



Portraits of Women in Three Folklore of the Karo Tribe: Feminism Studies

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the portraits of women in three folk tales of the Karo region, namely *Batu Renggang*, *Turin-Turin Beru Rengga Kuning*, and *Danau Lau Kawar*, using a feminist approach. The analysis focuses on how women are portrayed in such folklore, including social roles, power, subordination, gender stereotypes, and resistance to patriarchal norms. The results show that women are often placed in subordinate roles limited by patriarchal social structures, but also have an agency to fight inequality through creative and courageous actions. This folklore not only reflects the cultural values of the Karo community but also serves as a medium to reflect on the dynamics of gender roles and social injustices experienced by women in traditional contexts.

Keywords: *Karo Folklore; Feminism, Women's Roles; Patriarchy; Local Culture*

Introduction

Folklore is part of the cultural heritage owned by a certain group of people or communities. This tradition has been passed down from generation to generation traditionally with various versions, either through oral delivery or using movements, gestures, or tools to remember (Endraswara, 2013:3). Folklore is a story that develops in society through oral transmission, and it is generally not known who its creator is. According to Danandjaja (2007:3-4), folklore is a form of oral literary work that originated and developed in traditional communities, with its spread tending to remain in a certain group for a long period of time, using repetitive expressions.

Folklore, which actually reflects the worldview of traditional society, must receive serious attention if we want to maintain these local wisdom values. Folklore refers to a group of people who have distinctive physical, social, and cultural characteristics, so that they can be distinguished from other groups (Pudentia, 1998). In literary studies, folklore is classified as part of folklore. If the folktale has been written in written form and put into a book, then the folktale is no longer just oral literature, but has been transformed into a written literary work, such as a novel, poetry anthology, or other literary works.

Efforts to document folklore basically aim to re-record the various values that live in the society concerned, the values that have shaped certain lifestyles and maintain the preservation of these values in

the midst of changing times. This record-keeping also serves as a tool to maintain identity and strengthen cultural resilience in the face of external challenges. In the context of Karo folklore, this recording is very important so that cultural heritage does not disappear with the change of generations. This process also provides an opportunity to review values that may begin to fade, as well as serve as self-reflection for the Karo community (Rasmion Tarigan, 1999:1).

For example, seven folktales from the Karo region collected in a manuscript serve as oral literature that not only represents Karo culture, but also provides insight into the Karo people's outlook on life and social norms. The seven stories are, *Batu Renggang*, *Turin-Turin Beru Rengga Kuning*, and *Danau Lau Kawar* (Rasmion Tarigan, 1999:2). The recording of these stories will be valuable documentation for further research, allowing us to gain a deeper understanding of the social and cultural functions contained in these stories.

In this context, linking these stories to a feminist approach allows us to delve further into how these values reflect the role of women and their place in Karo folklore. Feminism is a form of ideological criticism that opposes views that ignore the problem of inequality and injustice in the division of roles and social identities based on gender (Budianta, 2002). Meanwhile, feminist literary criticism refers to an approach in literary criticism that is rooted in feminist thought, which prioritizes justice in treating the existence of women, both as authors and in the context of literary works (Wiyatmi, 2012).

The role and position of women in the past can be understood through literary works that reveal the highlights of women in the past, including through folklore. The feminist approach can reveal how women in these stories are often placed in certain positions, either as victims, saviors, or as connectors between society and the rest of the world. In addition, feminism also provides a perspective to assess the extent to which these stories reinforce or challenge the gender stereotypes that exist in Karo society. Thus, these folklore are not only cultural reflections, but also a means to analyze the dynamics of power and gender roles in traditional life.

