

The Intellectual Disability Figures in Indonesian Folktales

Muhammad Shubhi¹, Hasina Fajrin R², Dewi Nastiti Lestariningsih³

{muha264@brin.go.id¹, hasi001@brin.go.id², dewi041@brin.go.id³}

National Research and Innovation Agency, Jakarta, Indonesia

Abstract. This research explores the intersection of folktales and intellectual disability, examining how intellectual disability is manifested within Indonesian folklore and how individuals with intellectual disabilities represent themselves and their identities within these narratives. This study analyzes eleven folklores, available in print and online formats, with a thematic focus on intellectual disability using discourse analysis. By examining the portrayal of characters with intellectual disabilities in these narratives, this research uncovers the discursive constructs and subject positions available to (disabled) children as they enact and express their identities in their daily lives. The figures in these folklores are depicted as sources of inspiration, objects of pity, and objects of exclusion. This investigation sheds light on the complex interplay between folklore, disability, and identity in the Indonesian context, contributing to a deeper understanding of how intellectual disability is represented and negotiated within the cultural narratives of the nation.

Keywords: Body , Indonesian Folktales, Intellectual Disability

1 Introduction

Research on disability in Indonesia reveals that society holds a predominantly negative perception of disability, which manifests in various ways. Structural barriers stemming from stigma, labeling, prejudice, and stereotypes hinder the full participation of individuals with intellectual disabilities in society [1]. Furthermore, there exists apprehension among individuals regarding the possibility of having children with intellectual disabilities [2]. Lastly, children with intellectual disabilities continue to be viewed as burdensome [3]. The comprehension develops into a cognitive framework that is firmly grounded in the prevailing ideologies of normalcy. Folklore in Indonesia serves as a repository of historical narratives pertaining to the lives of its people, hence contributing to the formation of this cultural belief system. The paper addresses a significant research gap pertaining to the portrayal of disabled intellectual characters in Indonesian fairy tales, with the aim of critically examining this perspective and challenging the prevailing stigmas associated with it. Contemporary society has acquired novel insights pertaining to the perception and understanding of impairments.

Writings about fairy tales with stupid characters have been discussed by several people, including Safuan et al. [4]. He views the stupid figure from the other side that the story actually displays positive character and traits such as light-hearted, obedient, brave and independent. Yeti [5] analyzes the narrative structure and values contained in the Tongtong story. The stupidity of the characters in this story is accompanied by other good values. Amat

and Sulaiman [6] reveal the positive value of Malay folklore which has so far been portrayed in a negative perspective such as stupid, ignorant, and unfortunate. Dwita et al.[7] used the story I Belog which features a stupid character in training in drawing illustrations of folk tales for character development for elementary school children in Bali. This article discusses three folk tales originating from three provinces in Indonesia. These stories were chosen because they have similar plots and represent certain islands and ethnicities. These stories are La Tongko-Tongko, Sang Bugu, and Dongeng Joko Bodo [8]–[10].

The analysis of these narratives is conducted via the perspective of Foucault's conceptualization of the body. According to Foucault [11], the body is consistently subjected to scrutiny and interrogation. The body serves as the medium through which all events are perceived and encountered. Language has an active role in shaping and influencing the definition and experience of the body within a specific historical period. The definition of the body is established and shaped by one's knowledge in a specific sector [12]. This hierarchical structure is established and subsequently sustained in order to establish differentiation among various entities. Disciplinary measures are implemented with the aim of ensuring conformity within these entities, hence minimizing the existence of any deviant spaces.

2 Embodiment of Intellectual Disability

2.1 La Tongko-Tongko

The excluded body might be observed within the context of Ceritanya La Tongko-Tongko [8]. Exclusion refers to the deliberate act of impeding individuals with disabilities from attaining comprehensive participation in various facets of societal existence [13]. La Tongko-Tongko is narrated as desiring marriage and to have followed his mother's advice by searching for women everywhere. He eventually encounters a deceased individual who is believed to be inclined towards marrying him solely because of her absence of verbal communication. The mother, embodying the able-bodied perspective, believes that individual who possesses typical cognitive abilities would not express a desire to enter into matrimony with La Tongko-Tongko due to his perceived lack of intelligence. She even ridicules her son by telling him, "Keep the girl in your bed and in the room!" [8] because she already knows that no one wants that stupid La Tongko-Tongko. This treatment implicitly suggests that stupid people are paired with other stupid individuals. Furthermore, the mother ignored La Tongko-Tongko. He is comparable to a nonexistent organism, so none of his interests need to be considered. The mother only discovers that La Tongko-Tongko is carrying a corpse once the corpse is ordered to feed and does not respond. The mother considers the existence of a corpse to be greater than the existence of a stupid body.

