

Voices Unheard: Exploring female representation in Sundanese folk stories through transitivity and semantic code

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ABSTRACT

Folk stories provide a valuable insight into the cultural values and lifestyle of a society, as has been proven by a lot of previous research. However, most research on folk stories focus only on the morals and/or traditions in the stories. Linguistic studies on folk stories have also only focused on the surface text; not much research has been done to reveal the underlying messages on how the text perceived females and their roles in society. This study aims to reveal female representation in two popular Sundanese folk stories, “*Sasakala Talaga Warna*” (“The Legend of the Lake of Color”) and “*Sasakala Sangkuriang*” (“The Legend of Sangkuriang”), using Halliday’s transitivity analysis and Barthes’ semantic code. It combines transitivity analysis, focusing on participant roles in material processes, with an analysis of semantic codes. The findings reveal that female characters are positioned as agents in material processes, suggesting agency and power. Their representation in the stories is revealed through the semantic code—the code of connotation shows how their agency is limited to domestic settings or in conjunction with male characters. This means that the agency represents traditional female roles and power dynamics. Therefore, it perpetuates female stereotypes. This study contributes to the literature by providing an in-depth analysis of the Sundanese folk stories’ representation of female characters, which has been largely overlooked in previous research.

Keywords: Barthes’ semantic code; female representation; folk stories; Sundanese; transitivity

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INTRODUCTION

Female representations in literature, including in folk stories, has been a subject of scholarly interest across different periods and cultures. Folk stories, as a form of traditional literature, provide a unique insight to explore the cultural values, norms, and traditions of a society (Billah et al., 2022; Dundes, 1969; Ihueze, 2015; Juansah et al., 2021). Every ethnic group in Indonesia is known for its rich cultural heritage with its own unique traditional music, craft, dances, and folk stories—one of which is the Sundanese. Sundanese folk stories include a variety of legends, which is called “*sasakala*” in the

local language. The “*sasakala*” serves not only as vehicles for entertainment but also as vessels for imparting Sundanese traditions and moral values to the younger generation.

Despite the intriguing potential of Indonesian folk stories as a source of data for linguistic analysis, there has been a lack of attention given to gender representation in these stories in past studies, specifically in terms of female representation and their agency. While some studies have focused on micro analyses, such as morphology and lexical density (e.g., Gilbas, 2018; Sujatna et al., 2021; Yanti & Zabadi, 2016), others (Novianti, 2022;

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Restika et al., 2021; Silalahi et al., 2021; Yoedo & Mustofa, 2022) have explored the potential of using folk stories for translation analysis and as a tool for teaching critical thinking and moral values. Nevertheless, there remains a significant gap in research regarding the representation of gender in Indonesian folk stories, especially when approached through the lens of Hallidayan (1994) systemic functional linguistics and Barthesian (1974) narrative codes. Understanding gender representation in folk stories is crucial as folk stories often reflect the ideologies of a culture, which offer insight into historical and contemporary gender roles and relations; it also promotes gender equality by identifying and challenging stereotypes. Furthermore, as folk stories can influence media representations, studying gender in folk stories helps in understanding broader patterns regarding gender portrayal across various forms of media and its impact on audiences. Moreover, as gender representation in folk stories remains an underexplored area, incorporating analytical frameworks like systemic functional linguistics and narrative codes provides new methodologies and perspectives. Using diverse theoretical frameworks to study gender in folk stories encourages interdisciplinary collaboration and enriches both folk stories and gender studies.

This study aims to address this gap by analyzing two well-known Sundanese folk stories, "*Sasakala Talaga Warna*" ("The Legend of the Lake of Color") and "*Sasakala Sangkuriang*" ("The Legend of Sangkuriang"). These two folk stories are selected as they are included in the list of the most popular folk stories in West Java by the Directorate of Secondary Schools, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2023) and also other websites (Hanifah, 2023; Iswara, 2022). "*Sasakala Talaga Warna*" tells the story of a spoiled princess who did not appreciate her birthday present – a colorful bead necklace. As she tore it apart, her mother cried and the tears turned into a lake, which was colorful as it reflected the colors of the beads. Meanwhile, "*Sasakala Sangkuriang*" is a story about the origin of Mount Tangkuban Perahu, where a young man's rage turns a boat into an upside-down mountain. These two legends provide a unique insight into the cultural values and beliefs of the Sundanese community, particularly regarding female representations.

