

Aesthetic Strategies of Screen Adaptation: A Comparative Analysis of *Laskar Pelangi* and *Dilan 1990* Film Adaptations

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Abstract. Focusing on the film adaptations of *Laskar Pelangi* and *Dilan 1990*, my concern is “Ideology and Politics of Adaptation: Critical Reading of *Laskar Pelangi* and *Dilan 1990* as Cultural Texts”. Every adaptation comes with defined ideology and that is mostly due to its concern on the plot, conflict, and character building of the story. The adaptations of these novels did not only involve a change of medium. What requires concern is the social representation and value, ideology, and the politics of power in these popular novels. The objective of this study is to examine the articulation of ideology in the cinematographic adaptations of *Dilan 1990* and *Laskar Pelangi* and to analyse the similarities and differences in their ideological underpinnings. This research contributes to the discourse of adaptation theories by incorporating ideological critique, film theories, film discourse, and media literacy within the Indonesian context. This study employs a qualitative approach within the framework of critical cultural studies, employing interpretation and comparison within a critical paradigm. The data collection methods utilised in this study are documentation and non-participant observation. The data underwent analysis using CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) with the frameworks of adaptation, discourse, ideology, and representation critique. From the interpretation of the narrative and ideological representation within the context of viewing rituals and cultural text interpretation, it was revealed that both films, albeit produced in different contexts, tend to displace, depoliticise, and individualise the socio-political landscape while reproducing the dominant ideological hegemonies of developmentalism and heteronormativity through narrative metamorphosis and selective amnesia. This research also exposes a lack within adaptation studies literature which is the absence of the political and ideological aspects of film adaptations in Indonesian cinema.

Keywords: adaptation, ideology, cultural studies, Indonesian cinema, critical discourse analysis

1 Introduction

For many years, the adaptation of literary works to film has been understood as a cultural occurrence with several layers. From a cultural or film studies point of view, adaptations are not merely reproductions of narratives, but instead, cultural artefacts which, through creation, adaptation, or reception, reflect, negotiate, or shape some ideology or politics. This concern is even more pronounced within the context of the Indonesian film industry, particularly with the two adaptations of immense social and

cultural impact: *Laskar Pelangi* (Andrea Hirata, 2008) and *Dilan 1990* (Pidi Baiq, 2014). These adaptations are financially successful and are also rich with sociocultural representations and critical values. These narratives can be explored through critical analysis to expose the prevailing ideological and political frameworks. It is essential to analyse the relationship between popular narratives and contemporary socio-political values and structures.

Even though adaptation choices like addition, emphasis, or omission seem like neutral acts in the translation process, they can have far-reaching ideological consequences for both the work and the culture. Therefore, this understanding creates the gap between the tension of adaptation ideology and adaptation politics of both films *Laskar Pelangi* and *Dilan 1990*. This study investigates how social imagery and moral reasoning, ideas about gender, historiography, contemporary politics, and the circulation of ideological power as well as the changes it undergoes are made or are made to be in the adaptations. Also, the research concentrates on the politics and ideology of each adaptation, studying the divergences in the socio-political and thematic contexts of *Laskar Pelangi*'s education, poverty, and hope and *Dilan 1989*'s teenage romance, nostalgia, and hyper-masculinity.

The shift from literature to film should not be considered a straightforward process as a film production requires additional layers of meaning and ideological negotiation to reconstruct the meaning of the work. Adaptations, better explained as a reinterpretation of a work, and described by Hutcheon in 2006, as a form of intentional repetition, embody a creative interpretation process from the source text to a different medium. Moreover, Hutcheon elaborates the process of adaptations as a complex, creative interplay of the original work, the work covering it, and the culture and environment of the adaptation. Adaptations in film do not only aim to narrate a story. Rather, they seek to interpret, reinterpret, and critique the original text while supplementing meaning tailored for the most relevant time and audience.

Each film adaptation comes with a certain set of decisions, which may include underscoring, omitting, or entirely altering parts of the film. All such decisions derive from a specific philosophy, in most cases, a set idea that dictates toxic production and market expectation, or industry standards and norms. This, in particular, reflects that adaptations serve as a ground for the blending and colliding of ideology, and thus, the resulting text can both support the initial ideology of the text and actively defy or contradict the originating text.

One of the advantages that cultural studies offer is the analysis of novels, films, and other cultural texts within the social, political, and economic contexts. In structuralism, studies of culture and cultural texts are treated as artistic or aesthetic works but, within cultural studies, culture is viewed as the site of production, distribution, consumption, power, and ideology in operation. From this perspective, cultural texts are not neutral.

