

Female Masculinity in Indonesian Folklore *Nyai Undang Ratu Rupawan dari Pulau Kupang*

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the female masculinity in Indonesian folklore from Central Kalimantan, Nyai Undang Ratu Rupawan dari Pulau Kupang. This research uses gender study, masculinity. The material object in this study is a folklore originating from Kupang Island, Central Kalimantan, entitled Nyai Undang Ratu Rupawan dari Pulau Kupang. The formal object of this research is gender study, masculinity. Data analysis was performed through qualitative descriptive techniques by interpreting the data found in Nyai Undang Ratu Rupawan dari Pulau Kupang folklore and linked to masculinity data. Masculinity is generally associated with men. However, masculinity is not nature carried by children when they were born. It does not only belong to men. Females can also have masculine traits as it is not something absolute and fixed but merely a construction. Women and men are labeled with gender identities and values by culture and society. This paper tries to highlight how masculinity in Nyai Undang is relevant to the masculinity that exists in Dayak women in Central Kalimantan. Nyai Undang is a Dayak woman who has some traits that are considered masculine including leadership skills, courage, and assertiveness. This research eventually finds out that these masculine qualities that are found in Nyai Undang can also be found in Dayak women in Kalimantan.

Keywords: *Dayak woman, female masculinity, Indonesian folklore*

Abstrak

Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi maskulinitas perempuan di dalam cerita rakyat Indonesia dari Kalimantan Tengah yang berjudul *Nyai Undang Ratu Rupawan dari Pulau Kupang*. Objek material di dalam penelitian ini adalah cerita rakyat yang berasal dari Pulau Kupang, Kalimantan Tengah yang berjudul *Nyai Undang Ratu Rupawan dari Pulau Kupang* dan objek formal dalam penelitian ini adalah kajian gender maskulinitas. Analisis data dilakukan melalui teknik deskriptik kualitatif dengan menginterpretasi data-data yang ditemukan dalam cerita rakyat *Nyai Undang Ratu Rupawan dari Pulau Kupang* dan dihubungkan dengan data maskulinitas. Maskulinitas pada umumnya dikaitkan dengan laki-laki. Namun, maskulinitas bukanlah sifat yang dibawa oleh seorang anak saat dia lahir ke dunia. Maskulinitas bukanlah hanya milik laki-laki. Perempuan juga dapat memiliki nilai-nilai maskulin karena maskulinitas bukanlah sesuatu yang mutlak dan tetap melainkan

hanya suatu konstruksi. Perempuan dan laki-laki diberi label identitas dan nilai-nilai gender oleh budaya dan masyarakat. Tulisan ini mencoba menyoroiti bagaimana maskulinitas yang ada pada diri Nyai Undang relevan dengan nilai-nilai maskulinitas yang ada pada perempuan Dayak Kapuas di Kalimantan Tengah. Nyai Undang merupakan seorang perempuan dayak yang memiliki nilai-nilai yang dianggap maskulin termasuk diantaranya adalah kepemimpinan, keberanian, dan ketegasan,. Penelitian ini pada akhirnya menemukan bahwa nilai-nilai maskulin yang ada pada Nyai Undang juga dapat ditemukan pada perempuan Dayak di Kalimantan.

Kata Kunci: perempuan Dayak, maskulinitas perempuan, cerita rakyat Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Women are generally associated with femininity and men are associated with masculinity. Ashraf (2018: 2) in his journal defines masculine as behavior characterized by assertiveness, and being action-oriented and lively, whereas femininity is conceived as being passive, cooperative and gentle. Since childhood, men are expected to have masculine traits, as well as women, who are expected to have feminine traits. Most parents will buy gender-specific toys for their children. Girls' rooms contained more dolls, doll houses, and domestic items (e.g., sinks, dishes, stoves). In the boys' rooms, however, "dolls" were usually in such categories as cowboys and soldiers, probably comparable to today's action figures (Blakemore and Centers, 2005: 619). Boys play with hero action figures dolls with the hope that their boys will grow up to be brave and heroic and girls play with barbie with the hope their girls will be graceful and gentle. These stereotypes have not only been supported by the parents but also society. There is belief in society that men and women have different roles in family and work domains. Women in the traditional feminine gender role would be to nurture her family by working full-time within the horne. Men, on the other hand, are presumed by traditional views of gender roles to be leaders (Blackstone, 2003: 337). These gender roles are also found in most of Indonesian folklore. Dewi (2019) conducted research based on folk tales in Sumatra Island, found that women are associated with dometic works and men are the breadwinners. Furthermore, men and women's characters are also portrayed differently in Indonesian folk tales. According to research based on 25 Indonesian folklore conducted by Andalas and Qur'ani (2019:4), all male protagonists in folklore are always portrayed as muscular, handsome, helpful,