To achieve a comprehensive analysis of the representation of female in these tales, we analyze the text at its micro and macro levels—combining transitivity analysis, which examines the actions and relationships of characters at a micro level, with Barthes' semantic code, which provides a macro-level framework for analyzing how cultural values and ideologies are embedded in a text. The research focused on participant role analysis in the material

processes of the text, exploring the relationships between the participants in the text and their roles and positions using transitivity analysis. Additionally, Barthes' semantic code was used to analyze the ideological messages and cultural norms represented in the text.

By employing these tools, this research seeks to shed light on the representation of Sundanese women in folk stories and uncovering the values and beliefs the stories reflect. The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of the portrayal of Sundanese women in folk stories and their associated cultural values. It is important to note that this research is part of a dissertation aiming to provide a comprehensive examination of Sundanese folk stories and its significance in understanding female representation. The analysis of the selected folk stories in this present research presents a crucial component of this broader investigation.

Some prior studies have examined female representation in Indonesian folk stories, shedding light on various aspects of gender within these narratives. For instance, Masykuroh and Fatimah (2019) conducted a study on femininity in twenty Indonesian folk stories, employing content analysis and Halliday's transitivity. Their exploration indicates that femininity attributed to girls in Indonesian folk stories revolves around beauty, virtue, and passivity, often stereotyping girls as conforming to traditional ideals. Furthermore, their analysis shows how narratives in Indonesian folk stories reward adherence to what is considered 'proper' feminine roles while penalizing deviations, yet also offer forgiveness for those who fall short. Drawing from this, the present research aims to delve deeper into how gender is linguistically depicted within Sundanese narrative and examine the linguistic patterns that shape female representations in folk stories.

Similarly, Hidayati (2019) uses Barthes' narrative codes to reveal the portrayal of women and their roles in relationships in folk stories. Her findings reveal a prevalent narrative that depicts women solely concerning themselves in domestic affairs, or as stepmothers, spirits, animals, and even objects of curses, with physical beauty being the defining characteristics. Building upon this research, we aim to identify recurring themes and motifs that contribute to the construction of gender identities within Sundanese tales.

Additionally, Andalas and Qur'ani (2019) explored gender construction in Indonesian folk stories through content analysis and myth, which highlights societal expectations and the reinforcement of patriarchal values. Inspired by this, our research seeks to contextualize Sundanese folk stories within broader cultural dynamics as well as elucidate how gender expectations are reflected in Sundanese folk stories.

While these studies offer valuable insights, they share some commonalities that highlight a potential research gap. Notably, they use a lot of data sources in their analysis (between 15 and 25 texts of folk stories taken randomly based on popularity from different regions of Indonesia); this emphasizes the importance of ample data for better generalization of findings. However, in exploring gender representation within specific cultural contexts, the representativeness of the data becomes crucial. Culture has a significant role in influencing attitudes, beliefs, and expectations related to gender roles, identities, and behaviors (Crawford & Unger, 2004). Therefore, when a study uses data from various cultures to analyze gender representation, it can be quite problematic. Additionally, the use of translated data can introduce a translation bias and may pose a challenge in accurately capturing the nuances of gender representation.

Addressing this gap, our study focuses on Sundanese folk stories, providing a thorough examination within a specific cultural context to enhance the depth of our findings.

In addition to the studies mentioned above, it is important to consider the theoretical frameworks and analytical tools utilized in the analysis of female representation in Indonesian folk stories. Previous studies, such as the research conducted by Masykuroh and Fatimah (2019) and Hidayati (2019), employed content analysis, Halliday's transitivity, and Barthes' narrative codes to examine the linguistic construction and portrayal of femininity in Indonesian folk stories. These approaches offer valuable insights into the textual representations of female roles and stereotypes.

