The paradigm concept of Javanese' *Anak Polah Bapa Kepradhah* in the story of *Murwakala*: Lévi-Strauss structuralism

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia harbors diverse oral traditions, with a particular focus on Javanese traditions. Studies on oral traditions, especially those related to *geguritan* (poems), stories, and songs, often lean towards aesthetic analyses. However, there remains untapped potential for exploration, such as the exploration of local cultural elements underlying the contradictions in folklore. This article aims to elucidate these contradictions and delineate the paradigmatic concept of "*anak polah bapa kepradhah*" within the narrative of "*Murwakala*." Conducted as a descriptive-qualitative study, this research employs Lévi-Strauss structuralism as a framework for interpreting, mapping and attributing meaning to empirical paradigms embedded in societal concepts. The objective is to address the contradictions and logical patterns inherent in society. Data for this study are derived from the observation of Javanese oral traditions related to *wong sukerta*. These observations are then juxtaposed with the narrative of "*Murwakala*," as presented in the *wayang* performance of the *ruwatan* tradition, with a specific focus on the Javanese "*anak polah bapa kepradhah*" concept/value. The depth of meaning is further explored through the use of tables and diagrams. From a Lévi-Straussian perspective, it can be concluded that "*Murwakala*" and its associated value concept serve as logical tools capable of mapping paradigms, deciphering empirical contradictions (related to family relationships and power), and representing these dynamics in the cultural products and thoughts of Javanese society, both historically and in the contemporary context.

1. Introduction

The *Ruwatan* is a Javanese purification ritual that has been performed through generations and continues to be practiced to this day. This ritual is specifically intended for *anak sukerta* (pronounced: [sukƏrtɔ]]) or *Sukerta* children. *Bocah sukerta* refers to children born with original sin, including an only child, whether a boy or a girl (*ontang-anting/unting-unting*), a pair of twin girls (*kembang sepasang*), twin siblings, one boy and one girl (*kedhana-kedhini*), and combinations such as boy-girl-boy (*sendhang kapit pancuran*), five boy/girl children (*pendhawa/pendhawi*), among others, following the specified provisions (comprising 25 groups) [1], [2]. In addition to blood relations within the *sukerta*, as per Wardani [2], there are other *sukerta* groups defined by physical "differences" (*bule, cemani, cebol, jangkung*, *etc.*) and situations of negligence (making a bottomless shed, open kitchen, opening the windows at dawn, breaking *pipisan*/the traditional medicine grinder, *etc.*). However, *ruwatan* is exclusively performed for blood relation *sukerta*. Initially conducted by individual families, over time, this ritual has evolved into mass performances, such as the *ruwatan* ritual in Dieng, Central Java, the annual World's Wayang Day at the Indonesia Institute of Art (ISI) Surakarta, and other events. The core of this ritual involves a *wayang kulit* (leather puppet) performance precisely at noon,

featuring the main character "*Murwakala*," accompanied by specific offerings [3]. Participants wear all-white attire, and the *dalang* (puppeteer) must be a qualified *dalang* or *dhalang kandhabuwana*. A true *dalang* is defined as an individual who is neither a virgin nor a widower, born to both *dalang* parents, physically and psychologically capable, skilled, and inclined towards meditation or possessing significant spiritual qualities.