knowledgeable, thoughtful, wise, brave, and loyal. Otherwise, the ideal female figure is manifested in the form of a female protagonist with a beautiful, physically weak, kind, relentless, and loyal figure. But in reality, these masculine traits do not only exist in men and so do the feminine traits. Femininity is not only found in women but also men. Many men are found to be gentle and many women are brave and independent. This is because masculinity and femininity are merely social constructions in society. Women and men are labeled with gender identities and values that should not be considered as truth.

The debate about masculinity has attracted the attention of researchers since the 1980s and early 1990s. Until now, this topic is still undergoing a long debate because masculinity is not universal, permanent, and cannot be forced. But unfortunately, mass culture generally assumes there is a fixed, true masculinity beneath the ebb and flow of daily life (Connell, 2005: 45). It is as if masculinity only belongs to a certain gender which is male and it does not end there because not all men can be included in this category of true masculinity. In traditional masculinity, a man must meet several criteria to be called masculine. Some criteria are related to specific traits and physical appearance. Masculinity is not nature carried by children when they were born into the world. Masculinity is a construction built by culture and society. This was confirmed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) in their essay, *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the concept*. They stated Masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to gender relations in a particular social setting. In other words, masculinity is not something absolute and permanent, but flexible and dynamic.

Nyai Undang Ratu Rupawan dari Pulau Kupang is Indonesian folklore from Central Kalimantan that tells a story about the heroism and courage of a Dayak Kapuas female leader named Nyai Undang. Nyai Undang is a princess of Kupang Island Kingdom. She was known as a beautiful princess with good personalities. She was described as graceful, kind-hearted, friendly, and she is also devoted to both of her parents. However, unlike most of female protagonists in Indonesian folktales, Nyai Undang was found to have some traits that are considered masculine in society and cultural construction. She was famous for her leadership skills and courage. However, she was tested when she had to face two arrogant kings who wanted to propose her to be their bride. Nyai Undang decided to reject both of them because of their bad personality and also because she was already engaged

with a man named Sangalang. This action then led to the death of both kings who could not accept the rejection. It was told that their deaths were due to shock and disbelief. In the other version of the story, the death was caused by a potion given by Nyai Undang. The princess then had to face the consequences. The people and the troops of the two kings did not accept the death of their kings and decided to attack the Kingdom of Kupang Island.

The material object in this study is a folklore originating from Kupang Island, Central Kalimantan, entitled *Nyai Undang Ratu Rupawan dari Pulau Kupang*. The formal object of this research is the masculinity studies. The data obtained were analyzed using the theory of masculinity. Data analysis was performed through qualitative descriptive techniques by interpreting the data found in *Nyai Undang Ratu Rupawan dari Pulau Kupang* folklore and linked to masculinity data.

DISCUSSION

This research aimed to explore female masculinity in the female protagonist of *Nyai Undang Ratu Rupawan dari Pulau Kupang*. This study also tried to discover how the masculinity in Nyai Undang is relevant to the masculinity that existed in Dayak Kapuas women in Central Kalimantan. This research finds out that Dayak women in Kalimantan also have similar masculine traits as in Nyai Undang, including leadership skills, courage, hard work, and assertiveness.

