

Salasika

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Redefining Shadow Puppets Performed by Solo Raya Female Puppeters on YouTube

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ABSTRACT

The research aims at exploring how female puppeteers from Solo Raya use YouTube to introduce shadow puppets to the wider world, focusing on their role as custodians of Javanese culture online. It underscores their pivotal role as custodians of Javanese culture in the digital realm, where female puppeteers meticulously safeguard and reinterpret shadow puppet traditions on YouTube, ensuring the enduring legacy of moral narratives, philosophical depth, and artistic intricacies for both local communities and international viewers. Using a feminist research design informed by post-feminist theory and citizen diplomacy, the findings are based on data from 14 female puppeteers, who served as key informants, collected via YouTube. Female puppeteers deliver traditional shadow puppet performances, challenging male-dominated narratives and empowering women in cultural transmission. This research continues to consider YouTube's role in enabling female puppeteers to speak back against earlier male-dominated narratives while also changing who performs. Results show that these women puppeteers, through the YouTube platform, cultivate widespread global appreciation for Javanese culture, advancing gender equity within traditional performing arts, and significantly enhancing Indonesia's national soft power.

KEYWORDS: *female puppeteers, shadow puppet, Javanese culture, YouTube*

INTRODUCTION

In a shadow puppet show, the puppeteer plays a very important role. The puppeteer is fully responsible for the course of the shadow puppet show, such as the storyline, the flow of dialogue, the dynamics and movement of puppet characters, the harmony of the music from gamelan, and the narrator (Supriyono et al., 2008; Suhardjono, 2016; Fernández et al., 2022; I Kadek et al., 2024; Trihapsari et al., 2025). As explained by Ismah (2017), a puppeteer must be able to create stories with educational value for the community, such as those on religion, ethics, habits, norms, and problems or issues that occur in today's society.

The puppeteer, or *dalang* in Indonesian, in a shadow puppet show holds a pivotal, multifaceted role central to the entire performance. The puppeteer is fully responsible for orchestrating the narrative flow of the shadow puppet play,

including managing the storyline, directing the dialogue, and controlling the intricate movements and dynamics of the various puppet characters (Ardhianto, 2019; Tisna et al., 2024; Chotimah, 2024). This role demands mastery over synchronizing the puppets' gestures and expressions with the accompanying gamelan to create an immersive and harmonious theatrical experience (Foley, 2005; Haryanto & Hendro, 2019; Renda & Wangi, 2025). The puppeteer also serves as the narrator, skillfully weaving stories rich in cultural and moral significance. As Supriyono et al. (2008) emphasize, the puppeteers' duties go beyond puppet manipulation—they set the rhythm, mood, and emotional tone that resonate deeply with the audience.

According to Ismah (2017), skilled puppeteers are more than performers; they are creative storytellers who must be able to craft narratives that convey educational and social values for the community. Shadow puppet stories typically incorporate teachings on religion, ethics, societal norms, and contemporary issues, such as morality, community behavior, and cultural heritage preservation (Setiawan, 2018; Pandin & Glorino, 2020). The puppeteer thus acts as a mediator between traditional cultural expressions and present-day social concerns, using shadow puppetry to reflect on, critique, and educate the audience about prevailing conditions and values.

Moreover, the puppeteer's artistry encompasses technical proficiency in controlling light and shadow to create convincing effects that bring the puppet figures to life—making them appear to walk, dance, fight, laugh, and express emotions—a skill that requires a deep understanding of the craft. Beyond performance, puppeteers often engage in the design and construction of the puppets themselves, selection or adaptation of scripts, and occasionally in community outreach or educational programs to share the cultural heritage embodied in the art.

The role of the puppeteer in a shadow puppet show is a blend of artistic creativity, cultural ambassadorship, narrative authority, and educational mission. The puppeteer upholds and renews centuries-old traditions while ensuring the stories remain relevant and meaningful to contemporary audiences, thereby preserving an important cultural legacy through their performances (Prasetya et al., 2024; Santoso, 2025). This combination of responsibilities underscores why the puppeteer is considered the heart and soul of shadow puppet theatre, integral not just to entertainment but to sustaining collective cultural identity and moral discourse in the community.

