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# Queens in Folklores as Representation of Indonesian Feminism

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## ABSTRACT

The view that the patriarchic system has dominated human life is untrue. Evidence has been found that, in the history of human civilization, women have been raised to the royal throne and ruled a kingdom. The existence of a queen has also been found in folklore in Indonesia. Using the qualitative research design with the perspectives of feminist literary criticism, the present study analyzes four folklore titles with a queen as the main character, such as: (1) *The Legend of the Hermitage of Queen Kalinyamat*, (2) *Queen Kencanawungu*, (3) *Madam Undang Beautiful Queen from Kupang Island*, and (4) *The Legend of Princess Rengganis*. Findings show no gender bias in the transfer of the royal inheritance or in choosing the successor of the royal throne in some kingdoms of regions in Indonesia. The crowning of a new ruler is more based on kinship and leadership qualities. This research also shows that before the emergence and development of feminism in the West, it has been existed in the archipelago, which can be called Indonesian feminism, i.e, feminism that gave women rights and voices not only in the domestic sphere but also in the public sphere, as a queen whose power was recognized.

**Keywords:** *feminism, folklore, gender, queen, kingdom*

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## INTRODUCTION

Several women figures became the queen (woman king) of several kingdoms in some regions of Indonesia, long before Megawati Sukarnoputri was the fifth President of the Republic of Indonesia (2001-2004). These were, among others, Queen Shima (Kalingga, 674-695), Tribuana Tunggadewi (Majapahit, 1328-1350), and Dewi Suhita (Majapahit, 1429-1447). In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Aceh was consecutively ruled by four queens for 60 years, namely Safiatuddin Tajul Alam (1641-1675), Sultanah Nurul Alam Safiatuddin Syah (1675-1678), Sultanah Inayat Zaiatuddin Syah (1678-1688), and Sultanah Kamalatuddin Syah (1688-1699) (Sa'adah, 2007: 220). However, these names have often been omitted in the patriarchic system of Indonesian history.

Women becoming queens are also found in

Indonesian folklore, such as Queen Kalinyamat (Jepara, Middle Java), Queen Kencanawungu (Dewi Suhita) (Majapahit, East Java), and Madam Undang (Central Kalimantan). However, few studies examine the existence of women as queens in Indonesia. Research by Nastiti (2009), Hayati et al. (2000), Darini (2019), and Munandar (2015) are several studies that reveal the existence of women who became queens in the Old Javanese era. Nastiti (2009) examines the presence of three queens in ancient Javanese history who ruled between the eighth and fifteenth centuries AD, namely Īsanatunggawijaya (Ancient Mataram Kingdom), Śrī Tribhuwanattunggadewī Jayawiśṅwarddhanī, and Dewi Suhitā (Majapahit Kingdom). However, Nastiti does not examine Queen Shima, who ruled the Kalingga Kingdom in Java in the seventh century

(Djafar, 2012). (Sulityanto, 2019), and (Hayati, et.al., 2000), and Supriyono (2013) examine the existence of Queen Kalinyamat as queen in Jepara in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Darini (2019) and Munandar (2015) discuss the role of women in the public sphere in the Majapahit Empire; they are Gayatri, Tribuanatungga Dewi, and Queen Suhita.

Besides being narrated in several historical texts, the existence of queens is also described in folklore. Several folklores initially presented as oral traditions, have recently been written and published e.g., (1) *Legend of Queen Kalinyamat Hermitage* (Istiana & et. al., 2017), (2) *Queen Rara Kencanawungu* (Sayekti, 2010), (3) *Madame Undang Queen Beautiful from Kupang Island* (Kurniati, 2016), and (4) *The Legend of Queen Rengganis* (Sungkowati, 2010).