However, to provide a more comprehensive analysis, our research incorporates additional theoretical frameworks. For the micro-level analysis, we focus on the material processes as the main tool for examining the actions of characters and their social functions in the narratives. Gerot and Wignell (1995) highlight the significance of material processes in narrative texts, as they focus on the 'outer' experiences and events undertaken by the characters. Additionally, Toolan (2013) emphasizes the role of participants in material processes in indicating how they are portrayed in a text. By categorizing actors and targets, as referred to by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) as "actor" and "objective", respectively, we can discern the power dynamics and roles assigned to different human participants, such as agents and medium-targets (medium-t).

For macro-level analysis, our research draws on Barthes' writerly codes, which complement the micro-level analysis. Barthes (1974) posits that the writerly text allows readers to interpret aspects of the story as they see fit and incorporate their own meanings, defying the narrative's chronological order. Among the three writerly codes, namely the

semantic code (SEM), the symbolic method (SYM), and the cultural or referential code (REF), our study focuses on the semantic code. This code extracts additional or connotative meanings from descriptions of locations, people, and objects, enabling a deeper exploration of the narrative's meaning.

By employing these theoretical frameworks and analytical tools, we aim to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of female representation in Sundanese folk stories. Our research focuses on two legends from the Sundanese culture, allowing for an in-depth examination within a specific cultural context. Moreover, by utilizing the Sundanese language versions of the stories, we aim to eliminate potential translation bias. The combined analysis of transitivity and semiotics theories at both micro and macro levels will shed light on the linguistic and cultural dimensions of female representation, contributing to a deeper understanding of female representation in Indonesian folk stories.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to systematically capture the essence of the data, specifically focusing on depicting female representation in the two selected folk stories. Following Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach, which emphasizes extended or intense contact with the data to uncover preconceptions regarding the topics at hand through a process of deep attentiveness, it is believed that interpretivism is the most suitable approach for this study as the approach focuses on understanding and interpreting individual perspectives and experiences. Thus, it aligns with the aim of exploring the subjective meanings attributed to the portrayal of female characters within the cultural context of the folk stories.

In collecting the data, the present study employs a combination of transitivity analysis and Barthes' codes to analyze female representations in the Sundanese folk stories "*Sasakala Talaga Warna*" and "*Sasakala Sangkuriang*" rewritten by R. Satjadibrata (2012). These two tales were specifically selected for their rich portrayal of female characters, who play significant roles in driving the narrative forward, thus offering ample material for in-depth analysis. Moreover, both stories hold a prominent position in West Java's folk stories tradition since they are widely recognized and cherished by the local community; this underscores their cultural significance. In addition, their origins in the Sundanese language and the stories being written by the same author provide a consistent linguistic and narrative framework for comparative analysis.

The data collection process involves dividing the stories into clauses and assigning process types and participant role types to each clause. For ease of reference, the code name #STW is used for the first story, while #SS is used for the second story. Additionally, CL serves as an abbreviation for “clause”, followed by the number that indicates the clause's position in the story.

The analysis process consists of two main stages: the micro-level analysis and the macro-level analysis. The micro-level analysis focuses on the participants, processes, and circumstances involved in the material processes of the text. Initially, the grammatical structure of the text is analyzed to identify clauses that represent material processes. Each clause is assigned a code name using the format #STW CL[number] or #SS CL[number], depending on the story it belongs to. The participants involved in the material processes, particularly the female characters, are identified—and their roles within the material processes are assessed.

The macro-level analysis involves investigating the connotative and symbolic meanings of the text using Barthes' codes. Signs in the text that convey meanings beyond their literal interpretation are identified. The presence of Barthes' five codes, with special emphasis on the three writerly codes (semantic, symbolic, and cultural codes), is examined. The findings are then interpreted based on the identified codes, and the representation of the female characters is assessed in terms of their connotative and symbolic meanings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion section aims to present and interpret the findings of our analysis, which used two complementary approaches: Halliday's transitivity analysis for the micro-level and Barthes' narrative codes for the macro-level analysis of two Sundanese legends. In this section, we will discuss the results of our analysis concerning the research questions, as well as highlight the similarities and differences between the two stories in terms of female representations. We aim to provide a more nuanced understanding of how females are constructed and represented in Sundanese folk stories and to contribute to the wider discussion on female representation in Indonesian folk stories. The discussion section is divided into two subsections for ease of reading: (1) the participant role analysis for both legends and (2) the writerly codes analysis.