Traditionally, puppeteers are required to have the endurance to sit for 7-8 hours (overnight) for a single shadow puppet show based on a specific story (Ramonita et al., 2023). In their spare time, puppeteers are also cowhide cutters, preparing the material to make shadow puppets (Wang et al., 2022; Oruh et al., 2021; Ramonita et al., 2023). For this reason, a puppeteer must have stamina, energy, and endurance. Society's demand for physical strength makes the profession of puppeteer more suitable for men (Ismah, 2017; Jurkowski, 2018; Bell, 2018).

With digital technology, a shadow puppet show takes only about 2-3 hours. Changes in the rhythm of puppetry through digital technology provide great opportunities for female puppeteers. Based on the results of the researchers'

survey in Solo and its surroundings, there are several female puppeteers who are well known to the public including Nyi Sri Harti Kenik Asmorowati, twin puppeteers Nyi Seruni Widaningrum and Nyi Seruni Widawati from Surakarta, Nyi Saryanti from Sragen, Nyi Nia Dwi Raharjo from Sukoharjo, Nyi Retno Wijayanti from Kulonprogo, Nyi Elisha from Yogyakarta and many more. Through personal You Tube channel, female puppeteers can introduce their puppet show to global audience. The use of digital media makes it easier for female puppeteers to assert their presence and serves as a means of breaking down patriarchal boundaries in the art of puppetry.

In line with postfeminist theory, which emphasizes women's agency and empowerment through adaptable, creative strategies (Dosekun, 2015; Banet-Weiser et al., 2020; Hanifah et al., 2024), female puppeteers use digital media to assert their presence and challenge patriarchal constraints in puppetry. The idea that women can use artistic expression to reclaim space and voice while navigating and subverting patriarchal systems from within is supported by post-feminism. Since digital media embodies the postfeminist commitment to redefining power dynamics and expanding opportunities for women's visibility and participation in cultural spheres, it offers a powerful platform for female artists to challenge traditional gender boundaries.

As an epistemological breakthrough, women from the perspective of post-feminism possess the capacity to comprehend the distribution of power and their autonomy within gender relations, reflecting equal interaction between men and women in social realities (Sorrentino, 2021), and seek to challenge gender norms within social realities that remain heavily influenced by the pervasive structures of patriarchy (Firdausy, 2022). The post-feminism approach also emphasizes the importance of art as a tool for inclusive empowerment and social change, particularly for female artists navigating various obstacles in developing countries (Spitzer, 2023), and emphasizes that women's struggles can be pursued through artistic means within patriarchal systems, underscoring the importance of adaptable and creative empowerment strategies for women (Benschop & Lewis, 2025). As a response to traditional feminism, post-feminism is described as "relating to the ideas and attitudes which ignore or reject feminist ideas of the 1960s and subsequent decades. Women are now free to choose for themselves, according to post-feminism's emphasis on personal autonomy and choice (Ajit, 2016; McRobbie, 2019; Keisu & Brodn, 2023; Toubbali, 2024)

Based on the background above, the research problem concerns the contribution of Central Java female puppeteers as citizen-diplomacy actors in introducing shadow puppetry globally through digital technology. This grassroots activity serves as a powerful expression of cultural identity and a living bridge connecting local heritage to international audiences. Non-state actors like artists and community groups use traditional performance and crafts not only to preserve cultural knowledge but also as tools of public diplomacy to foster emotional connections and mutual understanding across borders, supporting governmental efforts and enriching cultural diplomacy through authentic and sustained cultural engagement (Bier & White, 2021; Khang, 2024; Roy et al., 2024). Citizen diplomacy empowers ordinary individuals to positively

influence international relations by establishing personal connections with people from different countries. It manifests in various ways, such as student exchange programs, cultural festivals, volunteer activities, and interactions through social media. Unlike formal government-to-government diplomacy, which can often be seen as rigid and exclusive, citizen diplomacy is more open and fosters direct, personal interactions across cultures (Lee & Ayhan, 2015; Williams, 2018; Purwasito & Kartinawati, 2019; Popkova & Michaels, 2022; Henriksen, 2024; Kodal & Temel, 2025).