The present paper aims to identify and explain women figures who become queens in Indonesian folklore. The discussion is expected to reveal the positions and roles of women in Indonesian folklore that can be regarded as the expression of the collective realities and awareness of the community members where the folklore is born. Dundes (2007) states that folklore is a mirror of culture. Meanwhile, Danandjaya (2007) defined folklore as a work of old literature that lives within a society whose transmission is done orally from generation to generation and distinguish into three kinds: myths, legends, and tale. The myth tells about the lives of Gods and Goddesses or Semi-gods and Goddesses. For instance, *the Queen of the South Sea* tells about the life and power of the genies' queen in the South Sea. The legend narrates about extraordinary characters which related to the founding of a place e.g., *The Legend of Dewi Rengganis* tells about yang Mount Argopura, East Java, ruled by Princess Rengganis, who has human and genie troops. Tales, meanwhile, are related to folk stories about humans and animals that are believed to be fictitious, such as the tale of *Bawang Merah dan Bawang Putih* (Danandjaya, 2007).

Almost all ethnicities in Indonesia have folklore that documents the collective life thoughts of the society. As folk literature, besides using the indigenous language, folklore is also narrated orally. To preserve and document folklore from all localities in Indonesia, since 2016, the Institute of the Language Development and Advocation (Language Institute), the Ministry of Education and Culture, has conducted a rewriting and printing project of folklore that have been written

by language researchers and supervisors from the Language Institute. From this endeavor, a minimum of 165 folklore pieces are rewritten and ready to be printed for all schools in Indonesia. Besides, members of the society can find in Suyitman's books entitled *Cerpen dan Dongeng: Minuman Nusantara* (2017). As intellectual work that incorporates history and life values of the community life, folklore can sustain and challenge the status quo that runs in a society (Nenola, 1999). Folklore can also express and strengthen acceptance of society's dominant norms, concepts, and power structures. On the other hand, folklore can also challenge dominant concept authorities held by power holders or present alternatives (Nenola, 1999).

The study used the qualitative research design to identify and explain four folklore titles with women figures as queens in defined localities in Indonesia. Data sources were folklore that had been rewritten and published by the chronicles about the queen. Through a purposive random sampling, four folklore were obtained: (1) *The Legend of Queen Kalinyamat Hermitage*, (2) *Her Majesty Queen Kencanawungu*, (3) *Madam Undang Beautiful Queen from Kupang Island*, and (4) *The Legend of Princess Rengganis*. The focus of the study was put on the understanding of the identities and positions of the female figures in these folklores as queens who ruled a territory. The research data were analyzed using the critical perspectives of feminist literature trying to understand the identities and positions of women from the point of view of the women themselves, which would challenge the main flaw of the non-feminist views that tended to undermine women's activities and thoughts, or present interpretations from men's point of views in the society or of the male researchers (Reinharz, 2005; Showalter, 1985). Through feminist analyses, possibilities would be uncovered concerning the strength of the patriarchic cultures that form the images of men and women, the relations between the two, or combat towards patriarchic domination reflected in literary works (Reinharz, 2005).

Feminist literary criticism develops from preceding literary criticism trends formed by traditional patriarchal, patriarchal voices (Ruthven, 1986: 6). Through feminist literary criticism, attempts will be dedicated to identifying the injustice and oppression of women in literary works (Humm, 1986: 22). As one of the traits of feminist research, efforts will be attempted to find information that is absent

about certain women and about women in general and identify the eradication and elimination of women in society (Bell, 2016: 1; Reinharz, 2005). Through feminist literary criticism, attempts will be sought to uncover categories apt to be universal and male-specific so that submerged women's experiences can be raised to the surface (Bell, 2016: 1; Reinharz, 2005: 220-221).

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Among four queens in the analyzed folklore, Queen Kalinyamat, Queen Kencanawungu, and Madam Undang are queens of kingdoms that exist in reality and are recorded in historical data and archeology, based on historical figures since their names and kingdoms are real. Meanwhile, the existence of Queen Rengganis, as sovereign of Mount Argopura in East Java, is believed to be true by the proponent members of the society. Most people think that their existences are between fact and fiction. Queen Regganis is believed to be the sovereign of the humans and genies in Argopura Kingdom, located in Mount Argopura, East Java.