Female Representation through Material Processes Analysis

The analysis of material processes provides a valuable picture of the actions and agency of female

characters in the Sundanese legends. By examining not only the verbs associated with material processes but also the roles of participants in the clauses, we gain a deeper understanding of the roles and behaviors attributed to these characters. Eggins (2004) and Chaerunnisah (2020) have emphasized the importance of examining the verbs associated with material processes and the roles of participants in understanding the agency and behaviors attributed to the participants in a text; when participants appear as the do-er of an action, they are more powerful, and when they appear more frequently in a text, they are given more opportunities to voice their actions. By building upon these existing scholarly perspectives, our analysis delves deeper into the portrayal of women in “*Sasakala Talaga Warna*” and “*Sasakala Sangkuriang*”. In this subsection, we will explore the prevalence of material processes, highlight specific examples of these processes, and discuss their implications for the representation of women in Sundanese folk stories.

The initial identification of clauses shows that *Sasakala Talaga Warna* has a total of 138 clauses, with 77 of them including female participants. Of these, 39 clauses involve verbs related to the material processes. Similarly, *Sasakala Sangkuriang* has 141 clauses, with 81 of them including female participants. Out of these, 53 clauses involve material process verbs. This indicates that the material processes are the most dominant type of process involving female participants in both stories (see Table 1); it is in line with Gerot and Wignell's (1995) note on the lexicogrammatical features of a narrative text.

Early findings reveal the pivotal role of female characters in both stories. In fact, they appear in more than 50% of the text in both stories (i.e., 55.7% in *Sasakala Talaga Warna* and 57.4% in *Sasakala Sangkuriang*). The significance occurrence of female characters as participants in the clauses shows the deliberate inclusion of female perspectives by the author. This attests to the recognition of the importance of female characters in storytelling.

In addition, the fact that the female characters in both stories are portrayed as active participants in material processes is also noteworthy. Material process verbs, which encompasses physical actions and “outer” experiences (i.e., experiences that are tangible) like running, jumping or cooking, highlight the dynamic agency of these characters. This portrayal suggests that female characters in these narratives are not mere bystanders or passive objects but rather active agents capable of instigating changes within their environment—at least, this is what is found in the initial process of transitivity analysis.

Table 1
Process Types in Clauses with Female Participants

No	Process Types	Frequency of Occurrence	
		<i>Sasakala Talaga Warna</i>	<i>Sasakala Sangkuriang</i>
1.	Material	39	54
2.	Mental:		
	-Emotive	7	5
	-Cognitive	1	3
	-Perceptive	5	0
	-Desiderative	0	2
3.	Behavioral	4	2
4.	Verbal	5	10
5.	Existential	1	0
6.	Relational:		
	- Attributive	13	2
	- Identifying	8	5
	Total	77	81

To illustrate the significance of material processes in portraying female characters, we are delving into some specific examples. In “*Sasakala Talaga Warna*”, we encounter instances where female characters are actively engaged in actions that shape the narrative. For example, in the following clauses, the queen named Nyimas Purbamanah is depicted as being active in ensuring the prosperity of her people:

“*Sering pisan ieu raja jeung ratu ngalanglang lembur. Ngariksa bisi aya rahayat nu teu dahar. ... Mun pareng mendakan rahayat nu teu dahar, gancang dikirim dahareun. Mung manggihan rahayat nu gering gancang diubaran.*” (#STW CL3-5, 8-11).

(Translation: “It was often that the king and queen **went** around the village. [The king and queen] **checked** if there were people who couldn’t eat. ... If [the king and queen] **found** people who didn’t eat, [these people] would quickly be **sent** food. If [the king and queen] **found** people who were sick, [they] would quickly be **given medicine**”)

Here, the material process verbs “*ngalanglang*” (went), “*ngariksa*” (checked), “*mendakan*” (found), “*dikirim*” (sent), and “*diubaran*” (given medicine) signify Nyimas Purbamanah’s active involvement in the government in conjunction with her husband within the story. It means that the king trusts the queen to be involved in taking care of their people instead of acting on his own as the ruler of the country. This portrayal highlights her agency and confidence, positioning her as a capable and influential character.

