

Malih: An Ethnography Approach on Malioboro's Social Change and Empowerment Discourse

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Abstract: This study investigates the liminal experiences of street vendors on Malioboro Street, Yogyakarta, and the street itself as dynamic entities shaped by governmental regulations and social realities. It explores the interplay between power, state governance, small and medium-sized economies, and socio-cultural phenomena, focusing on community empowerment. Employing ethnographic methods, the research provides an in-depth, qualitative understanding of the street vendors' lived experiences and the socio-economic environment of Malioboro. The findings reveal despite the government's pro-SME stance, restrictive urban policies frequently undermine the vendors' stability and economic security. This discord creates a persistent state of liminality for the street vendors, who are continuously displaced and rendered powerless to shape their lives. The study underscores the importance of inclusive and humane urban governance that balances regulatory objectives with the socio-economic realities of street vendors. It calls for involving vendors in policy development, creating flexible regulatory frameworks, and investing in supportive infrastructure. By fostering inclusive, participatory, and culturally rich urban environments, it is possible to create economically vibrant and socially equitable spaces, benefiting all city residents.

Keywords: Anthropology, Liminality, Malioboro's Sidewalk

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menyelidiki pengalaman liminal para pedagang kaki lima di Jalan Malioboro, Yogyakarta, dan jalan itu sendiri sebagai entitas dinamis yang dipengaruhi oleh regulasi pemerintah dan realitas sosial. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi interaksi antara kekuasaan, tata kelola negara, ekonomi kecil dan menengah, serta fenomena sosial-budaya, dengan fokus khusus pada pemberdayaan komunitas. Menggunakan metode etnografi, penelitian ini memberikan pemahaman kualitatif yang mendalam tentang pengalaman hidup para pedagang kaki lima dan lingkungan sosial-ekonomi di Malioboro. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa meskipun pemerintah memiliki sikap pro-UMKM, kebijakan tata ruang yang ketat sering kali merusak stabilitas dan keamanan ekonomi para pedagang. Ketidaksesuaian ini menciptakan keadaan liminal yang terus-menerus bagi para pedagang kaki lima, yang terus-menerus dipindahkan dan tidak berdaya dalam menentukan nasib mereka sendiri. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya tata kelola kota yang inklusif dan manusiawi yang menyeimbangkan tujuan regulasi dengan realitas sosial-ekonomi para pedagang kaki lima. Penelitian ini menyerukan

pelibatan pedagang dalam pengembangan kebijakan, menciptakan kerangka regulasi yang fleksibel, dan investasi dalam infrastruktur yang mendukung. Dengan mendorong lingkungan kota yang inklusif, partisipatif, dan kaya budaya, dimungkinkan untuk menciptakan ruang yang ekonomis, hidup, dan adil secara sosial, yang menguntungkan semua penduduk kota.

Kata Kunci: Antropologi, Liminalitas, Trotoar Malioboro

Introduction

"*Malih*," a Javanese word meaning "change," aptly describes the transformation of Malioboro Street in Yogyakarta. This iconic street has undergone significant physical and non-physical changes, evolving from a bustling, complex marketplace into a more orderly and spacious area. Once characterized by crowded sidewalks and contentious haggling, Malioboro now boasts cleaner, more navigable pathways. The Yogyakarta City Government's policies, particularly the relocation of street vendors, have significantly reshaped Malioboro's identity. (D. Harvey, 2012; Lefebvre, 1991). In February 2022, the sidewalks of Malioboro were cleared, and vendors were moved to new structures known as Terrace Malioboro I and Terrace Malioboro II. This relocation beautifies and organizes the area, reducing congestion and enhancing the tourist experience. The absence of vendors on the sidewalks has made the street more aesthetically pleasing, quieter, and less odorous. (Florida, 2002; Jacobs, 1961). However, this change comes at a significant social cost. The relocation policy has disrupted the social fabric of Malioboro. Street vendors, who once formed an integral part of the street's vibrant ecosystem, now find themselves in a state of liminality—caught between old ways of living and new, uncertain futures. This in-betweenness is marked by economic instability and a loss of power as vendors struggle to adapt to new environments. (Bhabha, 1994; Turner, 1969).

