

# Representation of Power Relation in Sundanese Myth in Kurniawan's *Man Tiger*: A Strauss' Structuralism Analysis

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## Abstract

Myth is an important part of the history of Indonesian civilization. This study tries to reveal the position of tigers as a myth believed in Sundanese society. In conducting the research, textual analysis by using Kurniawan's *Man Tiger* as the primary data was employed. The researcher analyzed how the tiger as a symbol in Sundanese myth represents a specific power relation in society. Levi-Strauss' structuralism was used. After determining units, episodes, and mythemes, binary opposition was used to reveal the meanings. The results of the study show that *Man Tiger* has eight episodes. It is also found out that there are different power relations established by two basic situations, namely Sundanese traditional and urban societies. In Sundanese traditional society, tiger owners are considered heroes because they protect people from both invaders and robbers. Because of this, they are put in a high place. These beliefs and power relations are very evident in the sphere of traditional society, while they begin to fade in the urban society. In other words, Sundanese traditional society has a myth-based-power relation showing that the tigers' owner have notable and high position, while the urban society socially has no power relation based on myth.

**Keywords:** Myth, Structuralism, Sundanese Society

## INTRODUCTION

Myth is not a strange thing to Indonesian society. If observed in detail, myths are inseparable even in the socio-spiritual landscape of many people in Indonesia. It dissolves, lives with humans, and often becomes a guide in stepping the path of life. Myth is not just a worthless fairy tale. Many academics view myth as a valuable entity and have a deep message or value, one of which is Claude Levi-Strauss, a very prominent French linguist and anthropologist. Myth creation is an attempt to describe a reality, whether relative or absolute, as a painting describes something. This device is considered as a simple and precise communication medium because in the past, people did not have complex communication tools (Madjid, 2000: 176).

Levi-Strauss (1981) argues that myth, something he mentions as another form of language, is full of information; there are meanings behind words, and commonly they are to keep the relation between humans, nature, and so on. He says myths have similarities with languages that can be learned (Ahimsa-Putra, 2012: 24-25). There are various messages stored in these cultural products. As a social part that is not mere nonsense, myth is basically intended to project messages, create and maintain good relations between humans and other elements, and build identity. These characteristics make myths have the same pattern in various cultures when analyzed (Alhaidari & Bhanegaonkar, 2012).

Indonesia is a very rich country that is able to accommodate various myths in various regions.

In fact, even today, discussions on myths, whether in small spaces such as coffee shops or academic study rooms, are still busy—as if it cannot be separated from us forever. One of the famous myths is the myth of the white tiger (maung) in Sundanese land, which is also a sign of the greatness of the name King Siliwangi, the most popular and last king of the Kingdom of Siliwangi. This myth is generally expressed orally by word of mouth, spreading from one person to another (Amanah, 2014).

The glory of King Siliwangi ended when he chose to leave his territory, going to a forest to avoid civil war, committed moksa—ending his own life by releasing his soul, transforming into a white tiger. Departing from here, Bandung City has the nickname maung. The tiger has become a symbol of the pride and glory of the Sunda region (Gustaman & Khoeruman, 2019).

This very legendary myth is photographed by Eka Kurniawan, a great novelist from Indonesia who has gone global, in a novel entitled *Man Tiger*. Kurniawan takes two important locations as the basis for his story, namely Sundanese traditional and urban communities. He proposes the main character named Margio to represent the heir to the white tiger. There, symbols of glory, strength, and kindness appear.

In this research, the authors analyzed the power relations that appear in the mythical landscape in Sundanese traditional and urban societies and how they are projected by the author. The researcher used Levi-Strauss' structuralism as a basis for dissecting the novel. Binary opposition, an approach that discusses the meaning of something from its difference with other things (Cuddon, 1999), will also be utilized after deciding mythemes in the myth structure. Mytheme is Levi-Strauss' effort to find a structure that can provide enlightenment about the meaning contained (Endraswara, 2005: 227-230). The position of the mythemes in a myth is notabel to determine the disclosure of its meaning. In the analysis process, synchronic relations precede diachronic relations. These relations can then be

simplified into binary oppositions (Putra, 2001: 70).

The results of myth analyses can also be linked to power relation. Foucault views power relation as something arising from certain knowledge that is structurally established. Knowledge cannot be separated from power; power creates knowledge and knowledge produces power. With sufficient and authoritative knowledge, one party can form a certain regime of power that is able to control others. The relationships formed there have an impact on everyday life (Balan, 2010).

This study would analyze the power relations formed in the mythical structure of the tiger myth in Sundanese society. As something that is embedded in society and has ideas, values, and messages, myth is seen as being analyzed from the perspective of power relations. Myths that are believed to be rules or regulations can divide society into classes with certain power relations.

