# Exploring the Representation of Gender in the Folklores from Central Kalimantan

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Abstract: Folklores are frequently used as teaching media at schools. However, they are suspected to contain gender stereotypes. This study aims to examine the gender representation and gender stereotypes in 28 folklores from Central Kalimantan published in two books by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia in 1982 and 1995. Gender representation is explored through the roles and occurrence of the characters in the folklores, while four categories of gender stereotypes (personality traits, domestic behaviors, occupations, and physical appearances) are used to investigate the gender stereotypes attached to the male and female characters in the stories. The results show there is an imbalanced representation of male and female characters in Central Kalimantan folklores; from the total of 106 characters, male representation has almost twice in occurrence (60.4%) compared to the female one (39.6%). Mostly, males are the main characters in the stories having both positive or negative roles, and the females have only inferior roles. The gender stereotypes of patriarchy are found to be promoted through the characters' description in the folklores. Therefore, to represent the proper concept of gender equality through stories, a critical view is needed in selecting folklores as teaching media at schools.

Keywords: Folklores, gender representation, gender stereotype

## **INTRODUCTION**

Folklore has been a fundamental part of Indonesian culture for centuries. Each individual must have encountered or read at least one folklore in their lives. Kittilä (2020) defines folklore as the information of ancient people considered as part of history that has been inherited across the generations for years. Folklore, according to Danandja (2007), derives from the words *folk* which means society, and *lore* which means a tradition of folk, namely culture, so folklore is part of inherited culture by generation in different versions, either verbally or gestures. Saddhono & Erwinsyah (2018) stated that folklore is a tradition shared between a group of people who have similar traits (physical, social, and culture) that differs them from other groups. In other words, folklore is a traditional beliefs or knowledge (literature, art, law, behavior) of people who share at least one common characteristic that passed down through generations. Moreover, folklores represent the collective beliefs of the

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community as they provide moral lessons and ethical codes. For example, the story of Malin Kundang which has the message that children must be filial to their parents, or the story of Danau Toba which conveys the message that one should not break his promise.

One of the elements depicted in folklore is gender representation. Gender refers to the social views toward male and female regarding on their roles and the way they behave in their community, while representation is defined as the way certain object is introduced, portrayed, or illustrated through media. Therefore, gender representation refers to how the society perspective on male and female behaviors portrayed in media, specifically in literary work such as folklores. Many folklores describe how certain gender behaves in certain ways. For example, the characterizations of males in folklores are often depicted as power holders, influential person, or warriors; they have the authority to rule the kingdom or the family (Amri, 2021; Moran, 2019). Whereas female characters, on the other hand, are often depicted as the ladies in distress roles that need to be saved by male characters because they do not have the power to change their own fate (Berlianti, 2021; Ibrahim Al-Barazenji, 2015). Also, there are two categories of female characterization in folklores; the first is they are good women that have gentle, submissive, exceptionally beautiful traits, and the second is the bad women with the aggressive, wicked, and violent traits (Amri, 2021; Hidayati, 2019; Ibrahim Al-Barazenji, 2015). These phenomena occurred because folklores reflect the society's view and norms of their time.

Amri (2021) argues that the division of roles and duties between men and women in folklores leads society to preserve and perpetuate the expectation of how both genders behave in real-life situations. Men are expected to be brave, adventurous, emotionless, and independent, since they are prepared to be the provider or the breadwinner of the family. In contrast, women are encouraged to be nurturing, compliant, and emotional. This expectation socializes for a long time and directs society to stereotyping people based on their gender. Folklores often depict men and women in the stereotypical way. For instance, men are often depicted as providers, independent, and brave, while women are often portrayed as caregivers, dependent, and submissive. As folklores are passed down through generations, the stereotypes that attached to men and women in the folklores are also transmitted. It can be said that gender stereotypes still exist because of the contribution of folklores as the media to illustrate the perception of society and inherit it to the next generation.