Similarly, in “*Sasakala Sangkuriang*” we encounter another female character, Dayang Sumbi, who is portrayed as an active agent in various material processes. One notable example is her being the decision-maker of her own fate in marriage:

“*Malah loba pisan raja jeung pangeran nu datang ngalamar. Ngan saurang ge eweuh nu ditarima ku Dayang Sumbi. Antukna, para raja teh parasea jeung baturna. Dayang Sumbi menta disingkurkeun ka hiji pasir.*” (#SS CL 27-31).

(Translation: “In fact, there were a lot of kings and princes who came to propose [to Dayang Sumbi]. However, none of them were **accepted** by Dayang Sumbi. Eventually, the kings fought [over Dayang Sumbi] with one another. Dayang Sumbi [then] **asked to be sent away** to a hill.”)

In these instances, the material process verbs “*ditarima*” (accepted) and “*menta disingkurkeun*” (asked to be sent away) are written in their passive forms but nonetheless emphasize Dayang Sumbi’s authority on deciding what she (does not) want(s) despite the consequences – that the kings and princes fought among themselves over her.

These examples illustrate how material processes contribute to the active agency and multifaceted roles assigned to female characters in both legends. In addition, the depiction of female characters actively engaged in material processes aligns with the findings of previous studies. In Rohmana and Ernawati’s (2014) analysis of the female performativity in Sundanese traditional ritual, it was observed that females often exhibited agency in their participation in material processes (in this context, i.e., traditional celebration of harvest). Another study by Iskandar (2012) also suggests that females in ancient Sundanese poems and idioms are placed in the position of importance, or the “*dunia atas*” (“upper world). These findings resonate with the portrayals of Nyimas Purbamanah and Dayang Sumbi in our analysis, where they take purposeful actions and shape the narrative through their involvement in material processes.

Next, we will further analyze the classification of female participants found within the material processes, focusing on their specific roles as agents, recipients, and mediums. This examination will show the distribution of power and agency among female characters in the stories, revealing the nuances of their representation within the context of Sundanese folk stories.

The analysis of participant roles reveals the distribution of roles assumed by female characters in both stories (see Table 2). Among the participant

roles, the role of female characters as agents is the most prominent one in both stories, indicating their power and agency. The agent role, associated with individuals who actively perform purposeful actions, signifies control over their decisions and

behaviors (Toolan, 2013). The predominance of the agent role for female characters suggests that they do not only play an active role in the narrative but also have significant power within the story world.

Table 2
Roles of Female Characters

No	Participant Roles	Number of Occurrences	
		<i>Sasakala Talaga Warna</i>	<i>Sasakala Sangkuriang</i>
1.	Agent	27	25
2.	Medium-i	4	8
3.	Recipient	2	3
4.	Medium-t	6	18
Total		39	54

One striking similarity between the two legends is the high level of activity and authority displayed by the female characters. In both “*Sasakala Talaga Warna*” and “*Sasakala Sangkuriang*”, the frequency of the role of Agent assigned to female characters is notable. The high number of occurrences of agent roles observed in both legends emphasizes the proactive and influential nature of female characters. This indicates that women in both stories are portrayed as active agents who take purposeful actions and exert control over their decisions and behaviors. This shared characteristic showcases a departure from traditional gender stereotypes and illustrates their capacity to shape events and drive the story forward.

For example, in “*Sasakala Talaga Warna*”, the character of Nyimas Purbamanah embodies the role of an agent in several instances. #STW CL26, “*Hé Nyi Mas, mugi Nyai ngidinan ka Kakang*” (translation: “Hey, Nyi Mas, I hope [you] allow [me]”), is one example that shows the power that the queen has in terms of her relationship with her husband the king. In this context, the king asks for Nyimas Purbamanah’s permission to go on a journey to the forest. While this action may initially seem to align with traditional domestic roles, it holds significant power dynamics. This instance indicates that Nyimas Purbamanah has decision-making authority over her husband, thus showing that she is not merely a passive figure in the household but as an active participant who shapes events beyond the domestic sphere.