## METHODOLOGY

This research was designed as a descriptive qualitative study, applying the Levi-Strauss style of structuralism theory. To make the analysis more specific and measurable, the authors also used binary opposition after determining the mythemes in the myth structure. The topic discussed here is power relations in the mythical landscape of Sundanese society, departing from the novel entitled *Man Tiger* by Eka Kurniawan as the object of research. The researcher read the text in depth, collected data in various forms, classified them, and interpreted them in the thinking framework that has been provided. After the myth structure was obtained, it was then linked to power relation theory provided by Michael Foucault.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researchers elaborated the binary opposition discussing the power relations represented in Sundanese traditional and urban societies after determining various mythemes obtained from the myth structure, namely the position of tigers' owners in the society due to their tremendous power, the disputes between Margio and Komar, the tiger inheritance, and the

beliefs of myth developed in the community. These notable mythemes are contained in 115 units—that are then classified into eight episodes, namely Komar and Nuraeni's wedding, Komar's torture towards Nuraeni, house moving, dispute and tiger inheritance, Nuraeni's and Anwar Sadat's Infidelity, death of Marian and Komar, the assassination of Anwar Sadat, and Margio's confession. Here is the summary of those elements in the form of the binary opposition table.

Table 1. Binary Opposition of Sundanese Traditional and Urban Societies

Traditional	Urban
Strongly believe in myth	Do not believe in myth
Consider tigers' owners as heroes	No heroes of myth
Tigers' owners get high position	No high position for tigers' owners

### Different Portrait of Sundanese Traditional and Urban Societies

There are many fundamental and significant differences that can be found in Sundanese traditional and urban communities in depicting myths. The main premise is that traditional societies believe in myths strongly, while urban societies do not. This thesis can be seen from the following quotes.

Never ever tease a girl genie, he always said, but if one of them falls in love with you, take her, for that is a blessing (Kurniawan, 2015: Page 40).

The writer uses the word "blessing", which means that human relations with genies are recognized as not a disaster, but a blessing that can lead to good things and good luck. Jinn is not seen as a scary figure. On the contrary, it is a life companion, a complement to the road, and a helper in times of trouble.

According to Ma Muah, the village storyteller, many man in the hamlet had a tigress of his own. Some married one, while others inherited a

tigress, passed down through the generations. (Kurniawan, 2015: Page 40)

Another keyword that can be found in the paragraph above is "marriage". As we know, in the universe of our thoughts about the various relationships or bonds between people, marriage is one of the most sacred. Parents and children are close because they are united by blood, love from childhood to adulthood and even old age. Meanwhile, marriage is not bound by blood at all. Two human beings are united by commitment—although of course, sometimes it is also born out of compulsion for certain interests. But clearly, the ideal marriage is a matter of commitment between two parties and even more. Marriage makes people swear vows directly to their spouses and God, and so it is sacred.

Therefore, the use of the term "marriage" here confirms that humans and jinn (especially tigers) have a good relationship. Their relationship is no joke. There is a kind of promise between the two, in which it binds, unites these different dimensional beings in one relation, commits to

living together according to their respective portions.

*How unbelievably happy he was, for the tigress was more than anything he had ever owned. He thought about how she would hunt with him, helping to corral the wild pigs that ruined the rice fields, and, if he ever got slack when one or two boats charged, she would protect him from the worst. (Kurniawan, 2015: Page 43)*

Margio's romance with his tiger also emphasizes that he really considers this creature valuable. This is very reasonable for at least two things. First, he has lived in fantasies about the possession of a white tiger that will lead the heir to a more meaningful and better life. Second, the background in Margio family life is a lingering sadness. His mother spends a lot of time daydreaming like crazy, while his father is a self-conscious rascal and is always tough on his wife. In his family, Mameh is the only one who does not weigh heavily on Margio's mind. In fact, the feud between their parents also makes Mameh feel turbulent. She herself has traumatized her father Komar, because the cruel man has seen her naked in the bathroom, embarrassing her to death and resentful that nothing should happen afterward.

From this, Margio's love for his tiger makes sense. Among the various problems he experiences, the presence of a white tiger is like a cool breeze in hot times, like rain in the middle of a long dry season, like a water source in a desert that is almost entirely covered in sand. Margio considers the tiger as his lover, as a wife, as a complement to life—without which his life will no longer have any meaning. His life is futile.

Judging from Margio's case, the feelings of other tiger owners with tigers can be assumed to be the same. They join together destiny and feelings. It is a destiny because the tiger will choose for himself to whom they will enter a person's body. The feeling of love will grow over time because basically people already know how humans are related to tigers.

