this discussion to political scientists and other experts in the related fields, but from the literary

perspective, many literary works in the Javanese language written by Javanese authors speak a lot about this problem and below is the discussion of the short stories in detail (I did my best to translate the titles in Javanese into English), followed by the manifestations of power reflected in them.

Although in terms of the quantity the number of modern Javanese short stories expressing matters of power and/or relationships between the ruler and the people is relatively small, it is safe to say that those short stories reflect what is going on in real life. The vertical relationship between the authorities and the people is the focus of several Javanese authors. It can even be said that the Javanese authors take side with the ordinary people. This happens and can be understood because many Javanese authors come from the common people and many of them live in villages or small towns. The authors are involved in experiencing all the events and hardships of life that ordinary people live. Therefore, it is not surprising that they take a position as ordinary people who are marginalized by the authorities or leaders. But it is crucial to emphasize that the ruler or leader is not necessarily an executive official, but can be a legislative or judicative official, or an informal leader or anyone who politically and economically has the power.

In general, these short stories show that the relationship between the ruler and the people—which can be compared to the relationship between the patron and the client in Scott's term (1972)—is no longer harmonious. There has been a great erosion in this relationship caused by the rulers (patrons), not by the people (clients). The relationship's requirement of reciprocity has no longer been implemented. The authorities who are supposed to provide protection to and welfare for the people do not do their share. Although in daily life the Indonesian people recognize that there are still efforts by the government to improve the welfare of the people, the fact is that the ordinary people are still not considered in many decisions by the authorities because they, ironically, disobey the law. This is a big problem of Indonesia today. There are so many corrupt officials at any level. Sofyanoor (2002) argues that corruption, collusion and nepotism exist in all areas of life at all levels. This is to say that harmony in Javanese society might have gone (Margono-Slamet, 2021b).

The sixteen short stories narrate the same big theme, i.e. that power is corrupt, but in different manifestations, even though certain stories express all manifestations of power. In my analysis, I found five different manifestations of power that the authors of the short stories focus on, i.e. that power is greedy, ruthless, ignorant, insincere, and collusive. One short story might express more than one manifestation of power, or more than one story might express the same manifestation of power, as can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Manifestations of power of each short story

	Short story	Manifestation of power				
		Gre	Ruth	Ignor	Insin	Coll
	Kasurung Wuyung (Fal			v		
	Pak Mikir (Mr. Mikir)	v	v	v	v	
	Tangise Si Jabang Bayi (the Baby)	v		v	v	
	IMF	v		v	v	
	Melik Nggendhong (Makes One Evil)	v	v	v	v	
	Wanita Kuru Anak (Skinny Woman w Children)			v	v	
	Bondhet Dadi Ca (Bondhet Becomes an	v	v	v	v	
	Caleg (Legislative Cont				v	
	Lara (The Sickness)	v	v	v	v	
	Sepatu Boot (The Boot	v		v		
	Nasibe Sang Konglo (Faith of the Conglome			v	v	
	Sukerta (Dirtiness)	v	v	v	v	
	Calon Lurah Warikun (C (Village Chief Candidat					
	Aktor (Actor)	v				
	Trima Lengser (It's Be (Down)		v	v		
	Srengene Isih Kaya Wi (Is Still Like It Was Yest	v		v	v	

6. Conclusion

Discussing the relationship between power and the people in Javanese literature is ironic. Unlike Indonesian literature, Javanese literature—along with other regional literature—has only a position as a marginal literature whose existence is not counted by the authorities (Quinn, 1983). In addition, not many Javanese scholars (intellectuals) are willing to read Javanese literature. Therefore, at the national level, Javanese literature is a lonely literature, always dying, but refuses to die (Atmowiloto, 1989). Among the Javanese authors themselves, there are even those who say that Javanese literature is not very useful for Javanese society (Ragilputra, personal

communication, 2020). I still think, however, that in terms of content, Javanese literature is a very authentic voice that must be listened to and paid attention to by those in power. Because in general Javanese literary works are about the lives of ordinary people who are marginalized, it can be said that Javanese literature is a voice of theirs. Unfortunately, because it is expressed in Javanese literature, the voice is almost inaudible. Whether it is heard or not, read or not, the voice of the ordinary people is there. In this context, Javanese literature—like other social institutions—is a medium or a means that cannot be ignored in the discussion of the social, political, economic, and cultural changes.

For further research, many topics related to the above changes reflected in modern Javanese literature can be done. Today, due to the Internet and digital technology, there are so many Javanese authors publishing their books in the form of the novel, anthologies of short stories, and anthologies of poems. Researchers interested in Javanese literature will not run out of materials and topic for their research.

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