Citizen diplomacy serves as a crucial support to cultural diplomacy and the promotion of a culture of peace by creating opportunities for dialogue and cooperation between nations. It encourages both sides in a conflict to engage, collaborate, and build mutual understanding, ultimately fostering a "culture of peace" that can transform conflict outcomes (Liu, 2015; Fulda, 2019; Lee, 2020; Scott-Smith, 2024). This approach emphasizes that meaningful change in conflict dynamics stems from gradual shifts in attitudes among a critical mass of people across society, including decision makers, civil society, and ordinary citizens, highlighting the collective role of all societal levels in sustaining peace through cultural engagement.

Furthermore, the researchers map previous research to demonstrate the novelty of this study. The following is a concept map of previous studies.

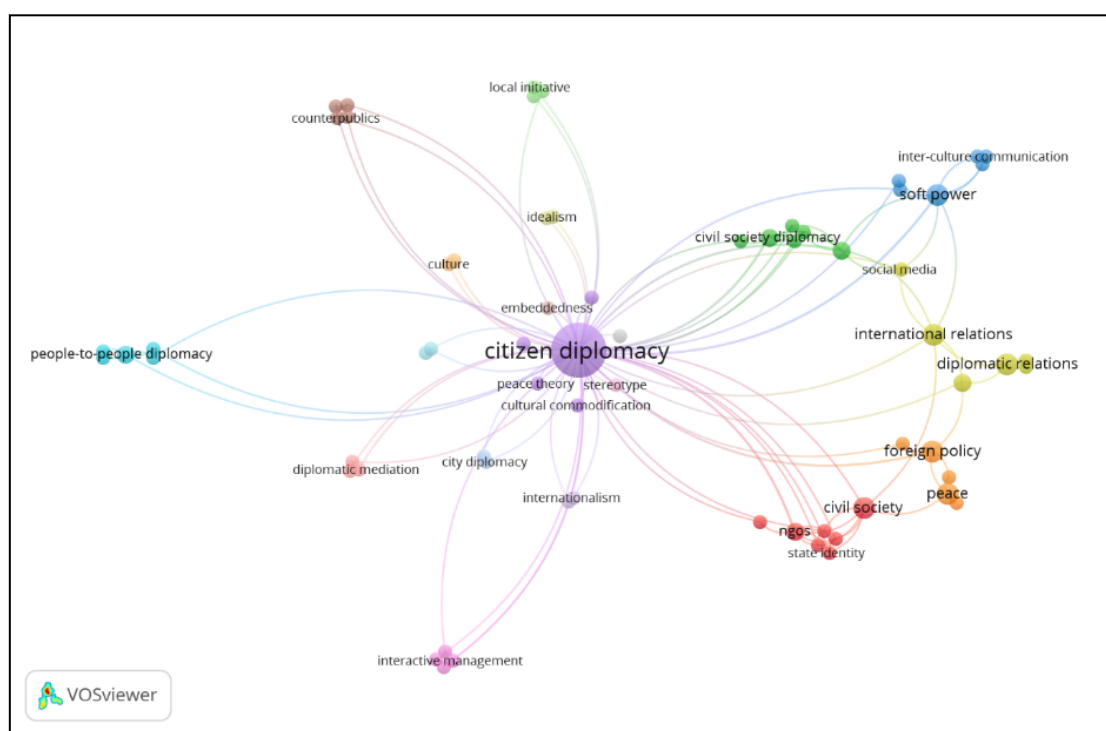


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Citizen Diplomacy (Processed by authors, 2025)

The figure above presents a concept map on citizen diplomacy, in which the citizen diplomacy node describes the dimensions of idealism and how it integrates cultural values and peace (Barash, 2010; Leeper, 2018; Rusakova et al., 2018; Schneider, 2005; Villanueva, 2018). Citizens play a vital role in promoting

national culture by actively engaging in and showcasing traditional arts. This ongoing involvement not only enhances cultural resilience but also strengthens international cultural connections, thereby amplifying the diplomatic value embedded in traditional cultural expressions (Faucher & Zhu, 2025).