Similarly, in “*Sasakala Sangkuriang*”, Dayang Sumbi exercises agency not only when she decides to reject the marriage proposals (#SS CL27-31 above) but also when she takes matters into her own hands to ensure that Sangkuriang, her son, may not succeed in his pursuit to marry her, as can be seen in the following clauses:

“*Dayang Sumbi ngadua tuluy meberkeun boeh bodas di belah wetan. ... Tuluy nakolan lisung niru-niru nu keur nutu isuk-isuk.*” (#SS CL120-121, 123-124).

(Translation: “Dayang Sumbi **prayed** then **spread** some white grains in the east. ... Then [she] **hit** them with mortars to imitate people hitting grains [to make rice] in the morning”)

Although her activity here involves tasks associated with a female’s duty around the house – cultivating rice by spreading grains and using mortars – it does not only mean that she is doing a womanly duty to make rice. Instead, her action demonstrates not only her agency in thwarting Sangkuriang’s desires but also her resourcefulness and determination to take control of her destiny.

Thus, these examples carry deeper implications regarding the female characters’ agency and power dynamics in the stories in spite of appearing merely as menial domestic tasks. In other words, these female characters are shown to be active characters who influence the storyline and exert their power within the narrative.

Despite the similarity in their active roles, there are distinct differences in the nature of female agency and their relationships with male characters in the two legends. In “*Sasakala Talaga Warna*”, the female characters are predominantly influenced by the males around them. Their actions are often portrayed not as a standalone action but together with the actions performed by male characters (see example #STW CL3-5, 8-11 above), implying a certain degree of subordination or dependency.

On the other hand, in “*Sasakala Sangkuriang*”, the female characters, namely Dayang Sumbi and Céléng Wayung Hyang (who was a goddess in the form of a pig and was Dayang Sumbi’s mother), primarily act for themselves as agents. They take independent actions and make decisions that directly influence the storyline. However, despite their agency, they tend to be positioned as the recipients or objects of the actions performed by the male characters surrounding them, as can be seen from the frequency of their role as medium-t in Table 2 above). For instance, at the beginning of the story, Céléng Wayung Hyang becomes pregnant after drinking the urine of Radén Sungging Perbangkara. This shows that although the action of “drinking” is

a deliberate and autonomous action by Céling Wayung Hyang, the “water” she drinks is the result of an action performed by a male character – which in return also makes her pregnant. Another example is when Dayang Sumbi asked to be sent away to the hills—in spite of this being what she wants, she still has to ask permission of the king, her father, before she is allowed to leave the palace. It means that she does not have full autonomy of her own actions as well as suggesting that the authority of the male

characters persists even when the female characters are active agents, potentially indicating power dynamics within the narrative. This finding resounds the findings of a previous study on the discourse of the “female body” in an ancient Sundanese literary work (Isnendes & Haerudin, 2011), which mention that while women are important in the matter of productivity and people relation, they are still put on the sideline and are subordinate to men.

Table 3
Examples of Different Participant Roles in Two Folklore

Title	Clauses	Participant Roles
“Sasakala Talaga Warna”	1. “ <i>abdi nuju ngandeg tos opat sasih.</i> ” (CL 59) (Translation: “ I am now four-month pregnant.”)	Medium-i
	2. “...[<i>Nyi Putri</i>] kalah wani nyépak ka nu nyampeurkeun téh.” (CL 102) (Translation: “...[Nyi Putri] kicks [the person] who approached daringly instead.”)	Agent
	3. “ <i>Kacaturkeun putra anu dipikapalay téh tos lahir sarta dijenenganan Putri Gilang Rinukmi.</i> ” (CL 71-72) (Translation: “It is told that the baby [they] expected was born and they named her Putri Gilang Rinukmi.”)	Medium-t
“Sasakala Sangkuriang”	1. “ <i>Éta orok téh kapanggih ku raja, ...</i> ” (CL 21) (Translation: “ The baby was found by the king, ...”)	Medium-t
	2. “ <i>Manéhna ogé tapa bari mutih.</i> ” (CL 83) (Translation: “ She also meditated while fasting [only eating colorless and tasteless food].”)	Medium-i

Overall, while the female characters in both legends exhibit significant agency and active participation, the nature of their agency differs, as can be seen from the examples in Table 3 above. These distinctions reveal layers in the portrayal of female characters and highlight the varied dynamics of power and authority within the two narratives, especially with the presence of other participant roles—which illustrates how female characters are diversely engaged in material processes. These roles indicate their involvement as mediators, recipients of actions, and carriers of information—respectively. The inclusion of these roles provides complexity to the portrayal, showcasing their intricate contributions to the dynamics of the narrative.

