



Love across entities and spiritual transformation: Intertextuality and cultural representation of Minangkabau in *Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih*

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10.51817/susastra.v14i2.218

Abstract

Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih is a Minangkabau oral literature rich in cultural values and local aesthetics. This study aims to analyze the intertextuality and cultural representation in Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih, focusing on the themes of love across entities and spiritual transformation embedded in the narrative. A qualitative approach is employed, utilizing symbolic, hermeneutic, and intertextual text analysis methods supported by theories of representation and cultural cosmology. The findings indicate that this kaba constructs a network of meanings that intertwines with the narratives of other Minangkabau kaba, particularly in the structure of spiritual journeys, identity transformation, and the relationship between humans and the supernatural world. Cultural representation is evident through natural symbols such as Mount Marapi and Pincuran Puti, which serve as the axis mundi, as well as the role of female characters as spiritual agents and guardians of the cosmic order. Love in this kaba is not merely romantic but functions as a mechanism for existential transformation and understanding across worlds, reflecting local values of harmony, custom, and spiritual balance. This study reinforces the position of kaba as a dynamic medium for cultural education, a reflection of local cosmology, and a critical reading of identity and spirituality in Indonesian oral literature.

Keywords: Minangkabau kaba, love across entities, intertextuality, cultural representation, spirituality, transformation

Sitasi (APA Style)

Muhardis, M. (2025). Love across entities and spiritual transformation: intertextuality and cultural representation of Minangkabau in *Kaba Puti Marintan Alui*. *Susastra*, 14(2), 127-139. <https://doi.org/10.51817/susastra.v14i2.218>

INTRODUCTION

Oral literature is a form of cultural heritage that encompasses worldviews (Odularu et al., 2024), values (Pang & Wu, 2023), and social norms of a community (Gwerevende & Mthombeni, 2023). In the context of Minangkabau culture, Kaba is a form of oral prose literature passed down through generations. Kaba is not merely entertainment but also serves as an educational and communicative tool for conveying customary values, social norms, and the worldview of the Minangkabau people (Muhardis, 2023).

As a traditional narrative form, Kaba documents local stories featuring heroic characters, customary values, social conflicts, and the relationship between humans and the supernatural world. Therefore, kaba holds an important position in studying

Indonesian literature, particularly within the framework of ethnic literature, which emphasizes local richness and its contribution to the national literary heritage.

One of the kaba that is still preserved and published in a bilingual version is Puti Marintan Aluih. This kaba belongs to the romantic narrative genre (Rajan, 2010), which tells the story of the relationship between humans and spirits (mambang) and the tension between custom, love, and social identity. The story places Puti Marintan, a female spirit who falls in love with a human named Marah Baganti, as a symbol of the meeting between two worlds: the visible human world and the invisible spiritual realm.

Narratively, Puti Marintan Aluih is on par with other famous kaba such as Cindua Mato, Sabai Nan Aluih, and Anggun Nan Tongga, which include elements of heroism (Bour, 2022), romance, and customary symbols. However, what distinguishes Puti Marintan Aluih is its emphasis on interworld relations and the courage to transcend customary boundaries for love. It makes the work compelling for analysis through intertextual and cultural representation approaches, particularly in exploring the symbolic meanings and customary values contained within it.

Academic studies on Minangkabau kaba have been conducted by various researchers, employing approaches that cover structural, sociocultural, gender, educational, and environmental aspects. Hayati (Hayati et al., 2024) examined ten traditional and contemporary kaba using structuralist and semiotic approaches to reveal how gender roles are represented, finding that modern kaba tend to feature more empowered female characters than traditional narratives, which retain patriarchal norms. Muhardis (Muhardis, 2023) explored the potential of Kaba as teaching material for character education by analyzing the values of independence in Kaba Si Buyuang Karuik, which aligns with the Pancasila Student Profile, discovering 14 poetic quotations that can be integrated into education. Meanwhile, Wardani (Nofrahadi et al., 2022) used ecocritical approaches to identify the role of nature representation in Minangkabau kaba, finding that landscapes are not only settings but also narrative symbols and analogies for human conditions. These three studies demonstrate that Minangkabau Kaba serves as an oral literary heritage and a dynamic space for articulating cultural values, education, spirituality, and ecological awareness in society. However, these studies tend to be thematic or contextual and have not fully integrated intertextual and cultural representation approaches simultaneously to understand the intricate meanings woven within kaba narratives.