Malioboro's sidewalks have long been a contestation between governmental control and social livelihood. The government sees these public spaces as areas to be regulated and beautified, while vendors and shop owners view them as essential for economic survival. This tension highlights the broader conflict over urban space—a battle for interests and territory. (Castells, 2010; Sassen, 2001). Urban space contestation involves various stakeholders with differing interests and perspectives, from citizens and activists to policymakers and developers. (Lefebvre, 1974; Soja, 1996). The changes in Malioboro are not merely aesthetic; they reflect deeper socio-economic shifts. The relocation of vendors has nullified the intricate social links between hawkers, street sellers, and shop owners. This disruption raises critical questions: Who defines what is aesthetically pleasing? And at what cost are these changes implemented (D. Harvey, 2020; Massey, 2005)?

The government's efforts to regulate and modernize Malioboro are part of a larger trend of urban development policies prioritizing order and cleanliness over social and economic inclusivity (Davis, 1990; Mitchell, 2003). These policies often marginalize the people they claim to help, pushing street vendors into a precarious state where they must continuously adapt to survive (Bayat, 2013; Roy, 2005). Malioboro's transformation

illustrates a fundamental aspect of urban change: the struggle for space and power. As the government enforces its vision of modernity, street vendors experience a loss of autonomy and economic security. This power imbalance is evident in the vendors' displacement and the subsequent erosion of their livelihoods (N. Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Zukin, 1995). The notion of "superstructure," as discussed by Marx and Engels, is particularly relevant here. The superstructure—comprising cultural, political, and ideological elements—is shaped by the economic base (Boonstra, B., & Boelens, L., 2011). In Malioboro, the material conditions of economic production (i.e., street vending) have been fundamentally altered, leading to changes in the social and cultural superstructure (Engels, 1884; Jessop, 2004; Marx, 1867). This transformation is not merely about physical space but involves deeper shifts in social relations and cultural practices (N. Brenner, 2004; D. Harvey, 2006).

Research and writings on the economic impact of the middle class and Malioboro street vendors have been extensively explored by both academics and practitioners. However, there is a notable gap in research specifically focusing on the social changes and the liminality experienced by street vendors in Malioboro. This study aims to address this gap by examining the social changes in Malioboro's sidewalks, driven by state policies, and highlighting the liminal experiences of street vendors caught between governmental ideals and economic realities. (Campbell, 1996; Neuman, 2005). The primary objective is to investigate how relocation and regulation policies while achieving a certain aesthetic order, have disrupted Malioboro's social and economic fabric. (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Smith, 1996). This research underscores the need for a more inclusive approach to urban governance that recognizes and integrates the voices and needs of all stakeholders, particularly those most affected by these changes. (Amin & Thrift, 2002; D. Harvey, 2009). By focusing on the liminality and socio-economic challenges street vendors face, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of urban transformation and its impacts on vulnerable communities.

Methods

I employed ethnographic research methods to gain an intimate understanding of urban spaces and discourses within. Ethnography involves immersing oneself in the studied community, conducting participant observation, and directly interacting with individuals and groups. This approach allows us to capture the nuances of social relationships, cultural practices, and the lived experiences of people within cities. The following are the steps that will be carried out in this research.

This stage is carried out to obtain data related to research. Data collected at this stage consists of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was searched through participant observation and in-depth interviews, while secondary data was obtained through documentation techniques.

The observation location is in Yogyakarta province, where the Malioboro is located. The street vendors are the subjects who are being observed.

I asked informants to provide information and act as a source of knowledge for researchers as ethnographers. Departing from the formulation of the problem and the purpose of this research, the informants were determined to be Malioboro street vendors.

The study of anthropology can be obtained through various libraries or scientific publications, which are available in various places such as data libraries and other locations. Likewise, data on cultural materialism studies were also collected. This literature study aims to complete the data collected through observation and support the arguments conveyed.

Results and Discussion

Malioboro

The Malioboro neighborhood is inextricably linked to various issues, including exploiting sidewalks as parking lots and selling booths, rubbish created by vendors and the surrounding community, road narrowing, and significant traffic congestion. The Yogyakarta City Government, D.I Yogyakarta Provincial Government, PT Kereta Api, and the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace launched the Malioboro Area Revitalization program to address these issues. (Susetyarini & Masjhoer, 2018). After years of unsolved difficulties and regional legislation that have not remedied the situation, this is believed to be able to create Malioboro as a better structured, integrated, and beautiful place. Malioboro, as the face of Yogyakarta tourism, has been the subject of shifting government laws on several occasions, either because there was no clear policy review until the pandemic two years ago, resulting in Malioboro having multiple faces as well as delays in the execution of city planning. (Mosse, 2004; Yvesta, 2023).