### Queens in Indonesian Folklores Represent Gender Equality in Royal Government

Queen Kalinyamat is a historical figure whose name is often excluded in Indonesian history, which tends to be colonialist and patriarchic. In the *Babad Tanah Djawi*, to the present believed to be one of the historiographical sources of family trees of Java kings. The name Queen Kalinyamat is found in the narration of male main characters such as Arya Penangsang (Olthof, 2017). *Babad Tanah Djawi* is a work of Ngabehi Kertapradja, which is presented to Olthof, given a preface by J. J. Ras, and published in the Latin alphabet by Foris Publications Dordrecht Holland/ Providence, USA, in 1874 (Lestari, 2017). Besides, there is no book or folklore collection mentions her name as a heading title. In the *Collection of Middle Java Folklore*, her study appears in a subtitle, the *Legend of the Hermitage of Queen Kalinyamat* (Istiana & et. al., 2017: 89-92). It means that her position and role are not considered necessary in the two folklore titles.

In the *Legend of the Hermitage of Queen Kalinyamat*, the family tree and role of the queen are narrated as sovereign of the Jepara Kingdom. Her story pivots on the journey to find a place to meditate

after her husband and brother are murdered by Arya Penangsang.

“To fulfill her intention, Queen Kalinyamat left on a journey to find a place for meditation. She departed in a group led by Ki Suta Mangunjaya. They walked for days till they arrived at a mountain with five peaks. The place was named *Puncak Pandawa*. In time, it changed to *Pucang Pandawa*. They took a rest in that place. Ki Suta Mangunjaya ordered two of his best soldiers to explore and find a good place for meditation.... Queen Kalinyamat liked the place and decided to do her meditation there. She put away all her jewelry in a cave nearby. She was willing to surrender all her wealth to whoever found it. The wealth that she left in the cave was called Donorojo. In time, the place was called Drojo Village...”

(Istiana & et. al., 2017: 69)

The quotation narrates the origins of the names of places that Queen Kalinyamat passes on her way to find a hermitage. The legend tells more of her spiritual feats than leadership at this stage. From a feminist's view, the storyteller does not seem interested in underlying her ventures' leadership aspect. Compared to Kartini, who struggles with ideas of women's emancipation in education as expressed through her letter collection *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang*, Kalinyamat has been in advance in going out from the chain of patriarchy.

In *Babad Tanah Jawi*, the leadership of Queen Kalinyamat is also not emphasized. The narration related to her case is the main antagonist character Arya Penangsang, who has caused the death of her husband and brother. Queen Kalinyamat is narrated as the third of five children of Sultan Demak, one of them is Prince Prawata who killed by Arya Penangsang. Sunan Kudus also wants Sultan Pajang's death, considered an obstacle to Java land (Olthof, 2017: 63). *Babad Tanah Jawi* emphasizes more of Queen Kalinyamat's courage to encounter the injustice committed by Sunan Kudus, who is thought to be responsible for the death of her husband and brother. She prefers to leave the Palace to meditate, asking for God's consolation to defeat Arya Penangsang, till ultimately, she receives help from Sultan Pajang, backed by Ki Pemanahan and Ki Penjawi (Olthof, 2017).

Why is Queen Kalinyamat's leadership not made

evident in the two folklores? It is found that the two folklores narrate the life of Queen Kalinyamat before she is crowned king. From tracing the historical facts of the biography of the queen, it is found that although she is the legal daughter of Sultan Trenggono, Queen Kalinyamat is not crowned as King of Kalinyamat. However, her husband, Prince Hadiri, wears the title of Susuhunan Kalinyamat. Queen Kalinyamat, whose maiden name is Princess Pembayun or Ratna Kencana, is finally crowned as king to replace her husband after the death of Arya Penangsang (Supriyono, 2013).

In her reign, Queen Kalinyamat acted as a queen who governed her kingdom and struggled to fight the Portuguese colonialists (Hayati, 2010). In the 30 years of her reign in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, she brought Jepara to its peak of glory (Hayati, 2010; Sulityanto, 2019; Supriyono, 2013). A Portuguese source by Meilink-Roelofs states that Jepara became the biggest harbor town along the North Coast of Java, with an extensive and robust navy in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Hayati, 2010; Said, 2017). In addition, Queen Kalinyamat can restore the trade of Jepara that falls into ruins during the reign of Pati Unus. Under her rule, in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the trade of Jepara with other places overseas grows busier. Unfortunately, the super achievement of Queen Kalinyamat is not told in either *the Legend Queen Kalinyamat's Hermitage* or *the Chronicle of Java Land* because the folklores develop from patriarchic cultures that do not pay enough appreciation to the roles and struggles of women, such as those of Queen Kalinyamat.