Since the essential roles to convey different kinds of messages to the readers and listeners, especially in picturing and representing gender roles and position in society, folklores become interesting objects to be investigated. The discussion of this study ultimately will contribute in ongoing discussions about gender representation and equality in literature, media, and society as a whole. The investigation of gender representation in folklores is important since it affects the collective belief of society. The critical examining about gender challenges the gender stereotypes, reshaping perception about gender, and being a tool of educational value. To use folklores as a tool of educational value at schools, it needs careful selection and critical views so that they can expose or lead students to have a balance depiction of gender, so that students can shape their perspective in a more equitable way about gender. Besides, since there are only few studies that focus on literary work from Central Kalimantan, it is interesting to conduct a study about gender representation in Central

Kalimantan's folklores. The aims of the study are to describe how men and women are represented in such literary work which existed and still evolve in Central Kalimantan, and to examine whether gender stereotypes are found to be attached to the characters in those folklores.

## **METHOD**

The design of this study uses descriptive qualitative method. Source of the data is the collection of Central Kalimantan folklores entitled "Cerita Rakyat Daerah Kalimantan Tengah" published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1982 and 1995 which contain 28 stories, entitled *Sangomang dan Maha Raja*, *Sangkanak*, *Anak Luting*, *Sangomang Mencari Ayahnya*, *Raja Rum*, *Si Dadang dan Si Dudung*, *Darung Bawan*, *Sambung Maut*, *Ceritera Tumbung dan Ingei*, *Batu Mamben*, *Terjadinya Danau Entin*, *Terjadinya Desa Tambak Bajay*, *Berasak Berdarah*, *Ceritera Mangku Amat Sangen dan Nyai Jaya Sangian*, *Asal Mula Burung Elang*, *Meninggalnya Raja Bunu*, *Kutukan Raja Pulau Mintin*, *Pulau Malam*, *Tunggal Hanjungan*, *Mambang*, *Lahirnya Bandar Pandung Ueisigi*, *Patung Abeh*, *Pulau Hanut dan Pulau Lepeh*, *Asal Mula Ijambe Paju Empat*, *Asal Mula Padi*, *Raja Darung Kawin*, *Mengapa Didis Menjadi Obat*, and *Murlaf dan Punoi*.

The analysis of gender representation is done by identifying and classifying the occurrences of male and female characters as well as their roles and position in the stories. The characters then are coded and classified into male named-active character (MAC), male named-non active character (MBC), male unnamed-non active character (MCC), female named-active character (FAC), female named-non active character (FBC), and female unnamed-non active character (FCC). The examples of the coded male and female characters based on their occurrences and roles in the folklores are in the folklore of *Sangomang dan Maha Raja*, there are Sangomang and Maharaja as the male named-active characters (MAC), Langgir and Bawi Jahawen as the females named-non active characters (FBC), and Ibu and Putri Bungsu as the female unnamed-non active characters (FCC); in the folklore of *Raja Rum*, the characters identified are Raja Rum and Sabangak as the male named-active character (FAC), and Ratu and Ibu as the female unnamed-non active characters (FCC).

While the gender stereotypes found in the folklores are analyzed based on four categories, such as Personality Traits (PT), Domestic Behaviors (DB), Occupations (O), and Physical Appearance (PA) (Parenthood, 2018). Personality traits include society's expectations toward women's characteristics, such as passive, submissive, dependent, soft-spoken, obedient, and powerless. In contrast, men are identified by characteristics such as having independence, dominance, brave, and adventurer. In domestic section, women are expected to taking care of the children and home duties, while men take care of finances, and do the home repairs. As for their roles or occupations, men are often portrayed as leaders and rulers, while women play inferior characters, only work on domestic sphere, or as companions of the male characters. For physical appearance, women are often depicted as feminine characters who are beautiful, have long hair, have perfect body shape, fair skin, and wearing dresses and makeup. Men, on the other hand, are often portrayed as the

masculine figures of being tall, strong and muscular, wearing pants and having short hairstyles.