Ruwat 'Murwakala' centers around a primary narrative, *'Murwakala.'* Alternative names for *Ruwat 'Murwakala'* include *'Bathara Kala Tundhung,' 'Tundhung Kala,' 'Ruwat Nuswantara,' 'Ruwat Purwacarita,' 'Kala Ruwat,' etc.*, varying by region. *'Murwakala'* is an authentic Javanese tale, distinct from adaptations of Indian epics such as 'Mahabharata' or 'Ramayana,' originating from *Serat Murwakala*. This study explores the story and the *'Murwakala' ruwatan* ritual using Claude Lévi-Strauss' structuralism approach. The choice of this approach is motivated by its alignment with the story's originality and cultural significance to the Javanese people. Lévi-Strauss' structuralism, initially developed for linguistic studies, is applied here as an epistemology for cultural knowledge studies [4], [5]. The theory is employed in ethnographic research, dissecting myths into harmonically coded elements, akin to musical notes, to reveal paradigmatic cultural aspects, analyzable diachronically or synchronically [6], [7]. These structuralism studies can document and trace human culture through individual or group cultural products [8]. The living concepts of Javanese people, encompassing values, *wewaler* (norms), ideologies, and *cangkriman* (riddles), serve as paradigmatic/comparative variables [9]. The chosen concept, *'anak polah bapa kepradhah,'* explores the tight connection between the concept of father-child relationships and the *wayang* character *'Murwakala.'* This concept serves as a narratological paradigm explicitly conveyed by the *dalang*, and addresses aspects of myth, social dynamics, familial relationships, beliefs, and power relations [10], [11]. When applied to analyze the structure of the *wayang* character *'Murwakala,'* this concept serves as the key to dissecting cultural codes (paradigms) related to father-child relationships [12], [13]. While other concepts may arise, they play a supporting role rather than serving as the key concept.

Previous research has explored *'Murwakala,'* including the study titled "The Role of Symbolism in Moral Education: A Study of the Ruwat Murwakala Ritual" [14]. This research examines the *mantras* in the *Ruwatan 'Murwakala'* ritual within the Saussurean semiotic system, connecting them to the moral education embedded in the *mantra's* meaning. Another study by Budhi, Subiyantoro, and Wahida, titled "Ruwat Murwakala Ritual: Transmission of Educational Values through Traditional Performing Arts and its Relevance to the Application of the Concept of *Merdeka Belajar*," investigates the transmission of educational values in *wayang* performances. The analysis of scenes in the story *'Ruwat Murwakala'* reveals the process of transmitting educational values and their alignment with the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* [15]. The research results on the *Ruwatan* ritual of the *'Murwakala'* play indicate findings related to the conveyance of character educational values for society, encompassing attributes such as curiosity, honor, religion, obedience to rules, fairness, intelligence, creativity, critical thinking, honesty, respect, and intelligence. Additionally, Efendi and Deswijaya's research delves into the concept of "*kempel*" in the *'Murwakala' ruwatan*, asserting that mantras in the performance hold magical power when there is 'unity' or *kempel* between the elements of formation and their functions. These elements include mantra pronunciation, applied music, silence crafted by the *dalang* (puppeteer) *ruwat*, and the use of properties during the performance, such as burning incense, creating low sounds, and the presence of the *dalang ruwat* with spiritual competence. In another study titled "Ruwatan Murwakala on Religious and Cultural Perspective," the implementation of the *ruwatan 'Murwakala'* ritual is examined from religious and cultural perspectives. The study suggests implications for religion, culture, social life, community welfare, and ecology. Theoretical findings affirm the presence of phenomenological theories, religious theories, and the theory of rites of passage in the *'Murwakala' ruwatan* ritual [16]. This research takes a distinct focus on *'Murwakala,'* differing from other studies that explore moral education, mantras, or the contemporary implications of its rituals. Instead, this study examines *'Murwakala'* in terms of its narratology and its connection with the Javanese concept paradigm—a cultural domain representing the relational contrasts existing in *'Murwakala'* and the socio-cultural relations of Javanese society. The

primary focus of this article is the exploration of the story/folklore *'Murwakala'* in the *ruwatan ritual* by Ki Manteb Soedarsono through Lévi-Strauss structuralism. This exploration is then linked to the paradigm of the concept *'anak polah bapa kepradhah'* in a disseminative manner through the contradictions inherent in it.