By looking at how the role of female characters are assigned in the two stories, we learn about their power and agency within the context of Sundanese folk stories. The dominant role as agent shows how actively they participate in the storyline, and in this case, challenge traditional notions of female passivity and subordination in Sundanese culture (Yuliawati & Ekawati, 2023; Zulaikha & Purwaningsih, 2019).

Female Representation through Barthes’ Semantic Code

Having explored the legends through the lens of material processes and participant roles, we now shift our focus to a macro-level analysis using Barthes’ writerly codes, focusing on the semantic code (SEM). The SEM analysis allows us to see the

connotative meaning based on the description provided within the text itself, providing deeper insights into the portrayal of female characters in Sundanese folk stories.

Our SEM analysis reveals a deeper picture of female characters when the material processes analysis only highlighted their active roles and agency. Despite their active engagement, we find that the actions of female characters are often depicted in conjunction with male characters, suggesting a lack of autonomy in their actions. One example of this is in “Sasakala Talaga Warna” when the queen goes to wake her daughter for the birthday party. Even though this has nothing to do with the government in which the king is the main ruler, the queen still goes with the king to get their child out of bed and into the hall where the party is held:

“*Tungtungna mah rama sareng ibuna anu ngageuingkeun Nyi Putri téh bari dikaléng ku duaan dicandak ka tempat pésta sina nampi hadiah.*” (#STW CL 103-105)

(Translation: “In the end it was **her father and mother** who woke [her] up and took her to the party so she could receive her presents.”)

Furthermore, we observe that female characters frequently engage in basic human needs or actions that reinforce traditional female stereotypes, such as being submissive (e.g., Nyimas Purbamanah obeyed her husband who announced that their daughter should be taken care of without anyone laying a hand on her or even rebuking her at

all cost), emotional (e.g., Dayang Sumbi could not contain her anger and hitting her son that caused him to run away from home), or fulfilling domestic roles such as cooking and taking care of the households..

By examining the verbs used to represent female characters in both stories, we uncover a common pattern where their agency within material processes is juxtaposed with actions that align with traditional portrayals of women as domestic characters confined to household chores (REF) despite belonging to different narrative traditions and depict distinct stories. This analysis raises important questions about the implications of these portrayals, including the reinforcement of traditional female roles and the potential impact on gender equality and social perceptions.

We will now discuss the semantic analysis of the narratives to explore the connotations, meanings, and broader implications of the portrayal of female characters within the context of Sundanese folk stories.

A pattern is seen to emerge in the portrayal of female characters in both stories when they are not involved in actions in conjunction with the male characters. While female characters are shown to have authority when they do their actions together with a male character, as can be seen from the examples in the previous subsection, clauses which portray them alone often portray these characters as being preoccupied with basic human needs or doing actions that reinforce traditional stereotypes of women. For instance, several clauses that depict them consuming food or drink, and attending to personal grooming (Datesman et al., 2014; Peter, 2010). This emphasis on physiological and emotional aspects rather than active participation contributes to the limited scope of their agency within the narrative. Moreover, many of the actions assigned to female characters align with traditional female roles prevalent in patriarchal societies, like in the culture of the Sundanese. For instance, the activity in clause #SS CL33 below shows Dayang Sumbi weaving – an activity is commonly assigned to women in many cultures (Inanna et al., 2020; Laplonge, 2019). Other recurring activities attributed to women can also be seen in the sample clauses below – such as rearing children (e.g., #STW CL 74) and displaying affections (e.g., #STW CL54; #SS CL99-100). These depictions reinforce the notion that women are primarily associated with domesticity and caretaking (Qingli & Ying, 2020), suggesting the confinement of their roles within the private sphere.

#STW CL54

“Nyi Mas Purbamanah ngagabrug [Sang Raja].”
(Translation: “Nyi Mas Purbamanah hugged [the King]”)

#STW CL74

“Ti barang gubrag ieu putri téh dirorok sarta diogo [ku Sang Ratu].”
(Translation: “From birth this princess was cared for and spoiled by the Queen.”)