Additionally, most studies on kaba focus on established texts that are frequently analyzed. At the same time, Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih, although translated as part of the literacy priority program by Balai Bahasa Sumatra Barat 2021, has rarely been subjected to academic analysis. This story presents the complexity of Minangkabau culture, including the narrative of love across entities and the spiritual values in the relationship between humans and the supernatural world. This gap highlights a research opportunity in kaba studies, explicitly addressing the intertextual and cultural dimensions of the narrative.

Thus, this study aims to analyze Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih using intertextual and cultural representation approaches. Specifically, this research seeks to uncover the narrative of love across entities represented through the structure and content of Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive, qualitative, and symbolic narrative method (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). The aim is to uncover the structure of meaning in Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih, particularly regarding the narrative of love across entities and the spiritual values represented through symbols, character relations, and cultural landscapes. The data source for this research is the bilingual (Minangkabau–Indonesian) version of Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih (PMA) published by the Language Center of West Sumatra Province (NN, 2021). This text was selected because it explicitly addresses the theme of love between humans and supernatural beings (mambang) and contains symbols of Minangkabau culture.

The steps of analysis include segmenting the text based on themes and main plotlines (meeting, conflict, transformation, and separation), identifying cultural and spiritual symbols (e.g., Mount Marapi, the lake, the ethereal body, and Pincuran Puti), analyzing the main character's traits with a focus on the interaction between love and custom, conducting intertextual comparisons with other kaba and hikayat to detect parallel narrative structures and meaning networks, and providing a symbolic and reflective interpretation of the spiritual values involved in the love story across entities. To ensure the validity of the findings, the researcher conducted two rounds of in-depth reading of the text and triangulated the analysis with literary theory sources and contextual studies of Minangkabau culture. The entire analysis was done manually, using thematic notes and text annotations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cross-Entity Love Narrative

Cross-entity love narratives are present in various media and cultural contexts. In Japanese entertainment, cross-media narratives combine manga, anime, and video games to form a complex story world with layered and connected architecture (Pérez, 2013). Romance games in Japan, which evolved from text-based adventures to visual novels and "otome games," challenged traditional storytelling patterns by combining literary strategies, digital content, and audiovisual elements. The game reflects a shift from modern identity politics towards a decentralized mediation model in contemporary relations (Saito, 2021). Beyond human-centered narratives, cross-species love is explored in flower cultivation in Yunnan, where small-scale farmers build kinship relationships with flora through the body's perception of plant needs. This love between species manifests in care and economic benefits, suggesting that symbols of romantic love, such as the Valentine's Day rose, also contain a meaning of love that transcends human boundaries (Sun, 2022). The love narrative in Puti Marintan Aluih is built based on the meeting between two different worlds: the human world (Marah Baganti) and the mambang world (spirit beings, namely Puti Marintan). The story begins when Marah Baganti sees Puti Marintan bathing in "tapian" (lake). In the Minangkabau tradition, this place is often associated with sacred nature and becomes the border between the visible and subtle worlds.

"Tolong maafkan wahai Tuan, denai bukan orang sini, denai bukan bangsa manusia, denai adalah bangsa mambang, turun dari puncak Marapi. Kami kemari bersama-sama, mandi-mandi di pincuran tujuh, berjalan-jalan ke atas dunia"(PMA, 2021: 5)

Puti Marintan acknowledges that she originates from the mambang, a supernatural or ethereal race. Her love story with Marah Baganti represents an emotional connection between the human world and the spiritual realm. Their relationship is not merely romantic; it symbolizes a profound desire to transcend physical and customary boundaries. Despite coming from different worlds, Marah Baganti marries Puti Marintan, and they have a child together. However, conflict arises due to their fundamental differences and Puti Marintan's longing for her original, sacred realm.