2. Method

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009), a prominent French anthropologist, held the major view that the thinking structure of both ancient humans (savage mind) and modern humans (civilized mind) was fundamentally similar because the foundation of all human characteristics was essentially the same [17], [18]. According to Lévi-Strauss, thinking could map a given subject into structured foundations capable of producing realities and offering solutions to contradictory issues [19], [20]. Compiled ethnographic data, such as stories and myths, for Lévi-Strauss, represented free human cultural products capable of addressing life problems. In his interpretation, Lévi-Strauss demonstrated that myths comprised (1) relationships and oppositions and (2) that, through this way of thinking, the savage mind successfully applied orderliness to their world [20], [21]. The method applied in this theory, according to Taum [22], is tentative, where the meaning of the application should be continuously tested and matched with the available results. In another sense, the depth of a story or myth is influenced by the researcher's intellectual capacity and understanding of the climate and cultural products of the people being studied. In the practical application, Lévi-Strauss would: (1) Collect the data, (2) Classify the data into scenes (mythemes), (3) Classify and organize the data into tables based on syntagmatic and paradigmatic (two-dimensional) readings, as well as divisions between relations and oppositions, (4) Contextualize the mapping results and readings concerning problems/contradictions in people's lives. The uniqueness and challenge of applying this method lie in how the researcher organizes myths into tables, as there is no structured standard. However, this challenge and openness in storytelling enable the exploration of anthropological phenomena from two perspectives, syntagmatic and paradigmatic, capable of transcending civilizations.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Synopsis/Mytheme

In its performances, *'Murwakala'* sometimes exhibits various *sanggit* (performance styles), each unique to a *dalang* or specific region. Examples include the Mangkunegaran, Kasunanan, *Padhusunan* (village/outside keraton), *Jawatimuran* (East Java style), and others [23]. This paper establishes its foundation from the story of the *'Murwakala'* performance by Ki Manteb Soedarsono (2019) during the mass *ruwatan* ceremony on World's Wayang Day at ISI Surakarta.

- *Batara Guru* summons *Batara Narada* due to a *gara-gara* (riot) sensed in *khayangan* (heaven). The disturbance is initiated by *Batara Kala* (son of *Batara Guru*), meditating in the *khayangan* field called *Hot Repat*. *Batara Kala* then presents himself before his father.

- When questioned, *Batara Kala* expresses a desire to consume humans, a request approved by his father, with the condition that he only consumes the *Sukerta*. Additionally, *Batara Kala* is prohibited from harming the *Sukerta* if they are protected by individuals capable of reciting *mantras* inscribed on their forehead, mouth, chest, and back, as these individuals are considered family and should not be harmed.

- Subsequently, *Batara Kala* descends to earth to prey on humans, creating havoc in the process.

- Despite *Batara Guru's* approval, *Batara Narada* defies the directive, recognizing the harm it would cause to the people on earth (*ngarcapada*). *Batara Narada* criticizes *Batara Guru* for not protecting the people and instead causing harm.

- Given *Batara Kala's* persistent meditation and disruption in heaven, *Batara Guru* grants permission and instructs *Batara Narada* to descend to earth to thwart *Batara Kala's* actions.

- *Batara Narada* approaches *Batara Bayu* to prevent *Batara Kala* from preying on humans. Subsequently, *Batara Narada* assigns tasks to *Batara Vishnu* and *Batara Brama* to assist in halting *Batara Kala*. Disguising themselves as humans, *Batara Narada* becomes *Ki Panjak Tapa Wangkeng*, *Batara Wisnu* becomes *Ki Dhalang Kandhabuwana*, and *Batara Brama* takes on the identity of a woman named Nyi Sruni/Nyi Asem Sore.

- In the kingdom of *Purwacarita*, *Jagabaya Jaka Sondong* and *Bayan Kocrit* encounter the group led by *Ki Panjak Tapa Wangkeng*. *Jagabaya* informs them of the abundance of *Sukerta* in *Purwacarita* and expresses his exhaustion in finding a *dalang* capable of helping the people. *Ki Dhalang Kandhabuwana, Ki Panjak Tapa Wangkeng*, and *Nyi Sruni* then travel to *Purwacarita* to offer assistance.

- While *Ki Dhalang Kandhabuwana* is aiding them in *Purwacarita*, he faces interference from *Batara Kala*, leading to a dispute between them. Offended, *Batara Kala* orders the *sukerta* and *Ki Dhalang Kandhabuwana* to surrender.

- *Batara Kala* requests *Ki Dhalang Kandhabuwana* to recite the *mantras* inscribed on his forehead, mouth, chest, and back. Successfully reading all the *mantras* weakens and injures *Batara Kala*, who seeks forgiveness and retreats from the earth.