The role of citizens as non-state actors in cultural diplomacy has become increasingly significant, particularly through the utilization of digital technology to introduce and promote traditional arts on the international stage. Digital platforms enable these actors to disseminate cultural expressions widely, circumventing traditional diplomatic channels and engaging global audiences more directly and effectively. This digital engagement not only enhances the visibility of traditional cultural heritage but also facilitates intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding, thereby strengthening the broader goals of cultural diplomacy.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method with a feminist approach. This approach was chosen for this research project because of its suitability to investigate social, cultural, and gender phenomena in depth, particularly the role of female puppeteers in the context of cultural diplomacy through shadow puppet performance art. The qualitative method is understood as an approach that emphasizes the exploration of meaning and interpretation of a subject matter, rather than the statistical measurement of data. A case study approach was chosen for this research project as it allows for the investigation of the distinctive and specialized attributes of female puppeteers in Solo Raya who have used digital media as a means of cultural promotion and advocacy.

The research is based on primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through direct interaction with 10 key informants, female puppeteers who are active in shadow puppet performances in Solo Raya (Wonogiri, Klaten, Boyolali, Sragen, Karanganyar, and Surakarta). In-depth interviews were conducted to gain insight into participants' challenges, experiences, and strategies in dealing with gender stereotypes and patriarchal culture. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing the researchers to flexibly elicit information from informants about their personal experiences, challenges, and contributions to puppet performance. This approach allows the researcher to obtain comprehensive data and gain insights into the nuances of female puppeteers' first-hand experiences. Participatory observation involved direct observation of shadow puppet performances, both those performed live and those broadcasted through social media platforms such as YouTube. This technique provides further insight into the dynamics of the performance and the interaction of puppeteers with the audience. In addition, data were also collected from written and digital sources, including video recordings of performances, news articles, and historical records related to the development of female puppeteers in Solo Raya. This documentation serves to strengthen and supplement the research findings. A brief survey was conducted to assess audiences' general perceptions of the role and reception of female puppeteers in shadow puppet performances, particularly in the context of digital media.

The data analysis was supported by triangulation based on interviews with three distinct sources: 1) 10 female puppeteers as the key informants who provide primary data regarding their subjective experiences, challenges, and strategies in navigating gender inequality within puppeteer profession in Solo Raya, 2) philologists who provide historical and textual contexts, which helps contextualize the findings by tracing the historical roles of women in Javanese puppet and identifying traditions or historical factors that may have influenced the current gender dynamics, 3) cultural figures who offer insights into contemporary cultural and social structures of Solo Raya community. By comparing the lived experiences of puppeteers with the historical background (from philologists) and the current cultural reception (from cultural figures), the research can build a comprehensive and critically informed picture of challenges and empowerment efforts faced by Javanese female puppeteers from a feminist perspective. The feminist perspective ensures that the triangulated data is not just summarized but critically interrogated through the lenses of power, inequality, and the potential for social change.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Shadow puppet (*wayang*) can be said to be one traditional form of puppet theatre native to the archipelago. This traditional art has received international recognition, culminating in its designation by UNESCO as a 'Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity' on 7 November 2003. Shadow puppetry is not only a performing art form but also a medium for storytelling that reflects the values, beliefs, and history of Indonesian society (I Kadek et al., 2024).

The word *yang*, which denotes something that is constantly shifting rather than stationary, is the root of *wayang*. The term *wayang*, which refers to a moving and hazy shadow, is then created by prefixing it with *wa*. In addition to being tangible, this shadow represents creativity and serves as a visual representation of the different characters and tales depicted in *wayang* performance art (Bagaskara et al., 2024). A puppet show is a representation of life that includes *pituduh* (life lessons), *piwulang* (teachings), and *sanepan* (metaphors) that convey moral lessons. Puppet show stories depict human behaviors, habits, and life journeys—from birth to death—all of which are natural parts of life. Humans constantly work to preserve harmony in their interactions with God, other people, and nature (Hermawan, 2017; Anggoro, 2018; Ilham, 2019; Perasutiyo et al., 2022).

In Javanese society, a puppeteer holds a highly esteemed position as a pivotal figure who uses the sacredness of the puppet show to teach moral and spiritual lessons. Nyi Panjang Mas, a Mataram Kingdom servant's wife and the first female puppeteer from Java, was an accomplished puppeteer. Patriarchal norms that rigidly define gender roles create structural and cultural barriers for female puppeteers. According to qualitative research conducted in Indonesia, conventional notions of masculinity in the puppeteer profession frequently undermine women's participation in the art of puppetry.