In 1973, YB Mangunwijaya emphasized that Malioboro Street "is more than just a road like any other metropolitan region or city; it is a square that belongs to all inhabitants, not just the wealthy." The street, as old as the Yogyakarta Palace itself, forms part of the imaginary axis stretching across Yogyakarta from Mt. Merapi in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south. Over the years, Malioboro has become the center of economic, social, and cultural activity. From Beringharjo Market, which has been a center of economy and trade since its establishment, to being a major tourist attraction, Malioboro's status as Yogyakarta's cultural and economic hub has been solidified. However, the increase in independent traders has posed various challenges for both traders and the government. (Fitriani, 2017; Gade, 2014; Rahardjo, 2020).

Mangunwijaya's Malioboro aligns with Lefebvre's concept of the "right to the city." Lefebvre argued that urban space is not just a physical location but a social product that should be accessible to all inhabitants (Lefebvre, 1991). The relocation of street vendors from Malioboro sidewalks to designated areas can be seen as denying their right to the city (Gehl & Svarre, 2013; McGranahan & Satterthwaite, 2003). The government risks marginalizing a significant portion of the urban population by prioritizing aesthetics and order over the vendors' need to earn a livelihood. Moreover, David Harvey's idea of the "right to the city" expands on Lefebvre's work by emphasizing that the right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban

resources; it is a collective right to change ourselves by changing the city (R. Brenner, 1977; D. Harvey, 2009). This is why the resistance from street vendors and residents is significant. Their pushback against the relocation policies is a fight for their collective right to shape the city in a way that serves their needs and preserves their way of life (Ortner, 1995).

The local government's perspective on Malioboro is reflected in numerous regulations. Malioboro is seen as an object of cultural heritage rather than a living, evolving entity. Efforts to safeguard cultural heritage areas, especially the Malioboro area, refer to the DIY Regional Regulation number 11 of 2005, article 1, paragraph 10 concerning the management of cultural heritage areas and objects and the Decree of the Governor of the Special Region of Yogyakarta number 186 of 2011 (Biro Hukum, n.d.). Therefore, the Yogyakarta Special Region Government is trying to protect Malioboro from physical and value-eroding potentials and protect buildings in Malioboro on a pristine concept, although sometimes or almost always forgetting its humanist elements. Based on these two regulations and by the Decree of the Mayor of Yogyakarta number 119 of 2004 concerning the Arrangement of Street Vendors for the Special Region of Malioboro–Ahmad Yani, the government relocated street vendors from the Malioboro sidewalks to designated areas, such as Terrace Malioboro 1 and 2 (Hernawan, 2022; Prihatin, 2018).

The layout and transfer of Malioboro have created new challenges. The identity of Malioboro, once characterized by the bustling voices of visitors and traders, fades away, making the area eerily silent. While logically organizing Malioboro to be neater and cleaner is beneficial, it raises the question of whether street vendors are reaping the same benefits. The local government represents the Apollonian force, seeking physical order, while the merchants embody the Dionysian spirit, breaking boundaries and maintaining Malioboro's dynamic, chaotic nature. (D. Harvey, 2009; Parker, 2004). Nietzsche notoriously questioned conventional morality, especially the ideas of good and evil, as tools of societal tyranny. He argued that moral frameworks inhibit individual inclinations while imposing order on human conduct. (Nietzsche, 2017). In "The Birth of Tragedy," Nietzsche established the Apollonian and Dionysian energies. The Apollonian represents order and rationalism, while the Dionysian embodies chaos and impulse. According to Nietzsche, these forces' interaction is essential for producing art and culture. (Nietzsche, 1994; Owen, 1995; Pearson, 2006).

Street vendors provide numerous benefits beyond tourism. They offer low-cost goods and services, particularly in economically deprived areas. Street vending provides employment opportunities for those who lack access to formal jobs or necessary skills (Bromley, 2000; Harris, 2001). This informal economy is a safety valve within the larger economic system (Sari, 2016; Watson, 2009). The government's approach to managing street vendors often overlooks their economic contributions, focusing instead on regulating and controlling their activities. Public policy should consider the social and cultural ecosystem of society. In many places in Indonesia, local authorities exert control over people's lives in the name of order (Shore & Wright, 1997; Wedel et al., 2005). This raises questions about who has the right to interpret "disorder." Different social

groups, such as labor unions, grassroots movements, and advocacy organizations, often challenge policies detrimental to people's economic well-being. Policies in Malioboro, like those aimed at relocating street vendors and rearranging parking lots in 2016, have consistently faced resistance from affected traders and Yogyakarta residents (Billiocta, 2016; Hernawan, 2022).

