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THE CONCEPT OF GENDER IN CIREBON ORAL LITERATURE AND ITS TRANSFORMATION IN THE *MEMITU SLAMETAN* RITUALS

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ABSTRACT
Cirebon oral literature, specifically *tembung éntar*, is an essential cultural resource that reflects societal values, particularly concerning gender roles. However, previous studies have not thoroughly examined how these expressions play out in ritual practices, highlighting a gap that this research seeks to fill. This study investigates the concept of gender found in *tembung éntar* and how it changes within the traditional ritual of Slametan Memitu. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach with semiotic analysis, 412 *tembung éntar* texts were analyzed. The data collection process involved documentation and analysis performed in four stages: gathering data, reducing it, presenting findings, and verifying the results. The findings showcase symbolic representations of gender roles in which *tembung éntar* indicates masculine and feminine qualities, including persistence, diligence, care, and obedience. The Slametan Memitu ritual transforms these symbolic meanings into cultural practices, illustrated by expressions such as "*Asah, Asih, Asuh*" and "*Manek gunung temurub jurang*," which emphasize mutual support and resilience. This research offers a fresh perspective by connecting oral literature with ritual performance, stressing the cultural representation of gender roles. Upcoming studies could investigate similar transformations in different cultural settings.

Keywords: gender concept, Cirebon oral literature, *memitu slametan*

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INTRODUCTION

Literature is a part of society as a potential medium for implementing character education values for the younger generation because it contains the local wisdom of ethnicities in Indonesia (Delawala et al., 2023; Hinostroza et al., 2024; Nazarudin, 2023; Putranto et al., 2022; Tadlaoui-Brahmi et al., 2022). The Oral Literature of Cirebon is a particular form of expression of the Cirebon community in the past that was generally communicated orally and incorporated elements of regionalism (Kasim, Ruhardi, Kalsum, 2015). In this case, oral literature greatly influenced the people of Cirebon. In general, the function of literature can be classified into five major categories: creative, didactic, aesthetic, morality, and religiosity (Giay & van der Horst, 2024; Kosasih, 2012; Muawanah et al., 2024).

The recreative function provides a sense of pleasure, happiness and entertainment (Brookfield et al., 2021; Ezzameli & Mahersia, 2023). The didactic function means educating the readers with the values of honesty and goodness in it. Aesthetic is the function of providing beauty values while morality contains morality values so that readers know good and bad things (Musdalifa, 2016). Religiosity is a function that contains religious teachings that are used as examples for readers. The research by Wulandari et al. (2023) showed that oral literature with local languages could be a means of communication and regional identity to improve intellectual capabilities and refine character.

As a type of literature that developed in the 1800s, Cirebon oral literature has never been separated from the development of Javanese literature (Ratna, 2011). The variety of Cirebon oral literature included pribasa or *tembung éntar*, gugon tuwon, wangsalan and parikan. In this case, oral literature has a functional role in the life of the Cirebon community. Oral literature becomes manners considered to have ethics and beauty of language (aesthetics), for example, in the wedding procession (Kasim, 2012).

Tembung éntar is a metaphorical word or a word that has no real meaning. Traditional literary forms that include *tembung éntar* include bebasan, paribasan, and sloka (Padmosoekotjo, 1955). Bebasan are those words whose use has a metaphorical meaning and has a meaning that is not actually there. The metaphor is in the context of the state or character of a person or object. Pribasan are words utilized in a way that has an indirect meaning but is also metaphorical. Pribasan comes from the words "*pari*" (rice) and "*basa*" (language), which means an expression with an intended meaning (Hadiatmadja, 2019). Sloka are words or sentences connected by metaphor, not real words but metaphorical meanings. They are generally allegorized to nature, animals, and plants.

If associated with the concept of gender, we can explore the meaning of the concept by analyzing the meaning of the oral literature of *tembung éntar*. Generally, gender can be defined as social differences based on biological or visible differences between the sexes. The definition of gender is to see the differences between males and females in terms of the characteristics of their attitudes and behaviors in a socio-cultural context. When God created two kinds of human beings, they were male and female. In this case, the cultural development of a group of communities establishes their respective norms in a manner that is in accordance with the natural factors that surround them.