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, which aims to understand the phenomena experienced by the research subjects, such as their behavior, perception, motivation, and actions (Moleong, 2013: 5). In qualitative research, the collected data is analyzed objectively and then elaborated according to the research objectives. Through a feminist approach, the researcher will explore the images of female characters that have been identified in the collection of folklore, by examining the dialogue between female characters and other figures as well as the way of thinking of female characters in the collection of folklore books in the Karo region as a source of research data. The seven stories analyzed include *Batu Renggang*, *Turin-turin Beru Rengga Kuning*, and *Lake Lau Kawa Batu Renggang*, *Turin-Turin Beru Rengga Kuning*, and *Danau Lau Kawar*. In addition to primary data sources, secondary data sources used are books, journals, and other references related to portraits of women in folklore.

This research uses data in the form of phrases, words, and sentences that describe various forms of women's roles. The data collection process is carried out through recording and labeling. After that, the data that has been collected is selected and selected for analysis. The data analysis techniques used are inductive, namely analyzing the data gradually, starting from the existing facts to reaching a theory (Rohmadi & Nasucha, 2015). The data that has been collected is then selected and focused according to the research problem. After processing, the data is systematically arranged and presented in the form of symbols or words. Finally, the data that has been compiled is analyzed, interpreted, and presented in the form of conclusions.

Result and Discussion

Folklore is an important part of cultural heritage that reflects the social and cultural values of the community, including the role of women in the social structure. Through the feminist approach, we can examine how women are portrayed in folklore, as well as how their roles and positions are often influenced by patriarchal systems. In this result and discussion, the analysis will focus on the portraits of women in several Karo regional folklore, paying attention to aspects such as strength, agency, subordination, and dependence on men.

According to Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) provides a comprehensive understanding of the portrait of women in a patriarchal society. She argues that women are placed in subordinate positions, where their roles are shaped by social structures that limit their freedom and agency, often seen only as mothers or caregivers. De Beauvoir emphasized that women's identity is not something natural, but the result of social constructions that put women in traditional roles, creating gender stereotypes that limit their potential. However, she also acknowledged that there is room for women to fight the existing inequality. This approach can be used to analyze portraits of women in folklore, which often reflect gender inequality and resistance to patriarchal systems.

1. Batu Renggang

Table 1. Portrait of a Woman in Batu Renggang Folklore

Aspects	Feminism	Character	Action	Characteristic
Social Role	Women are forced to occupy domestic roles that hinder their freedom and self-development.	Mother in <i>Batu Renggang</i>	The mother worked in the fields and took care of the children despite living in poverty. She showed loyalty to her domestic role as a mother who had to take care of the household.	Being oppressed, depressed, and feeling overwhelmed with unappreciated family duties.
Strengths and Agencies	The mother has no agency to fight or change the situation that oppresses her, which is a reflection of inequality in patriarchy.	Mother in <i>Batu Renggang</i>	Taking the decision to end his life as a form of resignation to the inequality experienced.	Having no control over his personal life or family, he is forced to accept the existing conditions.
Subordination and Dependency	The patriarchal structure puts women in a position of dependence on men, both economically and emotionally.	Mother in <i>Batu Renggang</i>	Dependent on the husband for family life, although it plays a role in meeting the family's economic needs through work in the fields.	Burdened, forced to depend on the role of men, both economically and emotionally.
Stereotip Gender	Gender stereotypes limit women's space to thrive, placing them only in the role of mother and caregiver.	Mother in <i>Batu Renggang</i>	It is shown as a mother who always serves the needs of her family even though she is in difficulties in life.	It is seen as an object that only functions in a household role, not as an individual with other strengths and potentials.
Resistance to Patriarchy	The story shows women's inability to resist the patriarchal structures that limit them, illustrating acceptance of existing inequalities.	Mother in <i>Batu Renggang</i>	Not fighting inequality, giving in to the situation by summoning the Renggang Stone to swallow it.	Passive in the fight, accepting oppression without being able to change the situation.

The story of *Batu Renggang* is best analyzed using the Radical Feminism approach because it depicts women trapped in oppressive patriarchal structures. The mother in this story tries to survive and overcome various family problems, but ends up having no control over her own fate. His decision to end his life reflected his inability to resist the constant pressure he received. In radical feminism, this inequality is seen as a result of patriarchal dominance that limits women's rights, freedoms, and agency, forcing them to accept traditional roles that society has predetermined.