#SS CL33

“Dina hiji mangsa Dayang Sumbi keur nenun,”
(Translation: “One day, Dayang Sumbi was weaving.”)

#SS CL99-100

“Dina hiji mangsa, nalika Sangkuriang keur léléndéan, ku Dayang Sumbi disisiran buukna.”
(Translation: “One day, when Sangkuriang was lying [on Dayang Sumbi’s lap], Dayang Sumbi was combing his hair.”)

By consistently attributing these activities to female characters, the narratives perpetuate the idea that women’s roles are limited to domestic tasks and reinforce societal expectations regarding gender roles (Crawford & Unger, 2004). These portrayals emphasize the notion that women’s worth and agency lie primarily within the domestic realm, further marginalizing their participation in broader societal and public domains when they are to act alone. In other words, the portrayals imply that women may actively participate in society when they do activities with a man. Our findings corroborate with some other previous research on gender representation in Indonesian folk stories and literature. Scholars such as Rosiana (2013), Nurhayati (2019), Istianah (2020), and Harjito (2021) have also noted the occurrence of female stereotypes and traditional portrayals of women in various cultural narratives. It is important to recognize the potential impact of these portrayals on gender equality and social perceptions, as they can contribute to the reinforcement of gender norms and hinder progress towards achieving more egalitarian societies.

These legends serve as cultural artifacts that shape collective beliefs, values, and perceptions; therefore, understanding these portrayals and the implications behind them allow us to examine Sundanese culture in a way. The consistent portrayal of female characters in limited roles and the reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes in these legends reflect how Sundanese society sees women: as belonging in the private domain of the home to take care of their families. This analysis invites us to question and challenge these prevalent gender dynamics, fostering a more inclusive and more equitable representation of women in narratives like rewritten legends or other children stories by making use of material processes and constructive semantic codes to show more empowered female characters.

CONCLUSION

This research explored female representations in two renowned Sundanese folk stories, utilizing Halliday's transitivity analysis and Barthes' semantic code. Through a comprehensive qualitative examination of the original Sundanese language versions, this study provided a deeper understanding of the portrayal of women in Sundanese folk stories, a topic that has been overlooked in previous research.

The findings revealed that female characters in the folk stories are positioned as agents in material processes, indicative of their agency and power within the narratives. However, the analysis of Barthes' semantic code uncovered that their agency is limited to domestic settings or in conjunction with male characters, perpetuating gender stereotypes. This suggests the influence of cultural norms and values on the representation of women in Sundanese folk stories.

The research makes a significant contribution to the literature by delving into the nuances of female representation in Sundanese folk stories, providing valuable insights into the cultural values and beliefs of the Sundanese community. By adopting a combined analysis of transitivity and semantic codes, the study offers a holistic perspective on the portrayal of female characters in folk stories, enriching the understanding of gender roles and relationships in traditional narratives.

Furthermore, this study addresses the dearth of attention given to the representation of women in Indonesian folk stories from a linguistic perspective. Previous studies on female representation in folk stories have primarily focused on content analysis and narrative codes, often employing translated data from various cultures. By using Sundanese data and conducting micro and macro-level analyses through transitivity and Barthes' codes, respectively, this research ensures a more culturally specific and comprehensive approach to understanding female representations in Indonesian folk stories.

The significance of this research lies not only in its contribution to the field of linguistics but also in its potential to shed light on broader societal issues. By unveiling the nuanced portrayal of women in traditional narratives, this study calls attention to the perpetuation of female stereotypes within Sundanese culture. As folk stories often play a role in shaping collective identities and beliefs, these insights can serve as a steppingstone towards fostering more equitable and empowering gender representations in Sundanese society.

In conclusion, our research contributes to the scholarly discourse on female representation in literature and folk stories. The research's multidimensional analysis brings to the forefront the agency and limitations of female characters, offering valuable insights into the intersections of linguistics, culture, and gender. By advocating for a more

nuanced understanding of female representation, this study invites further research in this area, aiming to promote inclusivity, gender equality, and cultural appreciation in the representation of women in folk stories and beyond.

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