They are the contested, or negotiated, ideologies. In cultural studies, Stuart Hall emphasised the importance of analysing the image-making functions of the media, how those images shape and are shaped by social power, and the power of social structures that surround image-making.

Ideology is a fundamental concept for this research. Within the tradition of criticism, 'ideology' is not simply a set of ideas, but is also a meaning system (representation, language, and practice) which constructs and/or deconstructs structures of power. Louis Althusser explains that ideology functions through Interpellation through Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) where individuals are made 'subjects' and, therefore, voluntarily delude themselves into accepting the social order. Antonio Gramsci introduced the concept of hegemony where the dominant ideology is maintained not only through coercive means but also a voluntary agreement through moral and intellectual guidance.

Through the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, one can examine the relationships that exist between language, power, ideology and a specific text. One of the founders of CDA, Norman Fairclough, proposed a three-step model of discourse analysis which included (1) text (2) discursive practice and (3) social practice where discourse is situated within society. CDA provides researchers the ability to go beyond the surface-level analysis of text and explore the ideology and power structures that permeate, are contested and are reproduced within discourse through language and semiotic choices.

Representation refers to the making and sharing of meaning within a culture and throughout value systems and images. In cultural studies, the concept of representation is actively constructed meaning through which the world is interpreted. As outlined by Stuart Hall (1997), there are two systems of representation, which are the conceptual system and the linguistic system. Narrative and image, two vital forms of representation, film, and literature create and shape the constructed reality and perception.

2. Methods

The approach in this study is qualitative and lies within the scope of critical cultural text study. It is set in a comparison-interpretative framework within a critical paradigm. Within the paradigm, culture is conceived as texts filled with ideologies, and texts are not viewed as neutral but as produced within and for particular societies, politics and economics, conditioned by ideological interests.

This study is categorised as non-participant observation and also utilises the literature dissemination as a technique of data collection. Primary data in the form of texts of the novels 'Laskar Pelangi' and 'Dilan 1990' are collected through documentation.

Moreover, non-participant observation is used to collect data from the films through repeated viewing to capture the visual and audio aspects that reflect the philosophy and politics of adaptation.

The integration of adaptation, ideology, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the concerning ideology and representation of adaptation defines the framework for data analysis. The analysis and the dividing of work take the following stages:

- (1) Text Description, which is the retelling of the novel and film
- (2) Text Interpretation, which is the interpreting of meanings, be it stated or the underlying meanings
- (3) Text Explanation, which examines the relationship of the text to the world and the socio context at large.

In all these steps, the analysis is cyclic, where the outcomes of one stage may require reinterpretation in other stages.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Ideological Review of Film Adaptation of Laskar Pelangi

The adaptation of Laskar Pelangi from a novel to a film involves significant ideological changes concerning certain narrative elements. For instance, in the film, the temporal structure of the novel is condensed into a linear plot and the less engaging elements are deemphasised. This process of selection transforms the film into an expression of optimism and a strong mentality.

In Laskar Pelangi, education and poverty serve as a domain where the notion of development is constructed. The film further advances the romanticised notion of poverty as a beautiful space by showcasing the stunning landscapes of Belitung, portraying poverty as beauty rather than a societal issue. The film further cements the ideology of education as a narrative of 'success.' This 'success' disregards the fact that education is not a global public good and that its quality is often subpar.

The film plays an important role in constructing the narrative of nationhood, most importantly, by positioning Belitung as 'authentic Indonesia.' Belitung is depicted as a pristine island paradise, 'unspoiled' by modern influences, which is an ideological construction of the region designed to showcase Belitung as an 'Ideal' Indonesia, which, of course, gives rise to nationalistic sentiments while conveniently masking developmental inequalities and the region's stark intraregional disparities.

3.2. Ideological Analysis of the Adaptation of Dilan 1990

The Dilan 1990 adaptation exemplifies a nostalgic adaptation and a selective erasure of history. While the film aurally and visually reinforces nostalgic markers of the 1990s, it also removes the surrounding context of the era, thus presenting a whitewashed history.

The film eliminates the era's sentimentally charged politics. There are no allusions to the politically violent history, including the student uprisings and the oppressive politics that followed. Instead, a mundane teen romance is the focus. Dilan embodies the idealised, aggressive male paradigm as a 'bad boy' and is so immersed in romantic imagery that he reduces Milea to a mere romanticised passive female archetype.