In a shadow puppet show, the puppeteer plays the main role and drives the story. The puppeteer is not only the narrator or storyteller but is also the director, musician, and even scriptwriter (Purwasito & Kartinawati, 2019). The profession of puppeteer also requires the ability to sing in performance. Puppeteers, according to Supriyono et al. (2008), are teachers, illuminators, and entertainers. Meanwhile, the spiritual education performed by a puppeteer must contain aesthetic, ethical, educative, creative, consultative, and recreative elements (Supriyono et al., 2008).

In general, people still assume that a puppeteer in a puppet performance is a man. This performance art clearly provides a lame narrative within the patriarchal culture. Prominently, society believes that only men are suitable to play the role of puppeteers, with all their attributes and abilities, under the guise of traditional values and religious interpretation, which leads to gender sentiment. Starting in the 18th century, women took part in these performances, although their roles were still limited. In the 18th century, women's roles were limited to *pengrawit* (gamelan players) or *sinden* (vocalists). Then, slowly, some women became puppeteers, although very rare (Mello et al., 2019; Fernández et al., 2022)

There are several reasons for the skewed views some people hold towards women who work as puppeteers. First, Sarmiento's study (2022) suggests that only male puppeteers can perform *meruwat*. As a sign of leadership, male puppeteers perform the *ruwatan* ritual to eradicate Murwakala and serve as legitimate leaders who can effectively use puppet performances to spread moral teachings. The second factor behind some people's views on female puppeteers is the perceived violation of norms. In Javanese tradition, the prevailing norm in the puppetry environment is that female puppeteers are educated and develop skills through inheritance from senior male puppeteers (Ardiani, 2019). In comparison, in the Balinese puppetry tradition, female puppeteers are considered spiritually incapable and therefore regarded as strange. These two patriarchal cultures show that female puppeteers are second-class in the performing arts, especially in puppet shows (Hirel, 2022; Marajaya, 2023). Third, Spiller (2024) proposes that puppet performances by female puppeteers are less interesting because female puppeteers are not as physically strong or as endurance-oriented as male puppeteers. Fourth, the domestic role of female puppeteers influences the lack of opportunities for puppet performances (Hannah, 2020; Ginis et al., 2023; Prasetya et al., 2024; Verma, 2025).

According to female puppeteers from Sragen and Surakarta, who are lecturers, because of broader societal biases and gender biases within the cultural realm, female puppeteers are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment from their audiences. Many audiences view female puppeteers with suspicion and contempt despite their artistic ability and command of the traditional craft, frequently stereotyping them as being easily tempted by money or prepared to enter into personal relationships to obtain financial advantage. In addition to undervaluing their professional abilities, this damaging misconception exposes them to rude behavior during or after performances, as well as disparaging remarks and unwelcome advances.

Female puppeteers from Wonogiri, Sukoharjo, Klaten, and Boyolali also stated that the hostile and unsafe environment created by such attitudes prevents them from expressing their full potential and preserving cultural heritage. Broader awareness and cultural changes are needed to address these issues to respect and safeguard female performers in traditionally male-dominated performance venues such as puppet shows and related puppetry traditions.

The ten female puppeteers from Solo Raya collectively affirmed that their participation in the traditional puppetry stage is insufficiently protected. The prevailing lack of security and comfort exacerbates the challenges faced by female puppeteers, significantly impeding their ability to contribute to cultural production and development. This lack of a safe and supportive environment undermines not only their artistic agency but also their potential to sustain and advance cultural heritage. Addressing these vulnerabilities requires a critical intervention that acknowledges the gendered nature of the performing arts domain and implements structural measures to ensure the safety, dignity, and professional recognition of female puppeteers. Such efforts are imperative to enable female practitioners to engage fully and equitably in the cultural sector, thereby reinforcing their contributions to both artistic tradition and socio-developmental objectives.

The landscape of international relations has undergone significant changes characterized by the absence of physical borders between countries. All global events and phenomena that initially moved slowly through mainstream media, both print and electronic, are now presented in real time, quickly, and as they are. One of them is the pandemic that has hit Indonesia, which has also affected shadow puppet performances. Conventional shadow puppet shows have shifted to social media.