The story also shows how patriarchy reduces women to passive and dependent subjects, with no room to resist or change the structures that oppress them. The mother figure, despite having an important role in the family, is not empowered to determine her future. This situation reflects how women in patriarchy often lose the power and agency to fight for their rights. Through an analysis of radical feminism, the story highlights the injustices experienced by women and emphasizes the importance of resistance to social structures that constrain their freedom.

2. Turi-turin Batu Renggang Kuning

Table 2. Portrait of a Woman in Turin-Turin Folklore Beru Rengga Kuning

Aspects	Feminism	Character	Action	Characteristic
Social Role	Women are often placed in roles that require them to fulfill family responsibilities even in difficult situations.	Beru Renggang Kuning	Helping his mother, finding his brother's whereabouts, and working hard to save his brother from the clutches.	Intelligent, compassionate, hardworking, and responsible.
Strengthsand Agencies	It illustrates how women can have the power to change their fate despite being in a repressive patriarchal system.	Beru Renggang Kuning	Taking the initiative to go undercover and travel long distances to find and free his brother.	Be independent, determined, and have the courage to make important decisions.
Subordination and Dependency	Analyze how social constructions require women to conform to gender norms in order to gain power and acceptance.	Beru Rengga Kuning	Disguised as a man to gain honor and influence King Singkel.	Forced to adapt to restrictive social norms to gain power.
Stereotip Gender	Assess how women must overcome gender stereotypes that require them to behave within certain boundaries in order to achieve power or recognition.	Beru Renggang Kuning	Using disguise and strategy to get what he wants.	Limited by gender stereotypes, but managed to overcome with ingenuity and courage.
Resistance to Patriarchy	The resistance to patriarchy can be seen in the actions of Beru Rengga Kuning who fought against gender inequality by saving his brother, even though he was forced to go undercover.	Beru Renggang Kuning	Saving his brother by using strength and ingenuity, despite being trapped in a patriarchal system.	Intelligent, resilient, and able to change things through progressive actions.

The story of *Turin-Turin Beru Rengga Kuning* depicts the journey of a woman who faces various social and cultural barriers, but still shows strength, courage, and agency to change the fate of her family. Beru Rengga Kuning, despite being trapped in social norms that require women to fulfill domestic roles and limited in their space of movement, is able to overcome the existing inequalities. She is forced to disguise herself as a man in order to gain power and recognition in society, an act that reflects how women are often forced to conform to gender stereotypes and roles that society has determined.

Through the approach of Liberal Feminism and Social Feminism, this story emphasizes that women have the right to make big decisions in their lives, regardless of the social system that oppresses them. Beru Rengga Kuning not only tried to save her brother, but also fought to uphold justice despite having to adapt to patriarchal norms that limited women's freedom and autonomy. Her acts of empowerment, which included the courage to go undercover, fight for her brother's freedom, and demand justice in her social life, showed that women had agency to change the situation and fight inequality.

This story reveals the importance of women's struggle for their rights and freedoms in a society that often limits their roles. Although the women in this story are forced to adapt in unusual ways to gain their recognition and rights, they still show tremendous strength and potential. Therefore, this story gives the message that despite being trapped in a patriarchal structure, women can play an active role in changing their circumstances, fighting for freedom, and obtaining justice. The feminist approach applied here not only focuses on gender inequality, but also shows how women can find ways to be empowered despite being under limiting social and cultural pressures.