Some traits are considered masculine in society. According to Connell and Hofstede, masculinity refers to traits that are stereotypically attributed to men, are typified by the image of a strong, technically competent, ambitious, self-sufficient and authoritative leader who can maintain control of his emotions (Drydakis et al, 2018: 2). Considerable body of research shows that masculinities are not simply different but also subject to change (Connell dan Messerschmidt, 2005: 835). Masculinity is formed by culture, history, and geography, that a man must be masculine, heterosexual, powerful, and strong (Udasmoro, 2017: 206). However, masculinity that has existed in society is not by the masculinity that comes from men in the real world but is merely a model or representation of the fantasies and desires of society. For example, if the media presents muscular and strong men as the model of masculine men, then most people will accept the representation. In the end, masculinity does not represent a certain type of man, but rather how the man places

himself into a construction of masculinity in society. However, this does not always apply as masculinity is merely a construction in society. Masculinity cannot only be labeled as the men's possession. Women also have masculine traits but only the levels are different depends on the management of these qualities.

Physical appearance and body shape will be the first thing that might be thought of when talking about masculinity. Masculine bodies, in general, are more related to men's bodies as feminine bodies are mostly related to women's bodies. The socially prescribed body size and shape for girls and women is small and thin, whereas the socially prescribed body size and shape for boys and men is big and muscular (Thompson & Cafri in Calogero and Thompson, 2009: 16). Many body features are closely related to male masculinity, such as mustache, muscular body, and short hair. Masculinity is related to gender construction. Gender is a social practice that is applied to the social system of society. In gender processes, the everyday conduct of life is ordered in relation to a reproductive arena. This arena includes sexual arousal and intercourse, childbirth and infant care, bodily sex difference, and similarity. It is thus constituted by the materiality of bodies (Connell, 2000:58-59). In the construction of male ideology, women's bodies are seen as a means of satisfying men, objects for men or as image frames and have a minor role (Bourdieu in Udasmoro, 2017: 293). Women more often than men are depicted in an objectified manner, serving as decorative objects (Szymanski, 2011: 10). However, bodies in this view have moved beyond biology, and play a crucial role in how people construct their masculinity and how they behave/act in their social surroundings (Mankayi, 2008: 26). Women do not have to have a masculine body to be said to have masculine traits. Values like courage, assertiveness, independence, and heroism are also traits that make a woman masculine.

Women may have masculine traits and still have feminine traits as masculinity and femininity are neutral. Either of them can be dominant under certain conditions. For example, men will show their feminine traits like caring and gentle toward someone they love. Females also can show masculine traits like bravery and independence if they are under pressure. In Indonesian history, many female heroes directly fought on the battlefield. They dared to take up arms and fight against the colonizers during the Dutch colonization. Historians have recorded the existence of remarkable women as part of the armed struggle against colonialism. One may recall Cut Nyak Dien and Cut Meutia from

Aceh, the northern tip of Sumatra. In Java several names are known such as Roro Gusik who with her husband, Untung Suropati, started an insurgency movement. In Maluku there was Martha Christina Tiahua who took part in the revolution led by Pattimura, while from South Sulawesi we can find Emmy Saelan, who was actively involved in the insurgency movement led by Wolter Monginsidi (Saskia in Arivia and Subono, 2017: 7).

Most of the princesses in fairy tales all around the world depend on men to save them. Cinderella waited for her prince to save her from the evil stepmother and stepsisters. Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* was willing to sacrifice her life for a man. Snow White and Aurora from the *Sleeping Beauty* fairy tale waited helplessly to be saved by the prince from their long sleep. The same formula also can be found in Indonesian folklore. Many women in the story are positioned below men. They are described as weak, helpless, dependent, and subordinate. Women must obey and submit to male power. It is as if their lives are determined by men. In *Cindelaras* folktale from East Java, the empress was slandered and easily expelled from the kingdom and exiled to the forest. The same formula happens in Keong Emas and folktale from West Java, Lutung Kasarung. When a woman's life depends entirely on a man, she became merely an object where her life seems to be regulated and owned by the man. These princesses are described almost the same in every tale that it has become an archetype. Conversely, if women try to resist and fight as a form of resistance to male power, they will be punished and experience something bad. This can be found in *Roro Jonggrang*, a folktale from Central Java. When Princess Roro Jonggrang refused to obey and do what Bandung Bondowoso asked her which is to marry him, she got punished and turned into a stone.

