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Deconstruction Of The Legend "Putri Tujuh": Reproduction Of The Meaning Of Marriage Hierarchy In Contemporary Malay Society

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Abstract

Folktales are often viewed as static entities that serve only as conservative didactic media. This study aims to deconstruct the legend of "Putri Tujuh" from Dumai to uncover the shifting sociocultural paradigm related to Malay marriage traditions. Using descriptive qualitative methods and Jacques Derrida's deconstructive analysis, this study dismantles the binary opposition between customary obedience (hereditary hierarchy) and the reality of life (theological inclusivity). The results show an aporia in the text that has marginalized the role of individual will in favor of structure. The new meaning discovered is the transformation of the "langkah bendul" phenomenon from a sociological disgrace into a form of "sovereignty of destiny" (theological). This finding reconstructs the identity of modern Malay society that is more adaptive, empathetic, and inclusive without abandoning its religious essence.

Keywords: Deconstruction, Seven Princesses, Bendul's Steps, Malay Society, Oral Literature

INTRODUCTION

Folklore is not merely a fictional narrative, but rather a representation of a nation's ideology and collective memory (Danandjaja, 2007). However, a single, hegemonic interpretation often renders folklore irrelevant to the modern generation. One crucial oral text in Riau is the legend of "Putri Tujuh." Conventionally, this text is seen as a moral warning about the dire consequences of broken promises. However, behind this narrative lies a power structure that governs the marriage hierarchy within Malay families.

Malay society has historically valued birth order as a determinant of marriage chronology (Kassim, 2012). Marrying ahead of one's older sibling, or "langkah bendul," is often viewed as an

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ethical violation. This research aims to deconstruct this established meaning. Through deconstruction, texts are no longer viewed as closed entities, but rather as open spaces harboring contradictions (Derrida in Al-Fayyadl, 2005).

This study aims to explain how the aporia point in the legend of "Putri Tujuh" reveals the contradiction between the hierarchy of birthright and individual happiness and explains the reproduction of meaning resulting from deconstruction reflecting the paradigm shift of contemporary Malay society towards the "langkah bendul" tradition.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Deconstruction is a critical reading strategy introduced by Jacques Derrida to challenge the Western philosophical tradition that is trapped in logocentrism, a belief that every text has a single, absolute, and stable center of meaning (Derrida, 1997). In Derrida's view, meaning is never final but always deferred (différance).

Jacques Derrida's deconstruction rejects the existence of a single center of meaning (logocentrism). Deconstructive strategies work by identifying binary oppositions (two opposing concepts, one of which is considered superior) and seeking aporia (points of meaning impasse or internal contradictions within a text).

In this context, researchers distinguish between established assumptions and marginalized assumptions. Established assumptions (dominant meanings) are interpretations that are widely accepted as the sole truth, usually dictating and preserving the status quo. Marginalized assumptions (subversive meanings) are meanings that are deliberately "hidden" or weakened by the text to maintain the stability of its moral message (Norris, 2003).

The folk tale "The Seven Princesses" tells the story of seven beautiful princesses of the Seri Bunga Tanjung Kingdom. The Queen hid them in a hiding hole in the forest to avoid the consequences of a war sparked by the rejected proposal of Prince Empang Kuala. The rejection occurred because the Queen insisted on upholding the custom of primogeniture: the prince could only propose to the eldest daughter, while he fell in love with the youngest (Mayang Sari). This rigidity in the marriage order led to a devastating war. Tragically, the seven princesses perished, forgotten in their hiding place.

In the context of oral literature, such as the legend of "The Seven Princesses," deconstruction does not aim to destroy the text, but rather to dismantle established assumptions that have long been considered objective truth. Oral literature, often considered a static entity and a conservative didactic medium, is seen through the lens of deconstruction as

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having gaps in meaning that can reproduce different sociocultural messages in accordance with changing times.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative method with a literature review approach. The material object is the legendary text "The Seven Princesses," while the formal object is Derrida's theory of deconstruction. The analysis is conducted in three stages: identifying binary oppositions within the text, reversing hierarchies to reveal marginalized meanings, and finally drawing conclusions regarding the new societal paradigm.