The island of Central Kalimantan—Pulau Kupang, there also lives a queen. Her story is told in the folklore of *Madam Undang, the Beautiful Queen from Kupang Island* (Kurniati, 2016). Madam Undang is the main character in the folklore. Her beauty, leadership, and power are pictured in the following.

“Once upon a time, there was a powerful young man called Temanggung Sempung. He was very well-built, courageous, and hard-working. He liked to travel and have adventures. He had a wife called Madam Nunyang. The couple had a gorgeous daughter, Madam Undang, who grew fast to be an intelligent and extraordinary young girl. She quickly learned all that her father and mother taught her. She had a good personality, great courage, and self-confidence. She had many friends. All the people in Pulau Kupang loved her....

As an adult, Madam Undang was inaugurated queen of Pulau Kupang. She ruled Pulau Kupang with the sound wisdom of a queen. She loved and was loved by all the people of Pulau Kupang.”

(Kurniati, 2016: 3-4)

The quotation shows that, although she is a woman, Madam Undang is trusted to be the queen of Kupang Island. Her leadership was characterized by wisdom and being loved by the people. The folklore tells about the daring adventures of Temanggung Sempung, Madam Undang's father, until he arrived at Kupang Island. The kingdom had no leader until Madam Undang was acclaimed as queen of Kupang Island.

In *The Lost City: Tracing the Steps of Madam Undang of Bataguh City in Memory of the Ngaju Dayak Ethnic*, Porda, et.al., (2017) stated that there is the legend of Sawang/Bataguh City. It is still questioned about Madam Undang's existence as a historical figure who becomes the Queen of Tanjung Pemetang Kingdom. Madam Undang is believed to be the ancestor of the Ngaju Dayak ethnic, especially those spread around the Bataguh district (Porda NP et al., 2017). In early September 2018, the Archeological Team of South Kalimantan, led by Sunarningsih, conducted a study on the site of Bataguh Kingdom in Handil Alai, the village of Kupang Island, Bataguh District, Kapuas Regency. The study reveals the existence of the site of Bataguh Kingdom, with Madam Undang as a great sovereign whose castle is approximated to be three kilometers wide (Rizkiansyah, 2018).

The two folklores in East Java, *The Legend of Princess Rengganis* and *Queen Kencanawungu*, seem to relate the glory of Majapahit Kingdom. *The Legend of Princess Rengganis* told that Princess Rengganis is a queen that sovereign the Argopura Kingdom (Sungkowati, 2010). Her blood father is Imam Suwangsa and her blood mother is Princess Medayin. Her step-father, the Genie Pandita, helped and married Princess Medayin after she was expelled from Medayin Kingdom since she committed out-marriage sexual relations with Imam Suwangsa.

“One day, the Genie Pandita took a journey around the world. The first country he visited was Tibet, then China, India, Bagdad, and Egypt. In the desert, dry and hot, he met a beautiful woman limping, her eyes swollen and weeping

all the time. The woman was from a small country near Arabia called Medayin Kingdom. She was driven away from the Medayin Palace for committing an unpardonable sin. She was caught doing illegal sex with Imam Suwangsa, also a member of the Medayin Palace. The Genie Pandita decided to cancel his trip and bring Princess Medayin home to his hermitage in Argopuro Mountain. In there, they lived happily as husband and wife. Princess Medayin had repented from her faulty behavior and became a hermit named Madam Kuning under Genie Pandita's guidance. She gave birth to a beautiful baby girl whom they named Rengganis.... She was intelligent, resourceful, and quick like a deer. She became the pride of all hermitage members and was then crowned Queen. After being crowned a Queen, she built a palace with fine gardens. Her beauty and power were well-known all over the world...."