- *Ki Kandhabuwana* observes a moment of silence to summon *Batara Bayu* to purify the earth, ensuring that *Batara Kala* and all forces of satans, genies, and other disturbances flee, no longer causing harm to humans.

3.2. Contradictions in Folklores

Contradictions within folklore, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss, hold significance beyond mere inconsistencies; instead, they are interpreted as manifestations of deeper structural patterns inherent in cultural narratives [24]. These contradictions are considered integral components that form the underlying structure, actively contributing to shaping the cohesive narrative within myths. Lévi-Strauss posits that myths and folklore deliberately contain contradictions structured in a manner that allows for their resolution or harmonization. For example, conflicting elements within a myth might be strategically balanced or reconciled through the narrative, symbolically resolving apparent contradictions in a meaningful way. Such contradictions in folklore serve a symbolic purpose, representing profound tensions or dualities inherent in both the human psyche and society at large [25]; by exploring and reconciling these contradictions, myths and folklore function as reflections of humanity's attempt to understand and reconcile opposing forces or conflicting ideas. Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss proposes that contradictions observed within folklore are not accidental; rather, they are indicative of universal cognitive structures. These contradictions are seen as manifestations revealing fundamental ways in which human minds categorize, organize, and comprehend information, thereby reflecting universally shared aspects of human thought. Lévi-Strauss views contradictions within folklore not as inadequate but as integral and meaningful elements constituting the structural framework of myths. They play an essential role in the coherence and symbolic functions of cultural expressions, embodying universal cognitive structures and representing the human pursuit of reconciling opposing concepts within cultural narratives [6], [22]. The contradictions in this part involve explanations containing an arrangement of myths with number codes (index cards) that show relationships. These relationships (mythemes) will be organized into a table with two-dimensional readings, tracing, and mapping that are syntagmatic (horizontal/linear) and paradigmatic (vertical/up and down) [22]. Since Lévi-Strauss' structuralism approach does not solely focus on literal or textual stories [6], [22], the discussion of these relationships that emerge also considers and contextualizes Javanese people's culture. The next discussion is about the relationships (logical tools) with concrete comparison variables of the "*anak polah bapa kepradhah*" concept inside relational and oppositional charts.

3.2.1. The Mapping of *"Murwakala"* play in Lévi-Strauss Model Table

Lévi-Strauss introduced the syntagmatic and paradigmatic methods as part of his structuralist approach to analyze and understand cultural phenomena [20]. The syntagmatic analysis focuses on the relationship between elements in a sequence or chain, examining how elements relate to each other sequentially, forming meaningful structures. Lévi-Strauss applied the syntagmatic approach by studying the relationships between cultural elements, such as myths, rituals, or kinship systems, within a specific context or sequence. He analyzed how these elements combined and interacted to form coherent structures. Paradigmatic analysis, on the other hand, emphasizes the relationship between elements that could potentially replace each other within a particular category or structure, focusing on the associative or substitutional connections between elements. Lévi-Strauss used the paradigmatic approach to analyze underlying structures and patterns by examining the substitutions or alternatives within a given set of cultural elements. He investigated how these elements could be replaced or exchanged while maintaining the overall structure or meaning of a cultural system. Thus, this method will disseminate aspects of narratology (based on myth) in four domains, namely (1) *Karsa*/will, (2) interest based on Self Power, (3) Wisdom based on Self Power, and (4) Clarification. This domain is extracted from the key myth and paradigm of the concept "*anak polah bapa kepradhah*." Lévi-Strauss employed these methods to analyze myths, rituals, and kinship systems among various indigenous societies. He believed that underlying these cultural phenomena were deep structures and universal patterns of thought, which could be uncovered through the application of these structuralist methods [4], [8]. By studying the relationships between elements within a system (syntagmatic) and exploring the possibilities of substitution or alternatives (paradigmatic), Lévi-Strauss aimed to reveal the underlying structures of human culture and cognition. From Table 1, it can be observed that the results of the myth mapping show a father-son relationship related to the paradigm of the concept "*anak polah bapa kepradhah*." Beyond the literal symbol, the paradigm of this concept signifies the power of the father, which can be broadly interpreted not only as the role of the biological father (*Bathara Guru*) but also as the power of actions (*polah*) carried out by another "father" (*Bathara Narada*). This role involves the power to influence the behavior of the child (*Bathara Kala*).