The love between Marah Baganti and Puti Marintan, as portrayed in Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih, constitutes a complex representation of interdimensional relations beyond romance. It expresses an existential yearning to cross identity, custom, and cosmology boundaries. The narrative extends beyond interpersonal affection, illustrating the tension between the human world and the spiritual world (alam mambang), which in Minangkabau cosmology are not merely separate domains but parallel dimensions with their laws and orders.

As a human, Marah Baganti consciously chooses to love and marry a supernatural being—Puti Marintan—thus transgressing traditional and existential boundaries preserved across generations. His decision represents more than a social transgression; it is also an ontological crossing from the visible world to the unseen. This choice renders love an act of liberation from societal norms and a process of spiritual transformation. He must undergo a ritual of transcendence (bathing at Pincuran Puti) to become unified in body and soul with his beloved from the spirit realm.

The ensuing conflict does not stem from personal discord but an essential, irreconcilable difference in nature. Puti Marintan yearns for her own latent, sacred world. Although they form a family and bear a child, their harmony is temporary. No structure can fully accommodate the merging of two entities rooted in distinct cosmological systems. The death of their child, killed by human violence, marks the story's tragic climax, signaling that the spiritual world can no longer accept the human world, which it perceives as unjust.

Puti Marintan's return to Mount Marapi is not merely a character's departure but symbolizes restoring a disrupted cosmic balance. In Minangkabau tradition, Mount Marapi is considered the pucuk alam—the peak of the universe, the origin of the ancestors, and a spiritual center that links the underworld, the middle world (the human realm), and the upper world (the divine realm). Within this cosmological framework, their love becomes more than a personal bond—it serves as the narrative axis that simultaneously unsettles and restores cosmic order. Thus, the story is an allegory of the dynamic interplay between tradition, spirituality, and the limitations of human attempts to engage with the supernatural.

Ultimately, Puti Marintan Aluih presents love as a form of existential awareness, a crossing of identities, and a search for meaning beyond boundaries. It teaches that true love requires the courage to transcend norms but also imparts a crucial lesson about

limits: not all differences can be reconciled without compromising a larger order—tradition, spirituality, or the cosmos.

Identity Conflict and Indigenous Norms

Jan Stasieńko's article on marriage between humans and non-human entities (Stasieńko, 2015) highlights how intimate relationships beyond traditional norms can be realized through symbolic practices such as marriage. Through a case study of Sal9000's marriage with the virtual character Nene Anegasaki from the game Love Plus, Stasieńko shows that this relationship is physical or fictitious and full of emotional, spiritual, and personal commitment. Although not legally recognized, marriage is still celebrated publicly and ritually as a form of legitimacy of the relationship by the individual who experiences it. In this context, objects (both digital and material) are positioned not only as complements but as partners in meaningful relationships.

This phenomenon conceptually resonates with cross-entity love in the Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih, where the relationship between humans (Marah Baganti) and supernatural beings (Puti Marintan) also transcends the boundaries of worldly identity and customary norms. As in the posthuman relationship that Stasieńko described, love in kaba is not only shown as romance but as a spiritual and transformative force that demands existential change. Marah Baganti must go through a spiritual process (bathing in Pincuran Puti) to legitimize his relationship and merge with the world of Puti Marintan, just as marriage with a virtual entity can serve as a means of forming a posthuman identity and affection. Both of these narratives show that while unconventional, love remains a legitimate space for articulating meaning, identity, and cross-border spiritual relationships.

"Dengarkan Tuan Marah Baganti, tidak boleh Tuan ikut, kita bukan orang sebangsa... Tuan di dunia, denai di langit... kalau dikaji asal-usul, tidak elok kita berjodoh..." (PMA, 2021:7)