Positive views and closeness to myths are strengthened by the presence of a storyteller named Ma Muah in the story.

*As far as Margio could remember, Ma Muah didn't have a husband or a child, and had no work to do either, other than endlessly reeling off stories. She could go to anyone's kitchen and eat there, or someone would come to her shack bringing food. People loved her, especially children. (Kurniawan, 2015: Page 41)*

Ma Muah is one of the keys to the preservation of stories about ghosts, jinn, and other supernatural beings, and people love her with evidence that they will listen to whatever comes out of the woman's mouth, feed her, treat her well even if she doesn't have any single-family. Ma Muah is an important point of how mythical beliefs flourish in traditional societies. Her presence is a kind of fertilizer for all stories about myths. Acceptance of her is a representation of the people's willingness to continue to hear stories and beliefs that have been carried over from generation to generation.

This is different compared to Sundanese urban society, in which the people do not believe in myth. Only Mameh and Komar, who are Margio's family members, are described knowing tigers as a myth representation. Besides those, there is no even a single person believing myths—even though Margio explains it, for instance, to Agung Yuda, the police, and other people.

The existence of myth is almost nothing; it is buried in everyday social reality. There is only a narrative about the hunting of pigs in the forest, infidelity between residents with various backgrounds—one of which is experienced by Margio's mom (Nuraeni), stories of love and sex between young people, addiction to alcohol, and occasional night market entertainment—which brings youngsters drunk in love in a deeper puddle of romance.

Before and after killing Anwar Sadat, basically, Margio has provided a kind of clue to the people around him. However, none of them understand because, in the universe of their minds

as urban people, there is no term of believing in supernatural powers.

*Some time before his disappearance, Agung Yuda had heard Margio say he intended to kill his father. He had confessed there was something inside him, and that he could kill without hesitation. (Kurniawan, 2015: Page 23)*

In this part, it is so clear that Margio has told Agung Yuda—one of his best friend—at least two things: first, Margio does hate his full-time-torturer father. Second, he really has something inside his body, namely a tiger spirit inherited from his grandpa, and it is as dangerous as wild animals that it can kill people with no hesitation.

### **Different Power Relation in Sundanese Traditional and Urban Societies**

In *Man Tiger*, the aspect of strength that is highlighted is the physical and supernatural strength obtained from the possession of a tiger. The tiger is not just a mythical symbol. In the story, it is explicitly narrated that the tiger owners really have tremendous physical strength, and because of this, they gain certain power in the social structure of society.

Why is the tiger a symbol? Why is the tiger the main point in this novel? First, to emphasize again, this novel takes place in the Sundanese region or land. This can be seen from one of the explanations about the Siliwangi tiger statue, as well as information about Halimunda which is one of the areas on Mount Salak.

*So he hurried down there, while people milled around the Siliwangi tiger statue and the flagpole, laughing. (Kurniawan, 2015: Page 34)*

The tiger is a great animal in the view of the Sundanese people. In various studies using the oral interview method, which were later searched for or published in academic texts, the tiger is considered special because it is the embodiment of King Siliwangi. Many Sundanese believe that King Siliwangi used to leave his throne to escape the war with one of his descendants. Together

with several loyal guards, he headed to the forest, then moksa or "kill himself" there

However, the difference in belief ultimately as mentioned previously affects the portrait of power relations in the two different forms of communities. Broadly speaking, the tigers' owners in traditional Sundanese society get respect and respect for their physical strength, supernatural gifts, and a willingness to protect their inhabitants. Meanwhile, urban people do not know the system of such power relations at all because they do not believe in it.

*He had often heard of his grandfather's prowess, and that of elders in other hamlets: how they resisted Dutch efforts to abduct the best young men for forced labor in the land of Deli... Ma Muah said that this was all because of the elders' elemental friendship with the tigresses, who became family through wedlock. (Kurniawan, 2015: Page 42)*

If it is connected with a more modern context, the heirs of the tiger are perhaps like village officials, police, and even military soldiers. In ancient times, people in simple and narrow social ecosystems lacked complex political tools and powers. Therefore, the power system that was formed also led to another simple system, namely myth—which has previously been described as a collection or set of simple rules due to limited means of communication.

How is the role of the police or military soldiers in the eyes of the community? Do they get respect from society? In general, the answer is yes. Police and soldiers get respect from society because they are considered to have created peace and stability. They are the place to complain if there are cases such as theft, murder, or rape. They are given the legal instruments and the right to do many things that ordinary people cannot.