In the context of gender representation, Cirebon's oral literature illustrates culturally defined roles for men and women. Traditionally, men are depicted as strong, decisive, and responsible, while women are portrayed as nurturing, patient, and supportive (Handayani & Novianto, 2004). This duality reflects a cultural understanding of complementary roles within family and community life. The cultural richness of *tembung éntar* finds its ceremonial expression in the Slametan Memitu ritual, a traditional ceremony celebrating the seventh month of pregnancy (Busro & Qodim, 2018). This ritual symbolizes societal values, emphasizing cooperation, mutual respect, and spiritual harmony. Ritual elements like "*Asah, Asih, Asuh*" underscore the ideals of sharing knowledge, providing love, and nurturing family bonds.

This study highlights the transformation of traditional values into living cultural expressions by examining the cultural narratives within Cirebon oral literature and the practices embedded in the Slametan Memitu ritual. This interplay between oral literature and ritual practices offers insight into how culture perpetuates itself through generations, adapting yet retaining core values deeply rooted in Cirebon's heritage. According to the above definition, this work sheds light on how Cirebon oral texts, especially *tembung éntar*, reflect gender ideas and their translation into ritual practices. The paper focuses on symbolic meanings in traditional language and sheds light on how cultural storytelling perpetuates social norms and values.

The work bridges a gap in the literature by linking oral-literary and ritual practices, highlighting how cultural content is not only linguistic but also performative in ritual societies such as the Slametan Memitu. There has been little research on this connection, particularly on a gendered basis. This research focuses on how gender identities are negotiated, defended, and redefined through oral

literature and ritual. It aims to show how *tembung éntar* is an effective vehicle for communicating and enforcing social norms around gender in Cirebon society. These results suggest semiotic interpretations of cultural emphases can also illuminate structural and gendered ritual structures. This can also help to frame discussions of cultural conservation, gender studies, and oral traditions as ways of preserving cultural heritage more generally.

METHOD

The research methodology used in this study is qualitative with a descriptive approach, focusing on exploring and interpreting the cultural significance of *tembung éntar* in Cirebon oral literature and its transformation within the Slametan Memitu ritual. The data source includes 412 *tembung éntar* texts chosen for their relevance to the research emphasis on gender concepts. Data collection was conducted using reading and documentation techniques. The texts were analyzed for symbolic representations of gender roles through a semiotic analysis approach, highlighting the interpretation of signs and symbols embedded in the expressions. To ensure the validity of the data, various validation techniques were applied. Triangulation of data sources was achieved by cross-referencing different literary sources, historical records, and cultural narratives to confirm the authenticity of the *tembung éntar* expressions. Peer review and expert consultation were carried out with cultural experts and literature scholars to validate the interpretations and contextual accuracy of the gender-related themes identified in the texts.

Furthermore, member checking involved gathering feedback from cultural practitioners familiar with Cirebon traditions to refine the analysis and confirm the relevance of the identified symbols. To ensure transparency and replicability of the study, detailed records of the data collection and analysis process were kept to maintain an audit trail. Data analysis followed four main stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and verification. The study aimed to provide a well-documented and contextually grounded exploration of the intersection between oral literature and ritual practices in Cirebon culture through this systematic approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a genre of oral literature, *tembung éntar* has considerable benefits. Among other things, it serves as advice that contains moral values for the people of Cirebon, which are indirectly related to the concept of gender in the Cirebon society itself. In general, we acknowledge that the characteristics of women and men are certainly different. Women are recognized as gentle creatures with neat personalities, meticulousness, patience, and more talkative or chatty, which are characteristics of feminism (Handayani, Christina & Novianto, 2004). Meanwhile, males are recognized as being manly, assertive, wise, hardworking, responsible, and rude, which are masculine characteristics. These characteristics can also be found in *tembung éntar*. Below are the characteristics of men in *tembung éntar* in the following table.