This quote is a crucial point in the narrative of Puti Marintan Aluih's kaba, which affirms Puti Marintan's cosmological awareness of the boundaries of entities in the universe's order. This subtle rejection is not just a personal expression. However, it reflects a deep internalization of Minangkabau traditional values that value the balance between the human world and the world of subtle beings (mambang). In the traditional view, each creature's origin and nature cannot be violated. Puti Marintan's statement shows that love based on passion and emotion cannot necessarily justify a violation of the original order since such a violation can shake harmony in relationships and the structure of nature itself. The statement also reflects the conflict between personal freedom and collective norms in traditional societies. Love in this context is not seen as an absolute right of the individual but rather as part of a larger value system in which origin, lineage (sako), and inter-world relationships are the primary considerations. When Puti Marintan says that "if we study the origins, it is not good for us to marry," he asserts that their relationship is not only opposed by physical or social distance but by ontological differences that cannot be reconciled without spiritual consequences. This is in line with the principles of the customary basandi syarak, the syarak basandi Kitabullah, where customary law and cosmic beliefs are integrated into maintaining the order of life. Thus, Puti Marintan's rejection is not a form of weakness but an expression

of spiritual wisdom rooted in cultural values, which realizes that not all desires can be realized without shaking the harmony of the universe.

Spiritual Transformation in Pincuran Puti

In Plato's thought, as Whitbeck (Whitbeck, 1984) described, love is seen as a "divine madness" that stirs the soul to give birth to goodness and beauty, leading to spiritual transformation. It is very parallel to the experience of Marah Baganti in Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih. He falls in love with Puti Marintan, leaves his old world, undergoes a spiritual procession (bathing in Pincuran Puti), and undergoes an existential change—from a brute human to a spirit being. Their love involves sacrifice and transformation: Angry Baganti has to leave the human world and undergo a spiritual procession (bathing in Pincuran Puti) to live in the mambang world with his wife and child. It is not just a place shift but an existential transition from a rough being to a spirit being.

"Jika kita sudah mandi, badan akan segera berubah, tubuh yang kasar menjadi halus... yang gaib akan kelihatan... Mereka pun turun dan masuk, ke dalam Pincuran Puti, mandi berkecimpung... bunyinya bak telempong." (PMA, 2021: 19)

The quote poetically describes a transcendental moment in the Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih, where physical processes such as bathing become a symbol of the existential transition rite. Pincuran Puti, as a source of holy water, is not only a place to cleanse the body but a gateway to another world. Water in this context contains a deep spiritual meaning—as a medium of transformation between the real world and the supernatural world, between the gross body and the subtle body. The transformation of Anger's body from an ordinary human to a subtle being is not only a change of form but an emptying of the ego, the release of worldly identity, and the readiness to merge with the spiritual realm. The sound of water that is "like telempong" marks that this moment is not only a ritual but also a sacred event that touches the dimensions of the cosmos and culture. This bathing process also shows that entry into the spiritual or "supernatural" world cannot be achieved instantly or solely out of love but through self-purification, mental readiness, and recognition of the spiritual order. It aligns with the concept of liminality in ritual anthropology, which is the threshold phase in the transformation of identity in which the individual is no longer in their old state but has not fully entered into the new state. In the context of this kaba, Pincuran Puti becomes a liminal space that bridges the human world and the world of mambang, as well as between worldly love and spiritual love. This ritual marks the fact that to love beings from other worlds, one must transform oneself both physically and spiritually, realizing that true love demands transformation and alignment with the greater spiritual order.

Sacred Landscapes and Parallel Worlds

The relationship between humans and mambang represents the Minangkabau spiritual awareness that this world is not only material but also one with the supernatural. The Minangkabau people are invited to live in a balance between worldly logic and spiritual values, respecting the visible and the invisible. The connection between the material and supernatural worlds raised in various cutting-edge studies finds a strong resonance in the narrative structure and symbolic meaning of kaba Puti

Marintan Aluih. The love story between Marah Baganti and Puti Marintan is not just a cross-entity romance but a metaphor for the connection between humans' physical world and the Mamma nation's spiritual realm. Just as Aquino (de Aquino, 2012) thought that the laws of physics could also lead to non-material dimensions, in this Kaba, the transformation of Marah Baganti's body from rough to smooth after bathing in Pincuran Puti represents the process of transcendence from physical existence to the spiritual dimension.