## RESULTS

The results of the study are presented into two parts; the first part is about the gender representation of male and female characters in 28 Central Kalimantan folklores, and the second part is the gender stereotypes found to be promoted in the folklores.

The result of analysis on gender representation in the folklores shows that there are 106 characters of male and female identified based on their occurrences, roles, and position in the folklores. The detail accumulation of male and female characters' occurrences in the folklores is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Accumulation of Gender Representation in Folklores

Characters	Male	Female
Named-active character	38	14
Named-non active character	22	11
Unnamed-non active character	4	17
Total: 106	64	42

Table 1 reveals that out of 106 characters in the stories, there are more male characters occurred than the female ones. The folklores have 64 male characters consisting of 38 MACs, 22 MBCs, and 4 MCCs; and the female characters found in the folklores are 42 consisting of 14 FACs, 11 FBCs, and 17 FCCs. To have clearer description of gender representation from the folklores, each result of male and female occurrence identification is converted into percentages, and the description is shown in Figure 1.

#### Gender Representation in Folklore from Central Kalimantan

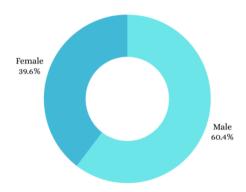


Figure 1: The Gender Representation in Folklores from Central Kalimantan

Figure 1 shows the representation of male and female characters in Central Kalimantan folklores; from the total of 106 characters, male representation has almost twice

in occurrence (60.4%) compared to the female one (39.6%). Thus, it can be concluded that the representation of male and female characters in the folklores is imbalanced.

In analyzing the gender stereotypes that are attached to the characters of male and female, four categories of stereotypes are used. The four categories are Personality Traits (PT), Domestic Behavior (DB), Occupations (O), and Physical Appearance (PA). Each character is examined through those four categories embedded to the male or female character. The accumulation of gender stereotype analysis results shows that out of 106 characters of male and female in the folklores, there are found 58 characters that promote 62 cases of gender stereotypes; and the results of analysis are presented in Table 2.

Gender	Stereotypes			— Total cases	
	РТ	DB	0	PA	— Total cases
Female	10	3	3	3	19
Male	26	2	13	2	43
Total	36	5	16	5	62

Table 2: The Accumulation of Gender Stereotype Cases in Central Kalimantan Folklores

Table 2 reveals that most stereotypes are referred to the male characters. There are 43 cases of male stereotyping found in the folklores, and the rest is female stereotypes with 19 cases. In the male stereotyping, it was found 26 personality traits (PT) attached to the male characters, such as independent, brave, respected, wise, strong, powerful, protective, adventurous, possessive, controller, etc.; followed by 13 occupations (O) such as being a king/leader/ruler, warrior, adventurer, gambler, trader, murderer, shaman, drunkard, hunter, etc.; then followed by 2 descriptions of domestic behavior (DB), such as being the breadwinner, the respected leader and/or the decision maker; and 2 description of male physical appearance, such as having muscular, being good looking or handsome. As for stereotypes that are attached to the female characters, most cases consist of 10 depictions of personality traits (PT), such as kind, gentle, obedient, dependent, submissive, amicable, softspoken, firm, etc.; followed by 3 description of domestic behavior (DB), such as doing the chores, taking care children, and obeying the decision made by the male family members; then 3 types of female occupations (O) described in the folklores, such as being a shaman, or having other roles as the companion of the male characters (a housewife, queen, princess, etc.); and 3 descriptions of female physical appearance (PA), such as beautiful, having long hair, and being slim/skinny.