Tabel 1. "*Murwakala*" Play Structure Analysis

I	II	III	IV
Karsa/ Will	*Interest based on Self Power*	*Wisdom based on Self Power*	*Clarification*
Batara Kala meditates so that his *sawab* / power creates a riot to *khayangan*			
Batara Kala askes to prey on humans. (*ANAK POLAH*)	*Batara Guru* permits *Batara Kala* to prey on humans, but only the *sukerta*. (*BAPA KEPRADHAH*)	*Batara Narada* defies the permission. *Batara Narada* is sent to earth to control *Batara Kala's* lust.	
	Batara Kala comes down to earth to prey on humans.	*Batara Narada* comes down to earth with *Batara Wisnu*, *Indra*, and *Bayu* in the form of humans.	There is a riot in the country of *Purwacarita* caused by *Batara Kala.* (*ANAK POLAH*)
The country of Purwacarita needs a *dhalang* to help the *sukerta*.		The envoy (*Jagabaya* and *Bayan*) comes across *Ki Dhalang Kandhabuwana* group	*Pangruawatan* is performed by *Ki Dhalang Kandhabuwana* group (*BAPA KEPRADHAH*)
Batara Kala disturbs *Ki Dhalang Kandhabuwana*. (*ANAK POLAH*)		*Ki Dhalang Kandhabuwana* reads the *mantra* written on the forehead, mouth, chest, and back of *Batara Kala*. (*BAPA KEPRADHAH*)	*Batara Kala*, together with demons, genies, and satans, go back to their place and be cleansed by *Batara Bayu*.

3.2.2. The Concept Paradigm of *"Anak Polah Bapa Kepradhah"* towards the *"Murwakala"* Play: Logical Relations and Oppositions

Based on the description above, the relationship concept of *"anak poah bapa kepradhah"* has been elucidated. The codes inside the brackets are not the final structural relations of the "*Murwakala*" play concerning the concept *"anak poah bapa kepradhah"* but serve as an indication of the early classification step. This initial classification step may also be termed the father-child relationship with its opposition pair, troublemaker-problem solver. This relationship highlights a power dynamic between external and internal power (as a father), encompassing responsibility, morality, and protection [26], [27]. The literal meaning of the concept "*anak poah bapa kepradhah*" is that with every child's behavior, it is the father who will bear the consequences [12]. According to the structure map in Table 1, a paradigm with Javanese people's ideology will emerge from the concept "*anak poah bapa kepradhah*". Before a further paradigmatic explanation, there will be an elucidation of the relationships in the form of charts based on the analysis of Ahimsa-Putra [28].

3.2.3. The Context Scheme of *"Murwakala"* Play towards the Concept *"Anak Polah Bapa Kepradhah"*

Lévi-Strauss proposed that underlying these cultural phenomena were universal structures of the human mind [24]. He believed that the patterns and structures found in myths, rituals, and other cultural expressions were not merely products of specific cultures but reflected fundamental ways in which human minds categorize and organize information universally [29]. Through his analysis, Lévi-Strauss aimed to uncover these universal structures by examining the underlying schemes that manifest across various cultural contexts [30], [31]. He argued that these structures revealed fundamental aspects of human cognition and thought processes, which were common to humanity regardless of cultural differences [25]. While being organized by deeper underlying structures, he argued that these structures are reflections of universal cognitive processes shared by human beings across diverse cultural contexts [4], [32]. In this article, a context scheme will be presented that maps the logical relationship of the contradictions in the father-son relationship with the paradigm of the "*anak poah bapa kepradhah*" concept in Fig. 1.
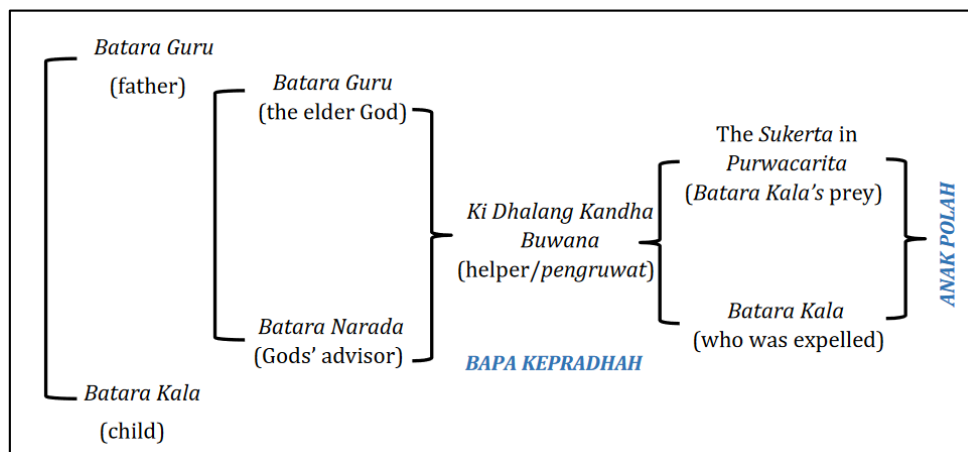