The power of social media lies in its role as a means of information, mobilization, socialization, and promotion, as well as a powerful propaganda tool for building networks (Ciasullo et al., 2018). Social media also plays an important role in the social community system, enabling active, widespread relationship-building and communication. Hine (2017) states that social media is a forum for distributing information and messages to the public. During the pandemic, digital platforms marked a major milestone in becoming public spaces. The echo of social media use continues to resonate, making it easier for people to communicate. This is inseparable from government regulations that limit activities outside the home that can cause crowds. Government regulations restricting community activities across various countries are the main cause of the increase in the use of digital technology, such as smartphones. The use of smartphones is not only for obtaining information but also for entertainment, lifestyle, and remote communication, among other things. Data show that device use among adolescents aged 15 to 30 years was highest during the pandemic, followed by those aged 31-40, 41-50, and 51-75 years. The graph below shows that those aged 51-75 (green) are in the safe category, as only a few are heavily engaged in using gadgets.

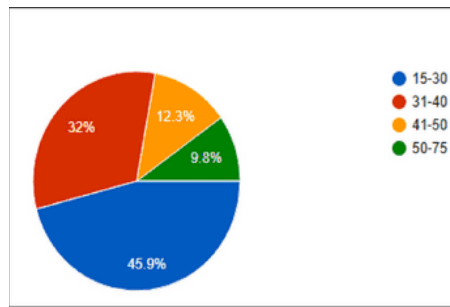


Fig. 1. Ratio of volunteers based on age.

Figure 2. Smartphone usage by age during the global health crisis (Tyagi et al., 2021)

Social media is easy to access and use, making it a means of spreading information and connecting individuals across borders in real time. Topics of discussion on social media are quite diverse, ranging from light matters such as idols, hobbies, interests, and fun to social problems and political issues.

In international relations theory, cultural relations between two or more countries are a very important part of implementing public diplomacy. Alnuaimi et al. (2022) explain that cross-border cultural interaction is not solely initiated by the government but arises spontaneously from the community, with the goal of supporting the achievement of national interests in accordance with foreign policy. This statement is reinforced by Enaifoghe and Makhutla (2020), who explain that cultural diplomacy is a form of public relations in the international context, understood as part of soft power in the current global system. According to Enaifoghe and Makhutla (2020), cultural diplomacy involves the exchange of ideas, information, art, language, and other aspects of culture between two nations or people of different nationalities. The main purpose of cultural diplomacy is to foster understanding among nations. This increased understanding is mainly due to people's support for the political and economic goals of the other country's government. Therefore, the essence of cultural diplomacy lies in a nation's ability to subtly influence other nations through soft power by introducing culture and communication in the international domain to achieve foreign policy goals, while also serving as an international public relations field.

Some of the experts above broadly argue that cultural diplomacy is a form of soft power that promotes a particular nation's culture. Cultural diplomacy is a means of developing mutual understanding between two or more nations, carried out by governments and societies. Cultural diplomacy is also a means of strengthening relations between nations and can influence the foreign policies of other governments to advance national interests.

The community referred to in this research is the community of art actors, particularly female puppeteers from Central Java. The existence of female puppeteers showcasing their expertise was seen during the pandemic. At that time, governments in various countries received instructions from the United Nations (UN) through the World Health Organization (WHO) to be vigilant, control the virus's transmission, save lives, and protect the vulnerable in their respective regions (Langhof & Gueldenberg, 2021). A shadow puppet show

should be presented as a whole in the form of drama, literature (knowledge of the story raised by the puppeteer), visual art, style, dance, music, and vocal performance, all of which are integrated in one performance (I Kadek et al., 2024). During the pandemic, fans and lovers of the art of shadow puppet performance could not enjoy the show in its entirety and in its ideal form. Javanese people, in particular, still think that puppet shows, especially shadow puppets, are not only a spectacle but also part of their culture. Shadow puppetry is a non-monetary cultural asset that is not solely economically valuable in the present but also provides long-term benefits. Shadow puppets can be used as basic capital for economic development (Efendi, 2023).