For La Tongko-Tongko to understand that his body is still living, he requires the assistance of the abled thief. Even the criminal concedes that La Tongko-Tongko's inability to distinguish between life and death is why he is labeled stupid. Even though stealing is unethical, it is still viewed as more valuable than working for La Tongko-Tongko. The depiction of the theft partnership between La Tongko-Tongko and the abled thief further emphasizes the ineffectiveness of La Tongko-Tongko's body. Even though the abled thief gives multiple opportunities, the outcome remains unchanged. The abled thief eventually gives up and separates himself from La Tongko-Tongko because he cannot earn money, even by stealing. The abled thief omits him because he is considered incapable of working as generally as other humans. Humans who are physically and mentally sound can utilize their bodies for

economic productivity, whereas La Tongko-Tongko is the opposite. Even when he commits theft, he is deemed nonexistent. He is not punished for his stupidity.

2.2 Sang Bugu

The fairy tale Dongeng Sang Bugu [9], which originates in the Lampung region, is an illustrative example of a foolish character who paradoxically serves as a source of inspiration. The term "bugu" in the Lampung language refers to a state of intellectual deficiency or lack of intelligence. Due to his cognitive limitations, assigning him a formal appellation is unnecessary. He is commonly referred to as the *bugu* for the sake of identification. Sang Bugu's cognitive limitations are evident in his difficulty comprehending sentences with multiple layers of meaning. When prompted by his mother to seek a prospective spouse, he construes any lack of response to the inquiry of matrimony as an affirmative indication, notwithstanding the deceased individual's inherent inability to provide any reply. It is the situation in which he is informed of the unpleasant odor. He also considers everything that smells rotten to be carrion, so he buries his mother, who farts. He also throws himself into the river because he farts, and no one could bury him.

His physical endurance is insufficient to sustain prolonged diving. Consequently, only his head remains above the water's surface, prompting Sang Bugu to classify the individual as deceased. Bakheti, a thief, critically examines Sang Bugu's conceptualization of a deceased individual, precisely the assertion that a deceased person lacks the capacity for verbal communication. Bakheti extends an invitation for his collaboration in the act of theft, which he eventually accepts. Bugu is additionally characterized as exhibiting constraints in effectively regulating his emotions. During his collaborative theft endeavors with Bakheti, he consistently attracts the house owner's attention due to his propensity for generating excessive noise when experiencing excitement. This pattern persists even during the act of pilfering from the royal residence, ultimately culminating in his demise through immolation.

Despite Sang Bugu's perceived lack of intelligence, he successfully avoids being burned by employing a cunning strategy to deceive a trader who has observed him bound to a tree. In addition, he successfully deceives the monarch by asserting the coexistence of his physical form in both terrestrial and celestial realms. The monarch, whose understanding is limited to mundane existence, places his faith in Sang Bugu. He ultimately consents to undergo a purifying ritual through immolation to reunite with his deceased parents in the celestial realm. Additionally, he deceives the monarch's wife into believing she should express her willingness to wed Sang Bugu during the king's absence. Upon ascending to the throne, he assumes the monarch's role, and the populace dutifully adheres to his authority. Given his cognitive constraints, he possesses the ability to confront the challenges of life himself without relying on external assistance. The notion of compensatory ability or distinctive trait pertains to using an individual's preexisting strengths or traits to offset the lack or deprivation of another skill [14]. The individual's impaired physical condition is associated with unattainable exceptional capabilities within the confines of a typical physique.

2.3 Dongeng Joko Bodo

Pity is the emotional response of experiencing grief in reaction to an individual's great misfortunes [15]. The subject of compassion in Dongeng Joko Bodo is the physical form of Joko Bodo [10]. The physical form of Joko Bodo is commonly perceived as lacking intelligence by individuals in his vicinity, leading to the attribution of the term "Joko Bodo." Nevertheless, the mother does not exclude him. He continues to be regarded and handled in a manner consistent with societal norms for human beings. Upon learning that Joko Bodo has discovered a suitable female companion, the mother exhibits contentment and expresses her intention to enter into matrimony with her. The mother holds the belief that Joko Bodo is doing his designated responsibilities. She harbors a greater sense of skepticism towards the girl, who is in a state of unconsciousness and lacks any preconceived notions regarding Joko Bodo's behavior until ultimately discovering that the girl is deceased. She shows a level of tolerance by allowing Joko Bodo to retain possession of the deceased individual's remains until he comprehends the significance of the putrid odor, which is commonly associated with the cessation of life. The mother regards his daughter's delayed comprehension as a typical occurrence.

Nevertheless, the restricted comprehension of such information subsequently detrimentally affects both parties involved. Upon the mother's culinary endeavors, she inadvertently emits odorous flatulence, prompting her offspring to embrace her in a state of profound sorrow, under the mistaken belief that she has succumbed to mortality. Despite his mother's evident difficulty articulating that she is still alive, Joko Bodo physically transports her and casts her into the river. Similarly to the case of Joko Bodo, it is reported that he engages in self-immersion in a body of water after perceiving the odor emanating from his flatulence.