The examples of the stereotyping are found in the folklore of *Sangomang dan Maha Raja* in which it is described that Maharaja, as the ruler of a kingdom, is powerful but not wise, whereas Sangomang is depicted as a strong, smart, and responsible man for his family. As a king, Maharaja forced Sangomang to tell him the secret of obtaining a golden casket, and he tried to do the same trick to get it, unfortunately because of his foolishness, he failed getting it. The depiction of these two male active characters promotes gender stereotypes, in which Maharaja as the king or ruler, is more powerful than others, forces others to obey what he wants to do or follow his instructions. Meanwhile, Sangomang is being stereotyped to have the personality traits as the common attributes possessed by heroic figures (strong, smart, and responsible), although it was told in the story that he often did tricky deeds or manipulated others for his own advantages. The other female characters in the folklore are not found to be clearly described, in which it can be said that female roles in the story of *Sangomang dan Maha Raja* are inferior and only being the complement for the male characters.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the study on gender representation in folklores from Central Kalimantan reveal that the characters of male are more represented than female. The biggest portion of male representation belongs to the named-active characters (MAC). This is because from 28 stories, there are 25 stories that have males as the main character, and the dominance of male representation can also be seen from the titles of the folklores which show the use of many males' names such as Sangomang and Maharaja, Sangkanak, Dadang and Dudung, Tumbung, Raja Bunu, Raja Pulau Mintin, Raja Darung, and so forth. In the folklores, the male characters have positive and negative representation in accordance to their roles in the stories. Lutters (2006) stated that in the needs of the story, the positive roles are commonly represented by the protagonist, and the negative roles are done by the antagonist. The examples of protagonists or positive characters are Bandar in the folklore of Tunggal Hanjungan, and Ambah Kuroweno in Asal Mula Ijambe di Paju Empat. Both males namedactive characters possess double roles as the king and warrior who are depicted as strong, passionate, and heroic figures. On the other hand, there are male characters who are depicted having negative roles, such as Tumbung in the story of Cerita Tumbung dan Ingei, Lumuh Sumpit in Pulau Hanaut dan Pulau Lepeh, and Naga in the story of Kutukan Raja Pulau Mintin. In those stories, Tumbung was portrayed as a possessive husband who caused trouble when the sacred ritual was held in the village because he was furious at his wife who violated his order, Lumuh Sumpit was an unqualified trader and unreliable man, and Naga was a drunkard.

The second most represented gender in the folklore are male named-non active characters (MBC). Even though being non-active characters that are not much being told and described, some of these characters have an impact on the dynamic of the story. For example, a male character named Nanyu Manulum in the story of *Terjadinya Danau Enteen*, who embodied into a big bear in order to help Siung Mangkuwungan (the male named-active character) to solve his problems. There are also the male unnamed-non active characters (MCC) as the minor characters in the folklores but have function as the key ingredient in the arc of the main character's development, such as Raja in *Sangkanak* story, who encouraged Sangkanak to go on a journey to solve the puzzle of the writing he wrote himself. There is also *Ayah tiri* in *Si Dadang dan Si Dudung* story, who made Dadang and Dudung run away from home to avoid their abusive stepfather, so that intentionally or not, their stepfather has led them having a better life and a beautiful adventure.

In female representation, the most represented characters are female unnamed-non active characters (FCC). The roles of these unnamed characters are minor, commonly they are mentioned as the mother, wife, daughter, grandmother, or queen in the stories. Compared

to the male most represented characters, female most represented characters are the side characters that barely contribute to the storyline. Their characters just exist as a complement. The second most represented female characters are named-active characters (FAC). They depict various roles such as a princess who needs to be saved like Tuan Puteri in the folklore of Raja Rum; a woman who stand her ground such as Ingei in Tumbung dan Ingei, and Sumbu Kurung Putok Bulau in the story of *Tunggal Hanjungan*; a woman who has magical power or a shaman like Nyai Jaya Sangiang in Ceritera Mangku Amat Sangen dan Nyai Jaya Sangiang; a wife such as Darange in the story of Pulau Malah and Punoi in Murlaw and Punoi; a queen like Lumuh Lenggana in Pulau Hanaut dan Pulau Lepeh; a poor widow such as Ibu Abeh in the folklore of Patung Abeh; and lastly a beautiful woman like Puney Tataw Andraw in the story of Terjadinya Danau Enteen. Then the least represented characters are female named-non active characters (FBC) that played roles as the companions for the main character. Their names are often mentioned, but they rarely have conversation. The examples are Langgir in the story of Sangomang dan Maha Raja, Bawi Nyai in Tunggal Hanjungan, and Nyai Jata Kayangan in the story of Mambang. Those female characters share the similar role that is being a wife as the companion of the main characters depicted as their husbands in the stories.