Nyai Undang is the example of a woman who is not easily subject to male power. She knows her worth and what she wants. She broke the stereotypes of most princesses in Indonesian folklore and even fairy tale all around the world where most of the princesses are dependent on men. Nyai Undang proved herself to be a good leader who is strong, brave, and responsible for her people. Masculine traits that have always mostly been attached to men in folklore, can be found in Nyai Undang. If Puspitasari (Udasmoro, 2017: 294) says that women must get rid of their feminine side to be recognized as a leader but it is a different case with Nyai Undang. Having masculine traits does not mean that women will lose their femininity. Nyai Undang still can be a good leader and recognized by her people without having to get rid of her feminine traits. She behaves and speaks gently, she

also had great affection and empathy for the people around her and also her people. She also appears to be a beautiful woman who knows how to dress and act gracefully.

Nyai Undang is a Dayak Kapuas woman from Kupang Island, Central Kalimantan. In the folklore Nyai Undang Ratu Rupawan dari Pulau Kupang, Nyai Undang was described as a very beautiful woman. she had beautiful black hair and fair skin. It was told that her beauty was able to captivate the hearts of the kings from other kingdoms. In Indonesia, Dayak Kapuas women are also famous for their natural beauty.

Dayak women are known to have fair skin and dark black hair. Sometimes, this makes a Dayak woman considered as a Chinese descent because of the similar physical features (Riani 2019).

Dayak woman or *bawin* Dayak has an honorable position in the social order of the Dayak community. It can be seen on from the title Nyai given for the Dayak women. The title Nyai for the Dayak tribe has a different meaning with the Banjar tribe. In Banjar tradition, Nyai is a title given for the wife of the low aristocrat. For Dayak people, Nyai a title for a respectable and prominent woman (Sjamsuddin in Elbaar, Evi dan Misrita, 2017: 3). Furthermore, the term "bawi mandiri" for Dayak women gives a lot of explanation about gender equality among the Dayak community. There is no difference between men and women, either in the daily tasks in the household, social life, leadership, making a living and also in carrying out other duties and obligations (Jemi, 2013: 1).

Leadership Skill

Nyai Undang is a female protagonist who is different from most of the other female protagonists in Indonesian folklore. Ever since she was a little girl, she has already shown that she has some masculine traits. This was shown when she played with her friends. She likes to play games that most of the boys like to play which are the game of war and other traditional games which involve physical activity.

*Even though she is a girl, she did not hesitate to be the leader in the game of war...
... In the sports activity, like running and game with chopstick, Nyai Undang often became the champion among her friends, both her male and female friends (Kurniati, 2016: 4-5.)*

Her leadership skills were shown when she played with her friends. She always offered to be the leader of the game and started the game. Most of the games that they played were

always won by Nyai Undang. She also had high self-confidence which was needed to be a good leader. She was sportive and did not easily give up even when she lost the game.

"Who will be the warlord this time?" Asked Nyai's friend when they were playing in her backyard. "Let me be the warlord!" Said Nyai Undang to her friends.

... "It is okay for me to lose in this gasing game, but next time I have to win. I will make a better gasing next time," said Nyai Undang excitedly (Kurniati, 2016: 4-5).

After she grew up and became the princess who led the Kingdom of Kupang Island, Nyai Undang showed another leadership skill. It was when her kingdom was attacked by two other kingdoms. The two kingdoms who could not accept the death of their kings, King Sawang and King Nyaliwan, then allied to avenge and attack the Kingdom of Kupang Island. She used her leadership skills to make a strategy to face their attack. After she heard that her kingdom was going to be attacked, she immediately decided to build a fortress using ironwood. She asked for help from her brothers. This is because she was aware that a good leader should not be careless by thinking that she can do anything by herself without the help of others. Masculine trait was also shown by Nyai Undang when she learned that her army was outnumbered. But even though she knew that her troops lost in terms of numbers, she still tried and did not surrender. It was because of her strategy in the war and her ability to lead, and also with the help of her brothers, Nyai Undang won the war and save the Kingdom of Kupang Island.