The film illustrates a blend of middle-class mentalities through violence-oriented consumption and cultural capital norming alongside a defiance of school authority. Dilan 1990 adapts Dilan's character in a manner that reproduces conservative romantic heteronormative patriarchal masculinity dominance intertwined with conservative hegemony.

3.3 Comparative analysis: Two adaptation models and ideological strategies

Both films, despite being situated in different socio-cultural and thematic contexts, plot parallels in their approach to the depoliticisation and individualisation of social phenomena. Laskar Pelangi individualises and depersonalises the concept of poverty, while Dilan 1990 individualises the conflict of adolescence. Both films also depoliticise the historic background, leaning on romanticisation as a form of escapism. In both cases, the adaptation processes function as sites of ideological conflict, and despite some moments of resistance, reproducing dominance asserts control.

3.4 Theoretical and methodological implications

This study applies ideology and politics as key elements of adaptation and thus advances adaptation theory. It asserts that "fidelity" in adaptation should be reconsidered as "ideological negotiation."

This study provides a model for critical examination of Indonesian cinema that reveals the concealed layers of ideology embedded within the dominant narratives. Therefore, the integration of AWK alongside representation and cultural studies of film proves useful for understanding and interpreting the films as multi-layered cultural artefacts.

3.5 Social and Cultural Issues

Public understanding and socio-identity awareness have been considerably shaped through the adaptations of the films Laskar Pelangi and Dilan 1990.

Laskar Pelangi and Dilan 1990 have both contributed towards shaping public understanding of socio-identity. Laskar Pelangi is credited with constructing a more

intense discourse regarding education and poverty alleviation, while *Dilan 1990* catalysed the image of teenage love in Indonesia. This study reinforces the importance of critical media education, particularly for those viewers who engage with cultural documents like film adaptations, which are laden with ideology.

4. Conclusion

In this particular case study, we focused on the politics and ideology of adaptation as they relate to *Laskar Pelangi* and *Dilan 1990* as cultural phenomena. This study employs a qualitative approach comprising interpretive and comparative methods within a critical paradigm. This approach, charting adaptation politics as ideology, permits us to explore the processes of screen adaptation across these two beloved works.

In this study, we constructed a comprehensive theoretical framework, encompassing adaptation theories and cultural studies, ideology, critical discourse analysis, and representation theories. This framework provided a toolkit to explore the layers of meaning and power in the texts. The analysis of *Laskar Pelangi* reveals the film adaptation not only simplifies the perspective and plot, but also selectively depicts episodes such as romanticised poverty and constructs a meritocratic development ideology, portraying the individual as the change-agent. Identity politics and nationalism are articulated through an exoticised view of the periphery, ‘authentic’ Indonesia, alternative masculinities, and education-empowered authoritarian femininities. In summary, *Laskar Pelangi* adaptation reinforces the dominant ideology of unyielding optimism and relentless striving, aligned with the narrative of national development.

At the same time, the review of *Dilan 1990* highlights the use of nostalgia and selective memory of the past in adaptation strategies, mostly recalling memories that strip the 1990s history context of its political relevance, exemplifying *Dilan* as a romanticised, masculinised idol, a ubiquitous ‘bad boy’ archetype while objectifying *Milea*, representing the middle-class value system through the lens of consumerism and cultural capital, normalising violent conduct while contesting the critique of authoritarianism and anti-authoritarianism. The adaptation of *Dilan 1990* reproduces patriarchy and heteronormative conservatism; *Dilan 1990* reproduces the adaptation of *Dilan 1990*, reproducing strong patriarchy and heteronormative romantic conservatism.

In relation to the two films, they both share a common approach of removing the wider context of socio-political concerns and individualising the experience, sidestepping systematic critique in favour of romanticisation.

As a cultural act, adaptation is a form of an ideological battleground wherein the dominant ideology comes under sustained attack, the more dominant ideology is

cloaked, yet moments of cultural defiance, seemingly blurred, the ideology of ambivalence and complexity of cultural texts emerges.

By integrating ideological frameworks, this research strengthens adaptation theory. It methodologically demonstrates a critical interdisciplinary analysis framework to reveal ideological components within Indonesian cinema. This research also exemplifies the need for media literacy and critical consciousness among the audience and the Indonesian populace, shedding light on how adaptation films during the post-Reform Era socio-culturally shape public discourse within Indonesia. It reaffirms the assertion that adaptation is a cultural phenomenon of great complexity and that film, beyond entertaining the populace, actively shapes their world views and values.

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