Overall, from the analysis of gender representation discussed previously, it can be said that Central Kalimantan folklores contain unequal representation of male and female. Most of the folklores from Central Kalimantan are male-centered. Males are placed as superior characters while females possess inferior roles. In most stories, men are allowed to choose the path they desire. The character that possesses the role of an adventurer is one of the examples. Most male characters are also portrayed as people with authority toward something or someone. In this case, it is their roles as the kings or leaders. Women, on the other hand, most of their characters are only passive characters that barely contribute to the storyline. There is only one female character being told to have the power to stand up for herself. She was Nyai Jaya Sangiang in the story of Ceritera Mangku Amat Sangen dan Nyai Java Sangiang who had the ability to heal people by using her magical power in which her ability as a shaman was extraordinary at the time as it was usually owned only by the males. While most female characters are depicted as weak, dependent, and submissive, Nyai Jaya Sangiang represents power and equality. Actually, according to the results of study conducted by Wiyatmi (2023), there are also several women figures in Indonesian folklores, one of them was Nyai Undang from Central Kalimantan, who were being told to have equal existence, role, and position as men; they not only had the right in the domestic sector but also in the public sphere. However, there are only few of such female characters found in the stories.

Compared to the previous study conducted by Surya (2022) that investigates the similarities and differences between Torajanese and English folklores, similar results to the present study are found. Both studies show that females are being the inferior roles in the stories, and often depicted as the passive characters who have no power over themselves, while males are mostly being the main characters and portrayed as being brave, heroic, strong, smart, wise, independence, dominance who have roles as the power holders, the decision makers, the controllers, and the heroes in the stories. The same results are found as

well in the studies conducted by Amri (2021), Berlianti (2021), Ibrahim Al-Barazenji (2015), Moran (2019), and Rhubido, et.al. (2024). The results of those studies also show the imbalance representation of gender in the folklores, in which eventually this unequal gender representation may cause perpetuation of gender stereotypes.

Gender stereotypes influence the conceptualization of men and women. They represent the standard that should be followed by men and women based on society's views. Zhao (2022) states that gender stereotype is as harmful as discrimination since it restricts one to act according to a certain way. In school settings, gender stereotypes may affect students' performance and academic decision. For example, male students are often believed that they have more ability to lead than female students. Female students are too emotional so they are considered as less appropriate candidate to lead her friends and make decision. Another example is male students are often encouraged to take mathematics and sciences because they have better understanding in those subjects. It makes them stay away from language and arts as these subjects are considered as less masculine. In the end, they might ignore their potentials and interests and choose what is considered appropriate for their gender which can hinder their academic performance.

Based on the analysis results of the present study, gender stereotypes are also promoted in Central Kalimantan folklores. It is found that most stories depict male's dominance and female's submission. Men are portrayed as strong, brave, and independent characters, whereas women are presented as weak, submissive, dependent, and judged by their appearances. Also, women only occupy domestic roles, while men have access to become the leaders or rulers. In line with this finding, Atqi (2022) revealed that she found the gender bias in the Children's Literature Kingdom Tale Collections. The finding shows the domestication of women and men's domination in the public sector. Women possess the role of the caregiver of the family, specifically in the kitchen area. Women's cooking ability is considered a natural family value, which implies that women are born with it. Amri (2021) also revealed the gender issues in two folklores of Tempiq Empiq from West Nusa Tenggara, and Mencari Ilmu Berumah Tangga from South Kalimantan. From the two stories, it is found that men have higher positions than women in society. Women belong to private areas or houses and are restricted to work in public areas. She also stated that the patriarchal system is deeply rooted in the Banjar and Sasak tribes which placed men in superior positions. Women become the weak party which makes them easily to be controlled, manipulated, and silenced.