The troops of Sawang Kingdom came to attack the Kupang Island from the south, while the troops of Nyaliwan Kingdom came to attack from the north. It was estimated that the number of enemy forces at that time was 10.000, far more than Nyai Undang troops (Kurniati, 2016: 56).

The unity and the solidarity of the troops, the people of the Kingdom of Kupang Island and also Nyai Undang's brothers were able to fight the enemy forces that were far more numerous (Kurniati, 2016: 56).

About Dayak women in Kalimantan, They have already shown their leadership skills since the Dutch colonial era. Dayak women have already participated in the big meetings or Gawi Hai in Dayak language. *Gawi Hai* in the Dayak community is generally associated with ceremonies or rituals related to death ceremony, marriage, and medication (Elbaar, Evi dan Misrita, 2017: 2). Although the number of female participants was smaller than

male participants, this was due to social, cultural and natural factors at that time. At that time it was still dangerous for women to travel because there was still slavery and the tradition of killing.

Dayak women have already shown their leadership skills for centuries ago. There are no restrictions on women becoming adat leaders in the Dayak tribe. Women can be actively involved in the adat council. Women can even serve as *damang*, the adat council head. The involvement of women in the adat council can be directly or indirectly. Directly, women can serve as *mantir* (adat council member), *damang* secretary, and *damang*. Indirectly, women can participate through their husbands or families who sit in the council as the adat elders by giving their support both energy and thought (Jemi et al, 2013: 3-4). One of the Dayak women who had ever chaired *Gawi Hai* is Nyai Rantai. She was trusted to chair the great meeting of *Tumbang Anoi* in 1984. She did not only become the chairperson for the women in this meeting but also for the men. It can be seen that women in the Dayak tribe hold important positions that they are recognized and deserve to be the leaders. In addition to being a leader in *Gawi Hai*, Dayak woman can also lead the religious ritual in the Dayak tribe. In Dayak religious rituals, there is not only an imam or male religious leader who is called *basir* but there is also a woman as the ritual leader who is called *balian* (Elbaar, Evi dan Misrita, 2017: 3-4).

Courage

Nyai Undang's courage was tested when she had to face two kings from other kingdoms who wanted to marry her. The first king was King Sawang who was also known as the King of the Sea. He was famous for his wealth and for having a strong trading fleet. He also owned large ships with strong and brave crews. His fleet was known as the ruler of the sea. King Sawang who was attracted to Nyai Undang's beauty then came to Pulau Kupang. He confidently proposed her by using his wealth and power. He believed that the Kupang Kingdom which was smaller than his kingdom and was led by a woman would be easily conquered. He thought that Nyai Undang would gladly accept his proposal as she might be afraid if she rejected him, her kingdom would be attacked. It can be seen that men tend to underestimate women's power.

“There is no way a beautiful princess likes war. She must be frightened if her delicate skin scratched even a little...” Raja Nyaliwan underestimated Nyai Undang over and over (Kurniati, 2016: 46).

As the princess who led the Kingdom of Kupang Island, Nyai Undang showed no fear at the threat of war from two kingdoms. Even when the two kingdoms finally launched an attack on her kingdom, she calmly devised a strategy and was finally able to defeat both of the kingdoms.

Dayak women are also famous for their courage and independence. They are also famous as a patient and diligent woman in making the living. They are also responsible and good at taking care of their families. Rahmaniar and Ajahari (2007: 99) in their research explained that working for Dayak women is a tradition that has taken root from time to time and is carried on for generations. They are also quite tenacious and patient in working and the natural conditions also seem not to make them give up so easily. This was proven since the morning before the sun was rise, many of them had left to the forest to work.

Courage was also shown by Dayak women at the time when Kalimantan was still practicing *kayau* culture (cutting off the head) and *habunu* (killing each other) and besides that, there was also slavery in which the victims were generally women (Elbaar, Evi dan Misrita, 2017: 3). It can be seen that women are not as free as now. However, it did not stop them to take a part in *Gawi Hai* although the numbers of female participants were far less than the men.