Shadow puppetry is a traditional performing art with basic economic, social, and cultural value. The economic impact of shadow puppet performances can be felt by the puppeteers, the puppetry community, and the puppet makers themselves. The economic impact on rural communities differs from that in urban areas. For rural communities, shadow puppetry is a traditional performing art rich in local wisdom and noble values. For urban communities, shadow puppets are often an economically valuable product. Differences in how people perceive shadow puppets can be a source of innovation and creativity for shadow puppet puppeteers. The social and cultural impact is felt by *wayang* fans, who can interact with one another (O'Mara, 2013).

During the pandemic, with mobility limitations, streaming through social media became a very profitable opportunity. Without leaving their homes, people can enjoy a variety of entertainment that is cheap, easy, and fast. One of the shows that appeals to some people is shadow puppetry through YouTube channels. Nyi Kenik's YouTube shadow puppet show is appreciated by the community. Nyi Kenik performed shadow puppetry on 2 May 2020 at the Convention Hall of Masjid Agung Jawa Tengah to celebrate the victory of Sulistyo as a member of DPD RI (Regional Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia). The shadow puppet performance on that day alone was watched by 254,000 audiences. Ten months ago, in November 2023, Nyi Kenik's shadow puppet performance received public appreciation, especially for the voice, which matched the puppet character being played. An audience, @atixbellatrix1723, who watched Nyi Kenik's puppet show in the 2021 performance, was moved to see the woman's achievement. The community, especially among women, is prouder of the presence of a woman puppeteer figure and motivates her to progress and develop.

One puppet show performance by Nyi Kenik takes the *lakon* (title) Wahyu Makutharama. The play depicts the teachings of Hasta Brata (eight teachings) from Sri Bathara Krisna to Arjuna about leadership values (Adisastra & Ni Made, 2021; Hudaya & Nugroho, 2013). Hasta Brata comprises eight leadership philosophies derived from the forces of nature: the sun, moon, stars, earth, ocean, water, wind, and fire (Indrianita, 2017).

According to Nyi Kenik, shadow puppet performances broadcast on YouTube are an attractive form of traditional arts entertainment for people accustomed to gadgets. People can easily and cheaply enjoy traditional arts without having to be in an arts center. Through YouTube, shadow puppet shows

that were previously of a long duration, more than five hours, can be enjoyed in a short time of about one to two hours.

Modern society, which is already familiar with smartphones, is a golden opportunity to introduce traditional culture, especially shadow puppetry. Shadow puppetry, which was boring before YouTube, has become more interesting. Shadow puppetry can be revived and continue to exist as people experience restrictions on activities outside the home. Through YouTube, people have a better understanding of the virtues in shadow puppet shows.

Another shadow puppet performed by a woman puppeteer is Baladewa Muksa, by Nyi Sarwiyanti. The story takes place after the end of the Mahabharata War between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, as a symbol of the triumph of good over evil. The Pandavas, consisting of five knights (Yudhistira, Bima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sadewa), became a symbol of good values that succeeded in defeating the wrath of one hundred Kauravas.

On YouTube, Nyi Sarwiyanti's performance on 2 December 2021 gained 33,422 views. One of the audiences, @agusnurcholis1713, commented that women can have good puppeteering skills like men. Another audience, @uwongJAWA, encouraged the female puppeteer to dare to create and innovate to advance and preserve Indonesian culture.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that female puppeteers in the shadow puppetry field face various obstacles, including sexual harassment and rigid gender stereotypes. Despite the cultural and social barriers they face, female puppeteers in Solo Raya have successfully used digital technology, particularly YouTube, to introduce puppets to a wider audience. Female puppeteers act as cultural diplomats, introducing local cultural heritage and contributing to public diplomacy through the arts. The increasing appreciation of female puppeteers on social media indicates a shift in public perception towards a more inclusive and positive direction.

It should be noted that this research has some limitations. Firstly, given that the research was conducted exclusively in Solo Raya, the results may not be fully representative of conditions in other regions of Indonesia. Secondly, this research uses qualitative methods with a limited number of informants, which may not fully cover the entire population of female puppeteers in Indonesia. In addition, further research on the long-term impact of social media use in cultural diplomacy and the promotion of gender equality through female puppeteers can provide deeper insights, especially in the context of post-pandemic digital technological advances.

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