(Sungkowati, 2010: 43)

The legend is believed happening in Argopura Mountain were located on the border between Probolinggo dan Situbondo entitled *Mystery of Argopuro Mountain, Location of Princess Rengganis' Palace* (Alfri, 2015).

"Argopuro Mountain is known to have millions of stories happening since times unknown. On top of this mountain is a ruin of a palace acclaimed as the only one in Indonesia located three thousand meters above sea level. According to historical records, this ruin is of the Palace of Princess Rengganis. The Mountain has three peaks having different names. The two prominent peaks are Argopuro Peak and Rengganis Peak, while the third is Arca Peak, a hidden peak. Each of the peaks has its own exciting story. The Argopuro is where the ruins of the Princess' palace are found. The Arca (Statue) Peak is named after discovering two broken statues of heads. The local people and hikers name this peak Ghost Hill. Many believe that one of the head statues represents that of Princess Rengganis. Meanwhile, the Rengganis Peak has another story at 2,980 meters above sea level. On this peak are found ancient graves believed to be those of the Princess and her guards."

(Rizkiansyah, 2018)

Archeologists, who analyze findings of ancient objects around Argopura Mountain, confirm that the mountain separates two regencies, Probolinggo Regency on the west and Bondowoso Regency on the east. One of the peaks is called Rengganis Peak, at 2,980 meters above sea level, on which location has ever been found the statue of Princess Rengganis. People's believe who live around the foot of the mountain, Princess Rengganis is Majapahit king's daughter who runs away and meditates on Argopura Mountain. These people are bound to call the mountain Rengganis Mountain rather than Argopuro Mountain (Riyanto & Priswanto, 2009).

Queen Kencanaungu from Majapahit (Sri Sayekti, 2010) is the last figure raised to be described as a queen. Her name is a minor character in the folklore *Minakjinggo* (Sasongko, 2016). Sayekti (2010: 5) writes that *Queen Kencanaungu* is rewritten from *Serat Damarwulan* by Raden Rangga Prawiradirdja in the Javanese language. Unlike the two other works with male main characters, *Queen Kencanaungu* narrates a woman main character. The story is written to emphasize the Queen of Majapahit, Queen Kencanaungu. This story tells about the leadership skills of Queen Kencanaungu, who inherits her father's throne. She is not married when she crowned a queen. The regent Minakjinggo from Blambangan, a district under the rule of Majapahit, proposed to marry her, but she refused which made Minakjinggo committed a rebellion. Queen Kencanaungu requested the help of the young man, Damarwulan, to defeat and eliminate Minakjinggo.

"During the reign of His Majesty Brawijaya, Majapahit lives in peace and tranquility under the wise rule of the King. The people respect him and are very faithful to him. King Brawijaya has a beautiful daughter whose name is Princess Kencanaungu. One day, the King went out of the Palace accompanied by the vizier named Mahundra. The Princess and the people do not know this. They become worried and afraid of the disappearance of the King and Vizier. They try to find them but to no avail. The Princess feels very sad about her father's disappearance, and the kingdom becomes chaotic soon. The people deliberation and decided to raise Queen Kencanaungu to replace her father. She appoints a vizier by the name of Logender. Vizier Logender is a blood brother of Vizier

Mahundra.

After Queen Kencanawungu rises to the throne, the kingdom becomes calm and safe again. The people feel happy because they have a beautiful, wise Queen.”

(Sayekti, 2010: 1-2)

Ultimately, Damarwulan, son of Vizier Mahundra and son-in-law of Vizier Logender, took charge, went to battle, and defeated Minakjinggo. A great battle entailed, and many regents and soldiers of Majapahit were killed.

In his article, Margana (2017) states that Sri Suhita (Kencanawungu) was augmented to be the queen of Majapahit to replace her father, who had decided to go into meditation. This decision was rejected by Bhre Wirabumi, one of the sons of Hayam Wuruk. In consequence, Bhre Wirabumi attempted to separate Blambangan from Majapahit. In the ensuing battle between Blambangan and Majapahit, Wirabumi was killed. Brandes (in Margana, 2017: 4) associates Bhre Wirabumi with King Menakjinggo of Blambangan, who did not acknowledge the sovereignty of Majapahit and wanted to marry Queen Suhita (Kencanawungu). Queen Kencanawungu refused Menakjinggo's marriage proposal and sent Damarwulan to Blambangan to kill him. In the end, Queen Kencanawungu married Damarwulan and crowned him as a king.