The difference is, when the police or the army are selected by the government with a clear and complex formal law, the owners of tigers are chosen by the tigers themselves—which the traditional Sundanese people believe to be an entity that really exists and has power. At this

point, sometimes belief in a "given" is stronger because it cannot be determined by humans—beyond our reach. This is different from the election or appointment of police-soldiers, which generally go through various human-created procedures, whether through constitutions or laws, not determined by God or other creatures outside of human decisions.

Starting from this assumption, the power relations that arise between tiger owners and non-tiger owners have significant limitations. Tiger heirs are considered brave, strong, and very nurturing—which makes them worthy of adoration and respect. Meanwhile, ordinary people couldn't access the same positions. They are not the focus of attention in the power dialogue. However, what needs to be underlined is that ordinary people are not objects that can be exploited by tiger owners who have the status quo.

In the landscape of (traditional) Sundanese people who strongly believe in the existence of tigers and their heirs, there is not a single story or record stating that tiger owners oppress or do arbitrary things to others. They are protectors. There are no other attributions such as criminals, perpetrators of injustice, and so on.

This kind of behavior is very reasonable if we remember the mythology of the tiger which is considered the "incarnation" or "soul" of King Siliwangi in another form. The tiger also represents compassion, great strength, wisdom, and justice. The power that appears is not an authoritarian force, which forces anyone to submit, fear, and become a slave to certain parties. The strength of the tiger and its owner is the power of compassion, protection, and love. This is why from the very beginning the concept of a relationship—which is previously explained—between a tiger and a human is a "love" relationship. In people's belief, the tiger is the wife, and vocabulary such as "marriage" is used very often.

This hypothesis will be even stronger when we see Margio, who despite being crushed by

various bad and painful situations, can still hold his emotions to the breaking point, which makes him completely out of control. Margio is a child from the marriage of Nuraeni and Komar bin Syueb. Both couples have been problematic since before marriage, and it is not surprising if their marriage is also full of intrigue, problems, to serious things such as sexual harassment and violence. Actually, Nuraeni and Komar's relationship is not that bad at the beginning. All quarrels and misunderstandings start with Komar's departure. Yet, Margio can hold his grudge and does not end up killing his own father.

In Sundanese urban society, there are no conversations and actions showing how people behave to the tigers' owners. This is because almost all people—except Margio, Mameh, and Komar—do not believe in myth. Therefore, there is also no impact depicted there.

However, even though people do not realize that Margio is the heir of tiger spirit, he is well-known and respected. He gets all because of his physical strength and behaviour.

*Among the troop of hunters that until recently had been under Sadrah's leadership, Margo was the champ... (Kurniawan, 2015: Page 7)*

Here, Margio's position as a "champion", or at least a mainstay in hunting, is a proof that he is someone who is respected and valued in society. Hunting is a symbol of toughness; the people in his residence consider hunting to be inseparable and important. Hence, someone who excels in hunting is surely to be hailed. Margio's name is popular as a strong and polite boy. There is no bad attribution for him—the only bad thing people know is that he often steals his own father's chickens.

Departing from the two forms of societies that are already mentioned, it can be seen that knowledge of myth possesses an essential role in building power relation. According to Foucault (1982), knowledge becomes a very essential element in creating power. In the context of tiger myth in the land of Sunda, knowledge about myth determines how far power relations based on

myth are established. Traditional societies that have knowledge about and believe in tiger myths have a clear relationship structure: tiger owners are respected more than ordinary people. They get a high position in society. This knowledge regime is "controlled" by tiger owners, old people, and a storyteller named Ma Muah. This knowledge is then disseminated to people in the community landscape. Therefore, they believe in the tiger myth to its roots—holding it as a rule in life. Power relations are eventually formed in the social system.

Different things happen to the urban community that does not have a regime of knowledge about the tiger myth. That myth is not something that is believed so it does not become an authority that has an impact on social schemes. Therefore, Margio as the owner of the tiger does not get a high status in society for that attribute. Once again, this clearly proves that the regime of knowledge about the myth of the tiger greatly determines the power relations that are formed in society. Without sufficient and authoritative knowledge, power cannot be created in social life.

## CONCLUSION

*Man Tiger* tells the story of Margio, a man who inherits a supernatural white tiger. Apart from showing the story of the bitterness of life and violence in the family, this novel also portrays the reality of myths in Sundanese traditional and urban society. The traditional society is depicted as deeply believing in myths, thus placing the heirs of tigers in a high position in society. Meanwhile, the urban community does not recognize the concept of such power relations. If in the traditional landscape the heirs of tigers are respected by all levels of society, then in the urban environment, their existence is neither recognized nor acknowledged. The popularity of Margio in urban society is derived from his physical strength and good attitude. No tiger heir frills exist there. Thus, the regime of knowledge plays a notable role in defining the power relations established in the society.

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