Policies should recognize and incorporate street vendors into the larger economic system rather than imposing rigid control or displacing them. Foucault posits that power is not merely oppressive but constructive, disciplinary, and contested. Power functions through various procedures and strategies, which he calls "power/knowledge." (Foucault, 1995; Hook, 2001). Applying Foucault's "power/knowledge" concept further illuminates the situation. Foucault suggested that power and knowledge are intertwined and power is exercised through knowledge production. (Abu Lughold, 1990; P. Harvey, 2005). In the context of Malioboro, the government's production of knowledge about the need for "order" and "cleanliness" is a power tool. This knowledge justifies the displacement of street vendors under the guise of urban improvement. The vendors, however, have their knowledge and understanding of what constitutes a vibrant and economically viable Malioboro. This clash of knowledge systems underpins the ongoing conflict. (Burchell, 1991; Gordon, 1991; Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994).

Power is a fluid and dynamic force that shapes and is shaped by social connections and discourses. Why are Malioboro traders seen as needing discipline? Why is such knowledge constructed and used to justify "orderly" measures? Neil Smith's work on gentrification and the "revanchist city" provides another useful framework. Smith argued that urban policies often reclaim city spaces for the middle and upper classes at the expense of low-income people. (Smith, 1996). In Malioboro, the push for a more "orderly" and "aesthetic" environment can be seen as a form of gentrification. The relocation of street vendors and the beautification projects might attract more tourists and wealthier visitors. Still, they also displace the existing population who rely on these spaces for their livelihoods. (Buch, 2015; Putri, 2018). From the street vendors' perspective, the government fails to protect their livelihoods. Government power interacts with social reality, seeking order and creative economic expansion, while traders hope relocation policies will not jeopardize their livelihoods. The interaction of these notions results in compromise and the development of a new reality over time. (Mitchell, 2003; Roy, 2005; Suharso, 2017).

The case of the Ngasem market's successful relocation offers a contrasting perspective, suggesting that inclusive and well-planned relocation processes can yield positive outcomes. Ngasem market shopkeepers relocated quietly and even joyfully in 2010. The relocation of traders from the Ngasem region to the Dongkelan area was carried out by a procession along the road, following maybe a dozen or possibly dozens of mediations with the traders by the mayor at the time (Syaifullah, 2010). Many Yogyakarta locals believe that the vibrancy and enthusiasm that permeates everything here is a key factor driving the bustling activity at the newly relocated Pasar Ngasem, making it a highly effective marketing strategy. Given these theoretical perspectives and empirical examples, it becomes clear that the state's policies in Malioboro need to be critically re-

evaluated. An inclusive approach that recognizes the contributions of street vendors and integrates their needs into urban planning is essential. This would not only preserve the socio-economic fabric of Malioboro but also enhance its vibrancy and dynamism.

Liminality and Inclusive Empowerment

Malioboro traders who experienced policy injustice responded to the state's unilateral actions by organizing united prayers and peaceful protests. (Izzudin, 2023; Susanto, 2021). These protests and prayers expressed their worry and sadness as they were uprooted from their traditional "homes" on the sidewalks and forced into modern buildings. This shift from "Malioboro traders selling on the sidewalk" to "souvenir traders in modern buildings" may seem trivial to outsiders. Still, for those selling on the sidewalks for decades, it represents a profound loss of identity. (Chua & Mathur, 2018; Li, 2017). Moving people involves relocating their physical presence and displacing the myriad meanings and sentiments entwined with their sense of place and community.

One trader, Informant A, poignantly described this feeling,

"Nang ati rasane ono sing njeglong Mas. Mendhelong ngono. Yo mungkin mergo wis biasane kulakan nang kono (Malioboro), mangkat mulih tujuane mrono. Saiki tujuan e wis beda. Mungkin sesuk yo bakal rame lan laris, tapi tetep ono sing ora pas, ayem rasane." (In my heart it felt like something was different, like something had suddenly disappeared. Maybe it's just because we are used to selling here (Malioboro). You start your day with the same destination, yet nowadays, the destination is different. Maybe it will be busy and in demand in the future, too, but now it feels like something isn't quite right, making it feel uneasy.)

The traders then expressed this anxiety by holding peaceful demonstrations and praying together. Some of them did it to protest against the policy, while others, such as Informant A, did this simply because they wanted to be united and help from God.