Table.1 Results of Analysis of *Tembung éntar* with Gender Concepts in the Masculine

Tembung éntar	Meaning of *Tembung éntar*	Analysis Result
1. *Aja dawa-dawa ula*	*Don't extend it.* There never was a snake that was very long. If there is a problem, please not extend it, but learn from it.	The character of men is that they dislike prolonging problems.
2. *Alang-alangana tumbak cucukan segara gunung*	*Obstructed by the protrusion of a mountain spear*. Strong determination and ready to overcome all challenges.	Male character is persistent and determined.
3. *Amprok maling, rikat playuné*	*Encountering a thief, swiftly running away*. Decision-making should be speedy and appropriate for the purpose. A thoughtful and decisive solution.	The characteristics of men are virtuous and decisive.
4. *Belok gigiré*	*Dirty back*. Worked energetically and enthusiastically at deep threshing until the sludge was up to his back. Worked diligently despite dirty bodies.	The character of men is hardworking.
5. *Endas dadi sikil, sikil dadi endas*	*Head becomes feet, feet become head*. Someone who actually works hard and doesn't appear to have any time to rest. All efforts are made so that what is desired is immediately achieved.	The character of men is hardworking.
6. *Gunung guntur segara asat*	*Mountains crumble, seas dry up*. Even though it is prevented by crumbling mountains and drying up seas, it will certainly be pursued.	The character of men is never giving up.
7. *Rawé-rawé rantas malang-malang putung*	*Rawé-rawé rantas malang-malang putung*. All challenges and obstruction should be overcome, not retreated against. This determination comes from being dedicated to a noble cause.	The character of men is never giving up on reaching a goal
8. *Toyagamana girigamana*	*Toyagamana girigamana*. Although the war on the water or the war on the mountain, I would definitely serve and wouldn't be deterred.	The character of men is brave

Source: Analysis of Research Results 2024

This table shows the gender concept of *tembung éntar* in the type of masculine characteristics of men, which are dislike of trouble, persistent, wise, assertive, hardworking, determined, and brave. The male character who doesn't like to delay problems can be seen in *tembung éntar "Aja dawa-dawa ula.*" The persistence of a man is seen in *tembung éntar "Alang-alangana tumbak cucukan segara gunung."* The wise character of a man appeared in *tembung éntar "Amprok maling, rikat playuné."* Next, the hardworking character of a man appeared in *tembung éntar "Belok gigiré"* and *"Endas dadi sikil, sikil dadi endas"*. Furthermore, the trait of never giving up is seen in the *tembung éntar "Gunung guntur*

segara asat"/ "Rawé-rawé rantas malang-malang putung." The brave character can be seen in the *tembung éntar "Toyagamana girigamana."* In this context, the concept of gender in the feminine form can also be found in *tembung éntar* as follows.

Table.2 Results of Analysis of *Tembung éntar* with Gender Concepts in the Feminine

Tembung éntar	Meaning of *Tembung éntar*	Analysis Result
1. *Aja mangan barang geseng*	*Don't eat scorchy food*. Processing matters must be careful, accurate, and conscientious. If there is a computation, it must be done thoroughly. You don't want to know that something is negative, but still continue with the work, and become disastrous.	A woman's character is meticulous and ever-cautious.
2. *Amin-amin tahlil*	*Amin-amin tahlil*. Whatever the leaders said in front of us, we followed. Participate in whatever the leader directed	The character of women is always obedient to the leader or husband.
3. *Celak tapihé, landung lambéné*	*Short on cloth, longer on lips.* A woman that worked hard but also talkative.	The female character is diligent but also fussy.
4. *Yen mangan ora entok koné jagoné mati*	*If the meal is not exhausted, the rooster will die.* Completing the work must be done.	Women are organized and tidy in the finishing of a job until it is completed.

Source: Analysis of Research Results 2024

The table showed that feminine characteristics in women include being conscientious, diligent, tidy, fussy or talkative, and obedient to their husbands. The meticulous nature of women can be seen in *tembung éntar* "*Aja mangan barang geseng.*" The diligent and fussy character of women can be seen in *tembung éntar* "*Celak tapihé, landung lambéné.*" In this case, women must obey their husbands, as in *tembung éntar*, such as "*Amin-amin tahlil.*" The attitude of being diligent and tidy is seen in tempting éntar, such as "*Yen mangan ora into koné jagoné die*."

In relation to social interactions in society, we realize that women and men mutually need each other. Although different, they can become one through marriage to establish a better personality. This is also evident in the analysis of *tembung éntar* as follows.

Table.3 Results of Analysis of *Tembung éntar* with the Concept of Social Relationships between Male and Female

Tembung éntar	Meaning of *Tembung éntar*	Analysis Result
1. *Asah, Asih, Asuh*	*Asah, Asih, Asuh.* Give each other knowledge. Give love to each other. Together remind each other of the rightness.	In a marriage, husband and wife must support and be loving to each other.