According to Zed (2014), literature study is not simply the collection of literary data, but rather involves in-depth analysis of texts to discover their philosophical essence. In accordance with the deconstructive framework, data analysis does not aim to find a single truth, but rather to trace traces of delayed meaning. The data analysis procedure is carried out through three systematic stages as follows:

Identifying Binary Opposition

The initial stage was conducted using a close reading technique to identify the binary oppositional structures that construct the narrative of "Seven Princesses." The researcher mapped the opposition between center and margin, such as: Custom vs. Agency, Birthright vs. Freedom, and Shame vs. Destiny. This stage refers to Derrida's concept that texts are always constructed upon a particular hierarchy of power (Tyson, 2014).

Reversal Stage (Overturning Hierarchy)

At this stage, the researcher disrupts the text by reversing the existing hierarchy. Marginalized meanings (such as individual rights in the "langkah bendul" phenomenon) are brought to the surface to assess the text's resilience. This step aims to elicit Aporia, the point at which the text experiences internal contradictions and can no longer maintain the logic of "blind adherence" to the structure (Norris, 2003).

Neutralization and Paradigm Reconstruction Stage

The final stage is drawing conclusions through a process of neutralization. Researchers do not simply exchange binary positions but transcend them to create a new paradigm. In this context, researchers formulate a transformation of contemporary Malay identity that reproduces the meaning of "langkah bendul" (steps of the bendul) from a sociological stigma to

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theological sovereignty (fate). The results of the analysis are then synthesized with the sociocultural realities of modern, more inclusive and adaptive Malay society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Binary Opposition Analysis: Established vs. Marginalized Assumptions

Christopher Norris (2003) states that deconstruction works by separating two layers of interpretation:

1. Established Assumptions (Dominant Meaning): This is a mainstream reading that preserves the status quo. In the legend of the Seven Princesses, this established assumption is embodied in the sacredness of the marriage hierarchy, which must not be violated. Violating the hierarchy is considered a sociological disgrace that will bring disaster.
2. Marginalized Assumptions (Subversive Meanings): These are voices silenced in the text to maintain the coherence of the moral message. Researchers focus on this layer to discover possible new meanings, such as inclusivity and the defense of individual rights, that have been buried under the shadow of the grand narrative of custom.

Based on the text above, the following is a deconstructive dismantling of its value structure:

Table 1. Deconstruction of the Value Structure of the Legend of the Seven Princesses

Aspect	Established (Dominant) Assumptions	Marginalized (Subversive) Assumptions
Marriage Hierarchy	Birth order (firstborn) is a sacred family honor.	Happiness and a soul mate are individual human rights without birth rate restrictions.
Causes of Tragedy	Due to external war and the prince's broken promise.	Due to the rigidity of customs (the Queen) which closes the space for negotiation for the sake of safety.
Bendul's Steps	Social anomalies and disgrace that bring curses/disasters.	Natural reality and part of God's sovereign destiny over humans.

Established Assumptions:

The text positions the Queen as a moral guardian for defending the rights of the eldest daughter. Readers are led to blame the "ignorant" Prince for jumping the line. This interpretation is well-established because it supports the ancient feudalistic Malay social structure.

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Marginalized Assumptions:

Through deconstruction, we see that the Queen is a deadly figure. For the sake of an "abstract concept" called marriage order, she sacrificed the lives of her seven children. The text subconsciously conceals the fact that rigid customs are more dangerous than enemies on the battlefield.

Deconstructive strategies work by identifying binary oppositions, namely thought structures that group concepts into two opposing poles, where one pole is considered superior or occupies a central position, while the other pole is considered inferior or marginal (Belsey, 2002).