The unfortunate circumstances surrounding Joko Bodo and the demise of his mother can be attributed to Joko Bodo's limited comprehension of the notion of mortality as communicated by his maternal figure. From the perspective of a typical physique, the demise of both individuals can be deemed futile, as their affection for one another is overshadowed by their untimely demise resulting from a lack of knowledge or understanding. The mother uses much effort and vocalizes her distress in an attempt to impede Joko Bodo from forcibly submerging her into the river. However, due to Joko Bodo's delayed comprehension, he first fails to grasp the intended message conveyed by the mother. Joko Bodo's actions, namely killing his mother and subsequently taking his own life, do not render him an inherently malevolent being. Instead, his actions evoke a sense of compassion and sympathy. The human body should get assistance to prevent engaging in reckless behaviors that pose risks and injury and ensure that both individuals and others receive the necessary support. He refrains from attempting to get it independently because his mother is the sole individual who has faith in his statements in the past.

3 Conclusion

In Indonesian fairy tales, the portrayal of individuals with intellectual disability predominantly features masculine characters. The characters in the narrative exhibit a form of intellectual deficiency that is commonly associated with challenges in comprehending language, engaging in effective daily communication, displaying awareness of their immediate

environment, and lacking self-reliance. The presence of other individuals is necessary for them due to the incongruity between the prevailing societal structures designed for typical bodies and their own unique physical attributes. From a physical standpoint, individuals are characterized as possessing robust physical constitutions. Consequently, within the realm of social interactions, the treatment of their bodies diverges significantly. Certain individuals experience exclusion through various means, even from others in their immediate circles. Conversely, there exist individuals who are exempt from such treatment due to their elevated status as kings. These entities are depicted as subjects of marginalization, subjects deserving of sympathy, and subjects that serve as a wellspring of motivation.

References

- [1] E. Kristiyanti, "Model Penyelenggaraan Pendidikan Inklusif bagi Penyandang Disabilitas Intelektual: Studi Kasus di DKI Jakarta," *Indonesian Journal of Religion and Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 67–79, 2019.
- [2] G. M. Lestari, T. M. Pratamawati, and G. S. Brajadenta, "Hubungan Pengetahuan tentang Disabilitas Intelektual terhadap Tingkat Kecemasan Orang Tua yang Memiliki Anak dengan Disabilitas Intelektual," *Tunas Medika Jurnal Kedokteran & Kesehatan*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2021.
- [3] A. Bellaputri, F. D. Purba, and L. Qodariah, "Kualitas Hidup Orang Tua dari Anak dengan Disabilitas Intelektual: Studi Kualitatif," *Journal of Psychological Science and Profession*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 42–57, 2022, doi: <https://doi.org/10.24198/jpsp.v6i1.32807>.
- [4] I. M. Safuan, A. B. Roslina, and N. M. E. Nik Rafidah, "Cerita Jenaka Melayu Suatu Manifestasi Watak Dan Perwatakan Positif," *Jurnal Melayu Sedunia*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 296–329, Sep. 2018, Accessed: Sep. 13, 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://juku.um.edu.my/index.php/jurnalmelayusedunia/article/view/13409>
- [5] E. Yetti, "Narrative Structure of 'Tongtonge' Tuter Story from Sumbawa Island," *Sawerigading*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 505–518, 2015, Accessed: Oct. 23, 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://sawerigading.kemdikbud.go.id/index.php/sawerigading/article/view/88>
- [6] A. Amat and N. S. Sulaiman, "Watak dan Nilai Positif dalam Cerita Jenaka Etnik Peribumi Terpilih di Sabah," *Malay Literature*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 1–24, May 2023, doi: 10.37052/ML36(1)NO1.
- [7] I. A. Dwita *et al.*, "Pelatihan Menggambar Ilustrasi Cerita Rakyat untuk Pengembangan Karakter Anak-Anak Sekolah Dasar di Bali," *Bakti Budaya: Jurnal Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 43–55, Apr. 2023, doi: 10.22146/BAKTI.6697.
- [8] Abdul. Rasyid, *Cerita rakyat daerah Wajo di Sulawesi Selatan*. Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1999.
- [9] R. M. Barusman, T. Noor, N. Udin, W. Akhyar, and M. Irsyad, *Cerita Rakyat Daerah Lampung*. Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Kebudayaan Daerah, 1984.
- [10] J. Danandjaja and D. A. Maryanto, *Cerita rakyat dari Jawa Tengah 3*, vol. 3. Grasindo, 1992.
- [11] M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.
- [12] M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New : Panthein Books, 1995.
- [13] S. L. Gabel, "Shatter Not the Branches of the Tree of Anger: Mothering, Affect, and Disability," *Hypatia*, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 553–568, 2018, doi: 10.1111/hypa.12410.
- [14] A. Schmiesing, *Disability, Deformity, and Disease in the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Wayne State University Press, 2014.
- [15] R. H. Kimball, "A Plea for Pity," *Philosophy & rhetoric*, vol. 37, no. 4, pp. 301–316, 2004.