Furthermore, as Herva (Herva, 2012) points out, spirituality can be present in everyday experiences and physical environments; it places natural landscapes such as lakes, mountains, and showers as active spiritual symbols, not just passive backgrounds. Mount Marapi, for example, is not only topography but also the center of the Minangkabau cultural cosmos, the place of origin of spirit beings, and a space for spiritually united souls. Thus, Puti Marintan Aluih articulates the world as a space that is not wholly material but is united with the spiritual meanings that live in nature, the body, and human relationships. Bonilla-Giovanetti (Bonilla-Giovanetti, 2021) highlights that a supernatural dimension in traditional texts, such as the kaba, challenges secular worldviews and opens up space for a more inclusive hermeneutic approach to non-Western cultures. In that sense, this Kaba becomes a local representation of cosmology that transcends the physical-spiritual dichotomy. Puti Marintan is not described as a threat but as a noble, wise, and affectionate figure.

"Cobalah lihat ke luar kolam, bisakah Tuan melihat, rumah gadang bersusun-susun, lumbung padi bersusun, jalan ramai lebih yang lurus. ..." (PMA, 2021: 21)

The quote implicitly reveals Marah Baganti's openness to the reality of the elven world after he underwent a spiritual transformation. Previously, the supernatural world was invisible, close to ordinary humans, still in a "rough" state. However, after purifying herself at Pincuran Puti, Marah Baganti could see what was previously hidden: a landscape featuring Gadang houses, rice barns, and orderly roads. This picture is not just imaginative but reflects the representation of Minangkabau cosmology, which believes in parallel worlds (elven realms) that coexist with human nature. It is not a completely foreign world but a reflection of the purified world of man—an ideal, orderly, and harmonious world.

In the view of the Minangkabau people, the elven realm is a place for spirit creatures and a symbolic space that accommodates cultural values in a purer or nobler form. Stacked gadang houses and abundant rice barns hint at the well-being, social order, and symbolic abundance that can only be achieved by those who have undergone spiritual transformation. The world is depicted not in a strange or sinister form but in the visual language and culture of Minangkabau itself, indicating that the mambang realm is not an antagonistic "other" but a sacred and hidden version of everyday reality. Through this vision of Marah Baganti, Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih conveyed that the spiritual realm is another existence and a continuation of the purified human world, and only those who pass the spiritual threshold can witness and live in it. It confirms that Minangkabau is familiar with the multi-layered cosmos, in which human beings, with humility and self-transformation, can access a higher order in their cultural and spiritual universe.

Tragedy as a Symbol of Cosmic Disconnection

The concept of spiritual and cosmic balance explained in recent studies aligns with the structure of meaning and narrative dynamics in the Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih. In the story, the love relationship between Marah Baganti and Puti Marintan, who come from two different entities (humans and creatures), creates an imbalance between the visible and supernatural worlds. When their son, Mancayo Alam, is killed by humans, nature reacts: Mount Marapi is veiled in clouds, the jungle is covered in fog, and supernatural sounds echo — all of this represents a cosmic response to a disturbance of balance, as Bryndin (Bryndin, 2023) explains that the universe responds to disturbances through restorative processes. The event also shows that spiritual imbalances can be triggered by human actions that transgress moral and cosmological boundaries, as depicted in the theory of community spiritual balance.

In the context of kaba, the human community fails to maintain harmony. It denies the traditional principles and sacred values of life, thus triggering a spiritual response from the world of “mambang”, which leads to Puti Marintan's departure and Marah Baganti's disappearance from the human world. It reflects the view that spiritual balance is maintained not only by individuals but also by entire communities that have collective responsibility. In line with Khaletskyj's (Khaletskyj, 2019) view, this kaba narrative also portrays the world as a space of ongoing spiritual transformation. Changing the Angry Baganti — from an ordinary human to a subtle being — is not only individual but marks a cosmological turning point in the relationship between the two worlds. This Kaba thus becomes a local mirror of a worldview that sees life as a continuous process towards spiritual balance and inter-entity harmony. He taught that the human world cannot be separated from the spiritual order and that any disruption of that balance will impact the entire universe, physical and metaphysical.