These kinds of actions could be vital in fostering social cohesion within organizations. They give individuals and communities a sense of belonging, affiliation, and continuity. Durkheim describes rituals as enhancing collective consciousness and sustaining social order. Ceremonies allow marginalized communities to declare their identity and reestablish their societal role. (Durkheim, 1997; Lindell, 2010). These merchants are marginal individuals who have been plucked from their roots and stripped of their identity, leaving them in a liminal state. It is a difficult position because of the instability of their financial situation and their identity, which has undermined the future foundation they have constructed thus far. Liminality, coined by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, is when individuals or groups temporarily separate from their traditional social roles and structures. This period is defined by uncertainty, bewilderment, and the suspension of societal standards. The liminal state is a transformative setting where individuals experience significant transformations in awareness and personal and social progress. (Gennep, 2004; Thomassen, 2009).

Gennep asserted that rites have at least three stages as liminality manifestations: 1) Separation: The first step of a ritual involves separating participants from their previous social positions and identities. This break marks the beginning of the liminal phase, in which people leave familiar surroundings and enter a transitional world. 2) Marginality: When people are separated, they are placed on the periphery of their usual social structures. In this transitional zone, individuals are no longer completely a part of their previous social group. Still, they have not yet entered the new social role or rank associated with the ritual. 3) Reincorporation: The last ritual stage involves reintroducing individuals into society in a different state. Individuals who have gone through the liminal experience return to their societal tasks with new insights, knowledge, and responsibilities (Gennep, 2004; Szokolczai, 2009).

Street vendors are uprooted from their homes and places of work, separated from their "neighbors selling," who have been selling alongside them for years, and then leave the familiar to enter an unfamiliar setting. Even their identity as Malioboro sidewalk vendors is being questioned after moving into a multi-story building called "Teras" rather than the iconic Malioboro overhang. They need time to adapt to a changing environment so that, in the end, they return to continue their selling activities with new insights, approaches, and new problems. (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Thieme, 2017). Peaceful action, joint prayer, legal efforts, and other forms of protest are coping mechanisms for Malioboro's overhang traders to fight and hold the Yogyakarta government responsible for promising income and a better life. They need time to adapt to a foreign environment, racking their brains to acquire customers. Peaceful demonstrations, joint prayers, legal efforts, and other forms of protest are coping mechanisms for these traders to hold the Yogyakarta government accountable for their promised better livelihoods. (Izzudin, 2023). Because they do not have the power to oppose or change regional regulations, the only way is to survive together as a cohesive community and formulate new insights and approaches to survive. (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Werbner, 1996).

The Malioboro sidewalk is a complicated environment where the people and their livelihood and those in authority with their idealisms clash. The sidewalk, which may be viewed as a location to sustain a people-based economy, is now again facing another challenge. The areas for social interactions that were formed between the businesses and the people of the Malioboro sidewalk are now collapsing and shifting places, and whether or not the "Malioboro's spirit" still exists is being searched. While it is clear that there are many problems here, there is also hope for the future as Marx argued that social change is driven by conflicts arising from the tangible effects of social circumstances, leading to qualitative changes through the clash of opposing forces. (Marx, 1867; Olssen, 2003).

The clash of opposing moralities and power structures allows for the emergence of new perspectives, the questioning of prevailing norms, and the potential for the affirmation of life. This collision is a creative force that could lead to the reevaluation of values, the development of individual potential, and the liberation from restrictive moral frameworks (Nietzsche, 2017; Scott, 2006). This conflict can also foster social cohesion

within marginalized communities, as described by Durkheim (Durkheim, 1997). Meanwhile, Tilly emphasizes the importance of collective action and the formation of social movements in response to grievances (Graeber, 2013; Tilly, 2004). The traders' actions in Malioboro represent a form of collective resistance against the state's policies, highlighting their agency and capacity to challenge and negotiate power structures.

Malioboro is essentially an organism that develops and changes together with its inhabitants. Street sellers, store owners, the government, and even visitors will create a visage like Malioboro's. Malioboro, as Mangunwijaya put it, is both the face of simplicity and the complexity of all the interests and demands of its citizens that are at stake. It is not just a street, a sidewalk, or a frothy philosophy like the philosophical axis of Yogyakarta. Malioboro's present and future have been fashioned by the collision of force and strife that has defined its existence since Negari Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat was established in 1755.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the social changes in Malioboro triggered by the state's policies reveal the complexities of power dynamics and economic realities. The traders' experiences of liminality, their strategies of resistance, and the broader implications for urban governance underscore the need for more inclusive and equitable policies that recognize and value the contributions of informal economies. By considering various theoretical perspectives, we can better understand the intricate interplay of forces shaping Malioboro and advocate for policies that support its inhabitants' diverse needs and identities.

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