3. Lau Kawar Lake

Table 3. Portrait of a Woman in the Folklore of Danau Lau Kawar

Aspects	Feminism	Character	Action	Characteristic
Social Role	Women often bear a great responsibility for ensuring family harmony, although this role is often not appreciated by other family members.	Si Tungkir's Grandmother	Taking care of the house and staying loyal to the tradition, despite facing disrespectful treatment from his grandson.	Patient, loyal to responsibility, but neglected by his family.
Strengths and Agencies	Women in traditional cultures often channel their power through spiritual or symbolic paths to fight the injustices they face.	Si Tungkir's Grandmother	Perform prayers and rituals to ask for justice for the mistreatment of his family.	Be assertive, bold, and use traditional means to protest against injustice
Subordination and Dependency	The patriarchal structure puts women in a position of dependence on men, both economically and emotionally.	Mother in <i>Batu Renggang</i>	Dependent on the husband for family life, although it plays a role in meeting the family's economic needs through work in the fields.	Burdened, forced to depend on the role of men, both economically and emotionally.
Stereotip Gender	The stereotype of women as domestic caregivers makes them often considered less important than men who are more active in outdoor activities.	Si Tungkir's Grandmother	Stay patient and accept her role as a housekeeper despite the mistreatment.	They are seen as weak and only have a domestic role without being given space to get awards.
Resistance to Patriarchy	In the context of social feminism, this action shows that women, despite being marginalized, have the power to change the situation through significant means.	Si Tungkir's Grandmother	Perform rituals to punish families and society for their disobedient behavior.	Be firm, courageous, and use spiritual power as a form of rebellion against injustice.

The Story of the Origin of Danau Lau Kawar presents the reality of women in traditional societies who are often in a subordinate position but play an important role in maintaining the balance of family and tradition. The character of Si Tungkir's grandmother shows patience and responsibility in carrying out her duties as a household guard. However, he was treated unfairly by his grandson, Si Tungkir, who ate his food rations. This injustice reflects how women are often underestimated in social structures, even though they play a crucial role. The subordination and gender stereotypes experienced by grandmothers show inequality in the division of roles and respect for women in patriarchal environments.

Despite being in a weak position, Si Tungkir's grandmother showed a form of resistance through spiritual and symbolic power. With prayers and rituals, he pleaded for justice for the mistreatment he received, which led to the destruction of the village as a form of punishment. This action illustrates the power of women in fighting injustice in a unique and traditional way. Through the approach of *Social Feminism*, this story shows how women have a huge, albeit often overlooked, role in the family, and how they can use their power to oppose inequality and demand justice.

Conclusion

This study has analyzed the portraits of women in three Karo regional folklore, namely *Batu Renggang*, *Turin-Turin Beru Rengga Kuning*, and *Danau Lau Kawar*, using a feminist approach to explore the roles, powers, subordination, gender stereotypes, and resistance to patriarchal norms contained in these stories. Through this analysis, it can be seen how women in Karo folklore are often placed in limited positions by social and cultural norms, but also show their strength and agency in the face of inequality. Here are some of the main conclusions that can be drawn from each of the analyzed folklore.

1. Batu Renggang: This story depicts the helplessness of women trapped in subordinate roles in patriarchal structures. The mother character in this story shows an attempt to survive even though she has no control over her fate. Her decision to end her life reflects how patriarchal systems often limit women's freedom and agency, forcing them to accept traditional roles that society has predetermined.
2. Turin-Turin Beru Rengga Kuning: In this story, Beru Rengga Kuning shows how women, despite being trapped within the social norms that limit them, still have agency and power to change their fate. Despite being forced to disguise herself as a man to gain recognition, she managed to save her brother and fight for justice, against the gender inequality that existed in society.
3. The Origin of Lau Kawar Lake: Si Tungkir's grandmother, although marginalized in the social structure and often neglected, shows how women can fight injustice by using their spiritual power. Through prayers and rituals, the grandmother showed that marginalized women still have the potential to change the situation and demand justice despite being in a subordinate position.

Overall, these three folktales depict the portrait of women in the Karo community who are trapped in a patriarchal system but still have the ability to fight inequality. Despite being in domestic or marginalized roles, the women in these stories show strength and courage to fight for their rights, both through direct resistance and spiritual paths. This research provides insight into the importance of considering the role of women in folklore as a reflection of the social and cultural dynamics of society, as well as how these stories serve as a means to analyze the gender inequalities that still exist in traditional life.

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