2. *Awét rajét*	*Awét rajét*. Husband and wife have been married for a long time, always squabbling but still have a long-lasting marriage.	Husband and wife should always keep their marriage going despite frequent arguments.
3.Buntut nurut endasé	*Tail follows the head*. Wherever the place is small employees often follow their leaders.	In a marriage the wife always followed her husband
4.Kambang kampul uripé	*Floating drowning*. Someone who lives overseas, struggling through the difficulties and joys.	Husbands and wives who live overseas must be able to handle the difficulties and pleasures together.
5.Manusa sederma nglakoni	*Humans are just doing it*. Humans can plan but God decides.	In a marriage, we should believe in God's destiny.
6.Manek gunung temurun jurang	*Climb the mountain, descend the ravine*. Life's journey must be done, even if it is difficult and painful.	The concept of married life, both difficult and challenging, is being lived together.
7.Sandang sanding sandung	*Sandang sanding sandung*. The main physical and mental necessity of human beings is to be sufficiently used, to have a faithful husband/wife and an emotionally peaceful.	The concept of happiness life among the citizens of Cirebon

Source: Analysis of Research Results 2024

On the table, we can recognize the concept of social relations between males and females, such as in building a marriage. In this case, a male and a female, or a husband and wife, are living a marriage based on the concept of *tembung éntar*. As a couple, they must love each other, go through difficulties and pleasures together, maintain continuity, and believe in the destiny that God has arranged so as to achieve a harmonious life. The concept of loving each other is seen in *tembung éntar*, namely "*Asah, Asih, Asuh.*" Marriage should always be maintained, as seen in the *tembung éntar* "*Awét rajét.*" Difficulties and pleasures must be passed together, as in *tembung éntar*, "*Kambang kampul uripé*" and "*Manek gunung temurub jurang.*" The husband as a leader is always followed by his wife, as seen in the *tembung éntar* "*Buntut nurut endasé*." According to the Cirebon people, the concept of the happiest life appears in *tembung éntar*, that is, "*Sandang sanding sandung.*"

Based on the analysis of *tembung éntar*, it is concluded that the concept of gender includes that males and females have personal characteristics. Although they are different, they can unite through marriage. In conducting the household, males and females must be capable of helping each other, loving each other, confronting joys and difficulties together, etc. The concept is also reflected in the traditional "*Slametan Memitu*" ceremony. This concept is also reflected in the traditional ceremony "*Slametan Memitu.*" Slametan memitu is a traditional ceremony conducted when the gestational age reaches seven months. Seven in the Cirebon language is called pitu. The Memitu tradition is the same as the Javanese community in general, to carry out traditional rituals or traditions passed down from generation to generation by the ancestors (Busro & Qodim, 2018). In this case, the purpose of Memitu is to *'ngumpliti,'*

which means to perfect. As we already know, during pregnancy, at seven months, the baby's limbs begin to form, such as the ears, nose, hands, and hands (Fauzi & Muliawati, 2024). During the Slametan Memitu ceremony, a song called Kidung Murtasiyah reflects the procedure of the Slametan Memitu. The following Kidung Murtasiyah song is below.

Kidung Murtasiyah

Kekidungan cerita Dewi Murtasiyah
Lelakonan kasmaran si dangdang gula
Kinanti megatruh sinom parijaka
Sesenggakan sendonan dalang mamaca
Waktu bobot kebisan pitung wulanan

Siram kembang campur kidung rerujakan
Jambe riwe memecah blotong ning prapatan
Nandakaken si dadap lagi slametan

Reff:
Bluluk gading nggo anak-anakan
Ping pitu dangdan adus-adusan
Sampe nderegdeg digrujug esuk-esukan
Rena bunga kluarga pada curakan

Biasane tanggale pitu-pituan
Guyub rukun sawengi pada melekan
Ngalap berkah sawise amin-aminan
Sesajian binagi pada bubaran

Meaning

The story of Dewi Murtasiyah
The story is about the love of sugar *dangdang*
Kinanti megatruh parijaka
The sound of the puppeteer's voice reading
When she was seven months pregnant