It was not easy to become a *balian* for Dayak woman as many steps in the treatment process needed to be done. The first step was to find out about the disease. The second step is medication. If the patient suffered from physical illness, then she will use traditional medication. If the patient suffered from metaphysical disease, a *balian* will chant the holy spell. A *balian* carried out all these processes by herself, including being a medium to be possessed by a spirit in the healing process (Elbaar, Evi dan Misrita, 2017: 3).

Assertiveness

In the folklore, it was told that Nyai Undang rejected two marriage proposals from King Sawang and King Nyaliwan. When both of the kings sent each of their messengers to propose Nyai Undang, she told the messengers to send a message that the kings need to come by themselves and propose her directly.

"...the intention to propose a princess was a very personal matter, between heart and heart, not between wealth and power. Send my message to your king that in the Kupang Island, the male eagle comes alone in search of his mate," Nyai Undang's voice was calm and authoritative (Kurniati, 2016: 26).

In the quotation above, it can be seen that proposing a Dayak woman is a very serious matter. By sending a messenger shows that a man is not serious and brave enough to marry the woman. A man must come by himself and express his feeling to propose the woman.

Nyai Undang did not easily accept the marriage proposal from men and she was not easily tempted by wealth and power. Nyai Undang flatly refused to marry King Sawang and King Nyaliwan as she knows that she will not be happy by marrying an arrogant king. She chose to marry Sangalang, a handsome, brave, and kind-hearted man.

Many steps are needed to be done by a man who wants to marry a Dayak woman. This is because the position of women in the Dayak tribe is very important. Therefore both Dayak women and her family will not easily hand over their daughter to a man to marry. According to Jemi et al (2013: 3), five steps must be taken by a man who wants to propose a Dayak woman. The first step is *Hakumbang Aub* or *Manjakab Duit* where a man comes to the woman's house, the second step is *Mamanggul* which is engagement, the third step is *Maja Misek* where the man gives money for the wedding, the fourth step is *Panganten Mandai* where the future bridegroom visited the parents of the bride in their house, the last step is *Pakaja Manantu* where the bride visited the parents of the bridegroom. Also, during this marriage proposal process, the man and his family must give around seventeen gifts for the woman and her family. It can be seen that Dayak women are not women who can be easily married and owned by men. In other words, Dayak women are highly respected.

CONCLUSION

Masculinity is a society's construction of several attributes that exist in a gender. Masculinity, in general, is closely related to the qualities that exist and belong to men. Otherwise, femininity is the quality that is constructed to be women's. However, in reality, masculinity does not only belong to men and neither does femininity to women.

In Indonesian folklore from Central Kalimantan, Nyai Undang Ratu Rupawan dari Pulau Kupang, the female protagonist has some traits that are considered as masculine. She

broke the typical princess stereotypes in Indonesian folklore. Some of the masculine traits that are found, including leadership skills, courage, and assertiveness. The spirit of leadership was shown by Nyai Undang since she was still a little girl. She also showed her leadership skills when she led her kingdom and strategized to fight against the other two kingdoms who were trying to take revenge. Although her troops were outnumbered, Nyai Undang did not give up and finally won the war. Courage and strength were also shown by Nyai Undang when she got the threat of war from two kingdoms. Nyai Undang was not afraid despite the threat that her kingdom would be attacked if she refused the marriage proposal from the two kings. Instead, she cleverly devised a plan to face the two kingdoms. Nyai Undang also showed assertiveness in the story. She firmly refused the marriage proposals of two arrogant kings as she knew her worth.

Masculinity is also found in Dayak women, Kalimantan. Leadership skills can be seen in the participation of women in the adat council and *Gawi Hai*. Women can even serve as *damang* or the adat council head and also hold other important positions, including *damang* secretary and *mantir*. Dayak women are also known for their courage and independence. Most of them are housewives who work to help their husbands. Dayak women were also brave as they still came to take a part in *Gawi Hai* even though it was dangerous for a woman to travel far at that time. Assertiveness is also shown by Dayak women as there are about five steps that needed to be done by a man who wants to marry a Dayak woman.

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