## Representation of Indonesian Feminism in Folklores

In the feminism perspective, the historical data depicts that four women in the folklore have the right to be queens. *The Legend of the Hermitage of Queen Kalinyamat*—the leadership aspects of Queen Kalinyamat—are not emphasized, as a bias of patriarchic power in the creation of the folklore. The figure Queen Kalinyamat as the queen in the colonial period is irrefutable likewise the existence of Queen Kencanawungu in the history of Majapahit and Queen Undang in the history of the Ngaju Dayak tribe. The rewriting of the leadership of Queen Kencanawungu, by Sayekti (2010) from *Serat Damarwulan* by Raden Ranga Prawiradirdja, attempts to uplift the position and role of the queen of Majapahit, which is not made apparent in *Serat Damarwulan*.

*Princess Undang, Beautiful Queen from Kupang Island* highlights the queen's beauty and leadership

skills. In her wisdom, she had refused marriage proposals of kings and princes who boasted of their power and wealth. This folklore shows that the Dayak Ngaju tribe does not discriminate against women in leadership matters. Although the existence of Queen of the South and Princess Rengganis differs from other three queens whose kingdoms can be found in reality, Queen Rengganis is believed to exist by the proponent members of the society. It means that their leadership and superior characteristics are acknowledged in the collective awareness of the adherent members of society.

According to the feminist perspective, the study discovers that there has been no gender discrimination of leadership matters in several kingdoms in Indonesia. The traces of Indonesian feminism (Nusantara) can be seen clearly in a number of the folk stories studied. This fact shows that before the feminist movement emerged in Europe and America in the 19th century (Robinson & Richardson, 1994; Tong & Botts, 2018), the feminism awareness was observed in several places in the archipelago, long before the independence of Republic of Indonesia.

Women are not members of the second class as other women are generally treated in patriarchic cultures (Beauvoir, 2010). They are subjects with power over themselves and others under their rule. The old texts and documents show women had equal positions and roles as men, both in domestic and public affairs. This finding agrees with Nastiti (2009) on the positions and roles of women in the old Javanese society between the 8<sup>th</sup> century and the 15<sup>th</sup> century. During these centuries, women are found to have a position as king or head of a region. It has been shown by the historical facts mentioned in the present study, which is consistent in terms of the times and backgrounds of the folklore between the 8<sup>th</sup> century and the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The reign of Queen Kalinyamat in the Jepara Kingdom, Queen Kencanawungu of Majapahit, and Queen Undang take their reign during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. These folklores also show that feminist awareness has been rooted for a long time in many parts and regions of Indonesia. The study found that folklore with feminist perspective can re-open the identities of women in the society of the old time; women turn out to have the active roles in history of civilization.

## CONCLUSION

This study discovers that there is no gender bias in inheriting thrones from parents to children in folklore about queens in Indonesian kingdoms. The criteria of royal inheritance are based on kinship and leadership. Queen Rengganis is believed to have power over humans and spirit beings among the other three queens. While Queen Kalinyamat, Queen Undang, and Queen Kencanawungu are queens whose kingdoms are documented in historical sources. Such folklore can be seen as a form of appreciation of the existence of women's roles in the history of human civilization. Since folklore exists to represent the life and collective awareness, Indonesian society had gender equality in leadership matters for a long time. It can be concluded that studying folklore with a feminist perspective will reopen the identity of women in society in the past, who have played an active role as the subject of civilization history. This research also shows that before the emergence and development of feminism in the West, feminism existed in Indonesia. It called as Indonesian feminism which gave women rights and voices not only in the domestic sphere but also in the public sphere, as can be seen in the story of queen whose power was recognized.

## STATEMENTS OF COMPETING INTEREST

The author declares that this article is free from any conflict of interest regarding the general data collection, analysis, editorial, and publication process.

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