Since many years ago, the patriarchal system has been existed not only in Banjar and Sasak tribes but also in other parts of Indonesia, and so has the literary works including the folklores. Thus, the connection between folklores and the patriarchal ideology is undeniable since folklores reflect the collective belief of the society in that time. The patriarchal ideology can also be found in the folklores from Central Kalimantan. It can be seen from the characterization of men and women in the stories in which men often occupy powerful roles, and have the chance to choose something they desire. It indicates that they are free subjects. Women, on the other hand, are not free to make decision and do what they want. They are encouraged to work only in a certain area, the domestic sphere, as if they are told not to pursue something that does not belong to them. They become the passive party who only act as recipients. The depiction of women as the oppressed and subordinate party perpetuates the idea that women are weak, passive, and only being men's companions. Their identity and quality depend on their relationship with men, not on their own. Women also become the subject of objectification. According to Amala & Ekasiswanto (2013), stereotype is a form of objectification. The depiction of women as passive characters can strengthen patriarchal ideology and limit women's roles in the society (Ibrahim Al-Barazenji, 2015). The imbalance representation of gender on educational tools may also resulting a significant impact on students' perspective toward gender role and their self-worth (Atqi, 2022; Casey et al., 2021; Harris et al., 2020).

In spite of the analysis results indicate that folklores from Central Kalimantan are deeply rooted in the patriarchal system which reflect the society's perspective toward the gender position and roles at that time, currently, the condition of gender in Indonesia is progressing although reaching gender equality is still a challenge. Women and men nowadays have the same opportunity to receive education and work in any field based on their interests and potential. Women also have better access to health services. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics which investigates the gender inequality index, it is stated that each dimension studied (reproductive health, empowerment, and labor markets) shows progress. In the last 5 years, the gender inequality index has decreased from 0.499 to 0.447 which indicates there has been progress in gender equality in Indonesia. In other words, it can also be said that folklores are not always in line with the ideal values that exist in society as society today is progressing toward reaching gender equality.

In education field, folklores are often utilized as teaching materials. In relation to gender representation and stereotypes, it is crucial to select folklores to be used as teaching materials at schools. To help students understand gender roles and social history, it is suggested to use folklores that consist of equal representation of men and women as teaching materials at schools. It does not necessarily mean that folklores which promote gender stereotypes should be avoided to be used as learning materials since by learning them, it is important for the younger generation to have the touch of their culture and heritage. They can also discover valuable insights about the ancestors' or another culture's values, beliefs, history, practices and customs. In addition to develop students' critical thinking skills, the folklore that consists of stereotypes must be embraced for its cultural reference yet be criticized for its gender inequality aspect. Teachers should be the ones who encourage students for having critical views about gender problems so that the younger generation can grasp the proper concept of gender equality.

## CONCLUSION

Central Kalimantan folklores are stories from different parts in Central Kalimantan which tell about simple characters that are passed down mostly orally from generation to generation. The stories are intended not only to entertain readers, but also to talk about life lesson as well as good versus evil. They can also be used to understand society's views toward gender, and the roles and expectations that are assigned to men and women at the time. Exploring gender representation in Central Kalimantan folklores reveals a mix traditional values and progressive ideas. These ancient narratives reflect society's views on men and women while shaping the understanding of equality; they emphasize the resilience of traditional gender roles, the importance of female spiritual and cultural contributions, the tensions between patriarchal norms and female agency, and the need for balanced perspectives on gender. By studying folklores, we learn from the past and find ways to promote fairness and inclusivity today. Folklores remain relevant, they inspire us to challenge outdated norms and foster a more equitable society. As nowadays, the society is progressing toward reaching gender equality.

For further researches related to folklores and gender representation, it is suggested to analyze the gender representation in other Indonesian folklores, or study the use of folklores in the field of education to promote students' cultural awareness.

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