“Gunung Merapi, dan Gunung Singgalang, ikut berselendang awan, tanda-tanda berduka cita, mega pun mendung tidak bercahaya. Lalu terdengar guruh, berdentang petir tunggal. Kilat sabung bersabung, hujan pun turun dari langit, pelangi menghampar, benang rimba berselimut kabut, mambang sedang berduka waktu itu.” (PMA, 2021: 49)

The quote is an emotional and spiritual peak in the Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih narrative. When the child of a cross-entity love, Mancayo Alam, is killed by humans because its origins are not understood, the universe reacts. The mountains in Minangkabau cosmology are seen as the axis of the world (axis mundi), veiled by clouds; Fog, lightning, thunder, and rain appear as symbols of cosmic mourning. This phrase describes the deep connection between the human and spiritual worlds, where a personal tragedy has implications for the entire order.

In the Minangkabau belief system, the balance between humans, nature, and spirit is sacred. Nature is not passive; instead, it is aware and responsive to human actions, especially if it touches the boundary between the visible and subtle worlds. The anger and sorrow of the mambang world are not only conveyed verbally. However, they are symbolized through extreme natural phenomena—lightning, rain, and fog—as a form of spiritual and cosmic communication. In this context, Mancayo Alam's death is not only a personal tragedy but a disturbance to the spiritual balance that demands a

rearrangement between the worlds. This Kaba teaches that in Minangkabau culture, humans are not the sole rulers of nature but part of a network of sacred ecosystems. When that order is violated—through misunderstanding, violence, or violation of customs—nature will show its signs. It is not a mere myth but a reflection of local ecological and spiritual ethics, affirming that justice and harmony are human and universal affairs.

A Dynamic Identity with Deep Cultural Roots

Understanding other cultures requires internal transformation, not just imposing one's identity on others. This process includes trying to understand the original point of view of the community as well as to realize their view of the world (Hanson & Martin, 1973). In Charles Taylor's theory, culture is seen as a hermeneutic medium that allows individuals to understand themselves through their fundamental relationship with culture (Centeno, 2010). In the context of multiple identities, exploring cultural boundaries through art can help individuals navigate the complexity of plural personas (Song, 2009). Edgar Morin emphasizes the importance of recognizing others as a mirror of oneself and the need for emotional knowledge and empathy in building understanding (Morin, 2022). Intercultural confrontation is a way to expand understanding, affirm diversity, and encourage mutual tolerance. Ultimately, proper understanding is only possible if we can recognize individual and collective identities without erasing the uniqueness of each culture, because each culture is a complex intertwining of various influences.

This view is particularly relevant when applied to the kaba Puti Marintan Aluih, where the love between Marah Baganti (human) and Puti Marintan (creature of the miner) cannot be maintained without existential and spiritual transformation. Marah Baganti did not impose his world on Puti Marintan but had to undergo a process of self-transformation, through a purification bath at Pincuran Puti, to truly understand and be one with nature and the values of the lover's world. It aligns with the idea that cross-cultural (or, in Kaba, cross-entity) understanding demands change from within, not just formal tolerance. This transformation also illustrates that true love is not just about emotions but about the ability to shed one's ego and become familiar with the other's way of life, values, and structure of the cosmos.

This Kaba, thus, not only voices the narrative of romance but also conveys a profound message about inter-identity relationships, transcultural empathy, and the importance of inner transformation in building a proper understanding of the "other." This story also represents how Minangkabau cultural identity is adaptive and dialogical. Angry Baganti did not force his human world into the world of Puti Marintan. Instead, he underwent a transformation ritual (bathing in Pincuran Puti) to be accepted in another world. It represents that to understand another culture (or another reality), one needs to change from within, not impose one's identity.

Women as Guardians of the Cosmos and Keepers of Indigenous Knowledge

Cutting-edge research challenges the old view of women as passive objects in society and emphasizes their active role and agency in shaping social dynamics. Gerson and Peiss (Gerson & Peiss, 1985) propose a framework for understanding gender relations through boundaries, negotiation, and awareness, which demonstrate women's

involvement in shaping social structures. Mernissi (Abdul-Rahim, 2020) analyzes how traditional Islamic views on women's sexuality shape social order while affirming women's potential to shake up the order. Canevaro (Canevaro, 2018) shows that women in Homeric epics use objects to negotiate their agency and reverse masculine perspectives, demonstrating their skill in utilizing cultural symbols. Meanwhile, Mills (Mills, 1997) suggests that women must seek values based on communication and exchange rather than following the logic of accumulation and domination typical of men. These studies highlight women's active involvement in social relations and their ability to challenge and reshape existing gender systems.