Fig 1. The Context Scheme of "*Murwakala*" towards the Concept "*Anak Polah Bapa Kepradhah*"

In Fig. 1 above, an explanation is provided on how the oppositions are created, along with the myth structure relations [33]. The instance where *Batara Guru* grants *Batara Kala* permission to prey on humans represents the realization of "*kepradhah*" or the father's responsibility because his child persistently pleads through meditation. This is not an absolute example of responsibility, as it takes the lives of many people on earth. It could be considered the father's responsibility, but it could also be the responsibility of others who have an oppositional relationship with the child while holding the same power as the father. Therefore, it illustrates that the one responsible is not only the father but also other individuals who hold oppositional power (not necessarily in relation) towards the child. Furthermore, when *Batara Narada* descends to earth with *Batara Wisnu* and *Batara Brama* as a group of *pengruwat*, it showcases the victim, which is the *sukerta*. They can only be spared when purified (*diruwat*) by

Ki Dhalang Kandhabuwana. This scene demonstrates that the *Pengruwat*/helper is the one who holds power over both the *Sukerta* and *Batara Kala*.

4. Conclusion

The results of the narratological reading of the mythical structure, the syntagmatic-paradigmatic map, and the meaning dissemination of the "*anak polah bapa kepradhah*" concept paradigm in "*Murwakala*" reveal contradictory conceptual paradigms within the literal father-son kinship relationships. These include the role of power relations, actions/wills, and responsibility. Each relationship is not always in opposition, and even when it is not an opposition or a direct relationship, it may still involve power dynamics, such as *Batara Narada* being responsible for the *sukerta's* freedom from *Batara Kala*. From the table, scheme explanations, and supporting details, several conclusions can be drawn: (1) The story of "*Murwakala*" incorporates a concept and paradigm related to "*anak polah bapa kepradhah*" that goes beyond a literal interpretation; (2) The opposition between father and child is not solely based on blood or descent but is also a cultural symbol indicating that the one with more power should utilize it constructively to promote kindness; (3) Those who wield power can be anyone with similar intentions, controlling the opposition side constructively for the development of goodness; (4) The narrative of "*Murwakala*" regarding the concept "*anak polah bapa kepradhah*" among Javanese people extends beyond obedience to the father or the father's power, emphasizing that responsibility lies with the one who acts against kindness; and (5) Anything or anyone disrupting the harmony of people's lives should be redirected toward the highest intention, which is kindness. In conclusion, the existence of contradictions in "*Murwakala*" can be interpreted as a symbolic dissemination of meaning and a paradigmatic concept aligning narratological values with the cultural concepts in folklore development. This reflection suggests that in "*Murwakala*," there is a principle or intention (*cipta*) of the ideal human being to attain goodness (*karsa*) as the highest value (*rasa*) in Javanese society.

Declarations

Author contribution	:	This article was written by a single author, starting with research ideas, data collection, data analysis, writing, and editing.
Funding statement	:	This article was funded by the Indonesian Literature Department, Faculty of Letters, Sanata Dharma University.
Conflict of interest	:	The authors declare no conflict of interest.
Additional information	:	No additional information is available for this paper.

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