Flower bath mixed with songs and rujak-rujak
Jambe riwe breaks the barrel at the intersection
Signifying that somebody was doing a slametan

Ref:
Coconut *geding* for baby children
Seven times to make up when taking a shower

Until shivering is washed in the morning
Happy family atmosphere at *curakan (sawer)*

It's usually a seven-day date
Gathering without sleeping all night
Looking for blessings after amen-amen
Food is distributed during dismissal (after the event)

Some of the materials that are required to be prepared for the ceremony include: 1) seven pieces of long cloth or *jarit*; 2) miniature houses that have been decorated; 3) *pendil* or a bowl containing water with a mixture of various types of plants, such as beringin and sugar cane, as well as coins that will be **stored**; 4) seven kinds of flowers, including flower *kingkong, red rose, white rose, cempaka, kenanga, kantil*, and jasmine; 5) offerings that include *nasi uduk, juwadah pasar, rujak selasih,* various fruits and tubers, and sugar cane *wulung* (black sugar cane); and 6) *bluluk gading* or young coconut. Some pictures of the ingredients are as follows.

Picture 1.
Pendil/bowl for Memitu

Picture 2.
Coconut for Memitu

Picture 3.
Memitu Slametan Bathing Place

In the ceremony *'Slametan Memitu'*, the husband and wife must perform procedures as prospective parents of the baby. First, the event begins with reading the book of Barjanji, which tells the story of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Cirebon locals usually call it Marhabanan. Second, after reading the Barjanji book, food is distributed, and the water brought out is mixed into the container in

the house. Third, the couple begins to be bathed, accompanied by the recitation of sholawat 3 times. The people who are allowed to bathe them are parents, relatives, and village elders. Fourth, the recitation program is continued.

During bathing, the wife only wears a *tapi* (long cloth), and the husband only wears shorts. Whenever someone washes the water or bathes the wife, she must change the clothes seven times. At the time of the 7th washing or bathing procession, the yellow coconut held should be dropped while the male partner picks up or catches the coconut before it falls to the ground. After that, the husband takes the pendil and immediately runs to the intersection or fork in the road to break the pendil.

This is a form of expression of the *tembung éntar* expression "*Manek gunung temurun jurang*" in that the father/husband must be willing to persevere and be persistent in life. As the father/husband runs, the children and local residents run and prepare to fight for the distributed coins.

Picture 4.
Children and residents scrambling the contents of the pendil

The items that should not be taken include banyan leaves, coconut flowers, and yellow coconuts. Afterward, the male partner carries the yellow coconut used during the bathing procession to the river to be thrown. In the ceremony, the husband is also not allowed to bathe in the well but must be in the river, and when heading to the river, it is recommended to run. In a cultural context, the *memitu* tradition that takes place in Java is different from the memitu or mitoni tradition that takes place in Sumatra. Hasil Penelitian (Savira & dkk, 2024) showed that the mitoni tradition in Bangun Rejo Village, Solok Selata Regency, Sumatra has two processions during the day and at night. The daytime procession includes *sungkeman, siraman, brojolan*, *tumpengan, lawuhan, keleman*/market snacks and rujakan. The evening procession includes Tawasul, reading the holy verses of the Qur'an surah Yusuf and surah Maryam, Nurbuat's prayer, Kenduri and Kepungan. What distinguishes the *memitu* tradition in Cirebon is that there is no procession at night.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the concept of gender in Cirebon oral literature, specifically through the lens of *tembung éntar*, and its transformation in the traditional ceremony of Slametan Memitu. While previous studies have addressed gender roles in various cultural contexts, this study offers a fresh perspective by focusing on the unique gender expressions within Cirebon's oral traditions.

The findings reveal distinct characteristics attributed to male and female figures in *tembung éntar*, showcasing the interplay between cultural norms and gender identity. This research identifies and analyzes these characteristics and emphasizes their significance in understanding the broader implications of gender within Cirebon culture.

Moreover, the study contributes to the field by illustrating how traditional rituals serve as a medium for cultural expression and transformation, enhancing the discourse on gender studies in Indonesian literature. The novelty lies in this intersection of oral literature and gender dynamics, which has not been thoroughly explored in existing literature. Future research could expand on these findings by examining other cultural phenomena within Indonesia, thus enriching our understanding of gender roles across different contexts.

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