In this study, the binary oppositions that are dismantled include:

- Customary Compliance vs. Life Reality: Where customary structures (hereditary hierarchy) have been positioned as the "Center" (superior), while individual will and life flexibility have been positioned as the "Periphery" (inferior).
- Structure vs. Agency: Traditional texts tend to champion social structure over the stability of moral messages, thereby suppressing the role of individual agency or free choice.

Aporia: Impasse and the Reproduction of Meaning

A crucial point in deconstructive analysis is identifying Aporia, the moment when a text betrays itself or experiences a logical impasse (Sarup, 2011). Aporia emerges when a text that explicitly teaches obedience implicitly demonstrates the contradiction or impossibility of such absolute obedience.

The point of aporia is found when the text attempts to demonstrate the Queen's maternal love through the act of hiding her children, but this act ends up killing them. This is where the "center" of meaning collapses. In contemporary Malay society, this deconstruction manifests itself in a softening of views on "langkah bendul."

In the phenomenon of "langkah bendul" in Malay society, aporia is found in the clash between rigid customary law and the theological principle of destiny. Through deconstruction, the meaning of "langkah bendul" is reproduced: what was originally seen as a social anomaly (a disgrace) is now read as a form of the Sovereignty of Destiny. This shift demonstrates that contemporary Malay identity is not rigid, but rather adaptive and empathetic, where religiosity is no longer understood as a punitive structural rule, but as an inclusive theological space.

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Reproduction of New Meanings in Contemporary Malay Society

In contemporary Malay society, the deconstruction of this legend is manifested through a softening of views on the langkah bendul phenomenon. A significant paradigm shift has occurred:

1. From Structural to Theological: While historically the bendul's move was considered an insult to the older sibling, today's Malay society tends to view it as Divine Providence. A collective awareness is growing that delaying a younger sibling's marriage in favor of an older sibling can actually bring greater harm, as befits the tragic fate of the princesses in legend.
2. Fluid Empathy: The emergence of collective empathy, where families prioritize emotional support over rigid customary validation. While the tradition of giving "uang pelangkah" (step money) remains as symbolic compensation, it is no longer restrictive. Modern Malay identity demonstrates a more adaptive and inclusive character, positioning religiosity as a solution to the rigidity of past traditions.

Furthermore, the shift in the meaning of langkah bendul from "sociological shame" to "theological sovereignty" indicates a more progressive re-Islamization of Malay identity. Contemporary Malay society appears to be beginning to recognize the aporia within its traditions: that enforcing rigid customs (langkah bendul as a prohibition) often contradicts fundamental religious principles of destiny and compassion. This interpretation emphasizes that Malay modernity is not achieved by discarding tradition, but by deconstructing it, namely by finding a more fluid point of empathy so that religious values can still humanize humans amidst changing times.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the deconstructive analysis of the legend of "The Seven Princesses," this study concludes two fundamental points. First, it discovered a point of aporia in the traditional narrative that has been overlooked; the tragedy of the deaths of the seven princesses was not simply the result of external warfare, but rather the impact of the rigidity of customary structures (the hierarchy of kinship) that ignores individual agency and the flexibility of circumstances. This deconstruction reveals that blind adherence to sociological order can be destructive if not accompanied by humanitarian considerations. Second, there is a reproduction of meaning in contemporary Malay society related to the langkah bendul phenomenon. There is a paradigm shift from a sociological view that positions langkah bendul as a disgrace or ethical violation, to a theological view that accepts it as part of God's sovereign destiny. This

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transformation indicates that the identity of Malay society today is increasingly adaptive, empathetic, and inclusive. Modern society tends to maintain the value of religiosity as a fluid solution to soften the rigidity of past traditions without losing the essence of Malay culture itself.

This research provides a theoretical contribution, demonstrating that oral literature is not static, but rather a space for negotiation of meaning that continually evolves with changing times. Practically, the results of this research can serve as a reference for understanding the dynamics of customary law and the social life of modern, more humanistic Malay society.

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