This context is very relevant when read in the context of Puti Marintan Aluih's kaba, where Puti Marintan is not only a beloved female figure but also a figure with high awareness and agency. He was aware of the difference in entities between himself and Marah Baganti and the customary boundaries that should not be violated. Thus, he negotiated transworld relations based on spiritual values and social responsibility. Puti Marintan does not wait but instead leads the transformation process of Marah Baganti through symbolic guidance, such as the bathing procession at Pincuran Puti. In this sense, she reflects the character of women who are not subordinates but rather movers of change and guardians of the cosmic order. Like the woman in the epic or the traditional society who intelligently uses symbols and space, Puti Marintan is also an active subject who determines the story's direction and the balance of the two worlds.

This Kaba, thus, shows that traditional narratives also have the potential to redefine the role of women progressively and profoundly. In this cross-entity love, the female character (Puti Marintan) is not a passive object. He is aware of cosmic boundaries and customs and tries to maintain order even though he loves Marah Baganti. She is described as a spiritual, wise, and emotional figure, which reflects the position of Minangkabau women as the *limpapeh* of the gadang house, as well as a bridge between generations and values.

Mount Marapi and the lake as a spiritual axis

These locations are not just places but symbols of the transcendent world — the place of origin of spirit beings and the center of the universe's balance in the Minangkabau people's beliefs. Sacred natural sites such as mountains and lakes often serve as spiritual axes (*axis mundi*) or centers of the universe in various cultures. These places are seen as focal points for spiritual practices, healing, and nature preservation (Verschuuren, 2010). The concept of *axis mundi* is found in many religious traditions, such as Mount Kailas in Tibet, which some believe is the center of the world. In Judaism, the *axis mundi* symbol is applied to holy figures such as caddies, depicted with images resembling sacred spaces (Green, 1977). In Hinduism, spiritual experiences at natural sites such as frozen lakes can have transcendental meanings (Yeats, 1961). In the Philippines, Mount Banahaw is considered a "power mountain" that is the spiritual center of the people and attracts pilgrims seeking physical and spiritual healing (Gorospe, 1992). This concept is strongly reflected in the Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih, where Mount Marapi, the lake, and Pincuran Puti function as a geographical setting, sacred space, and center of transcendental events.

Mount Marapi is not only the place of origin of the Puti Marintan figure but also represents the spiritual world (the realm of the mammogram), which can only be accessed through a purification and transformation procession. Pincuran Puti, as a bath that causes the "rough" body to become "smooth," functions like a sacred lake in the Hindu tradition—that is, as a gateway to a higher spiritual dimension. This Kaba shows that the Minangkabau people also interpret nature cosmologically, making specific natural sites a link between the human and supernatural worlds. Thus, Puti Marintan Aluih presents a local understanding of the concept of axis mundi, showing how the natural landscape is treated as a spiritual center and a symbol of the universe's balance in customary cosmology.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the kaba Puti Marintan Aluih contains a close intertextual structure with other Minangkabau kaba narratives and presents a complex cultural representation through cross-entity relationships between humans and mammals. The love between Marah Baganti and Puti Marintan Aluih is a narrative theme and a mechanism of spiritual and social transformation that moves the storyline and reflects Minangkabau cosmology. The innovation of this study lies in cross-disciplinary readings that associate natural symbols as axis mundi, female figures as agents of change, and the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual worlds in local value systems. These findings enrich the understanding of kaba as a dynamic text that preserves the oral literary heritage and opens up space for critical reflection on transcultural relations, local spirituality, and social structures in contemporary Indonesian literature and culture.

The implications of this study can be used in the development of contextual and transformative culture-based education. Kaba, such as Puti Marintan Aluih, can be used as a medium for learning spiritual values, ethics, and local wisdom and as a source of interdisciplinary academic studies in literature, anthropology, gender, and cultural ecology.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the Balai Bahasa Provinsi Sumatra Barat for providing access to the bilingual text of Kaba Puti Marintan Aluih, which served as the primary data source for this study.

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