

Feminist Sacrifices: A Comparative Analysis of Gender, Agency, and Transformation in *Princess Mandalika* and *The Little Mermaid*

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Abstract—This study provides a comparative feminist analysis of two folktales from two cultures: *Princess Mandalika* from Lombok, Indonesia, and *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen. Both stories depict a female protagonist who sacrifices for their communities based on different motivations and cultural contexts. This study aims to explore how gender, agency, and transformation are seen from the perspective of feminism by analyzing how the two narratives negotiate about the role of women in patriarchal structures. The importance of this study lies in its contribution to the cross-cultural feminist literature by highlighting women's agency in both Eastern and Western traditions. The study found that *Princess Mandalika* embodies selfless collective sacrifice for the harmony of society. At the same time, *The Little Mermaid* emphasizes individual desire, suffering, and the search for autonomy within a limited framework. The feminist analysis gap of these two folktales lies in the lack of comparative studies, which this study seeks to meet. This study uses feminist theory to offer a new view of how cultural narratives affect the perception of women's empowerment and its associated costs. The comparative approach offers novelty by embracing Eastern and Western femininity in studying folklore.

Index Terms—*The Little Mermaid*, *Princess Mandalika*, folktales, feminist theory, sacrifice and transformation

I. INTRODUCTION

Fairy tales, a genre that has existed since the beginning of the storytelling tradition, include stories about royal princesses and heroes and lessons in darkness and morals. Many fairy tales reinforce traditional gender stereotypes by portraying female characters as passive, nurturing, or in need of being saved, often by defining women's values through beauty, obedience, or matchmaking (Degree & Jammu, 2024; Pawlowska, 2021; Shaheen et al., 2019). Tyson states that traditional gender roles, which portray women as emotional and weak and men as logical and strong-based creatures, have long been used to justify the unfair treatment of women (Budidarma et al., 2023). Gender roles shape how society expects men and women to behave in both private and public spheres, with these expectations coming from societal and cultural norms based on a person's perceived gender (Sumarsono et al., 2023). Patriarchal beliefs often lead society to view women as inferior.

Both *The Little Mermaid* and *Princess Mandalika* illustrate these traditional gender roles. In *The Little Mermaid*, the female protagonist displays emotional depth, self-sacrifice, and compassion. She risks her voice and endures pain to win the prince's love, showing how stories often portray women as weak and submissive in matters of love. *Princess Mandalika's* narrative aligns with traditional gender expectations, depicting the princess as beautiful and sacrificing herself for harmony, an act often framed as a woman's responsibility in patriarchal narratives. Both stories reflect the influence of patriarchy, which shapes the perception that women are weak and inferior in society. This role justifies women's gaps in fiction and real life.

The culture of Sasak, Lombok, has long embedded the myth of *Princess Mandalika*, using it as a symbol of enthusiasm and inspiration for Sasak women (Muhtar et al., 2024). The Sasak tribe closely connects *Princess Mandalika* to their annual tradition, *Bau Nyale*, which they believe honors the princess (Sucilestari et al., 2023). According to the beliefs of the Sasak tribe, the nyale is the embodiment of the reincarnation of the princess, who sacrificed herself by jumping into the sea to prevent disharmony in society (Wahidah, 2019). This sacred tradition involves the appearance of the *Bau Nyale* (sea worm), which only occurs in the Lombok calendar during a specific period, around February or October. This tradition reflects an eco-theological relationship between nature, God, and humanity to achieve balance in the community (Ramdani, 2022).

The Little Mermaid is a story about physical transformation, specifically the body of a woman transformed into something more valuable in a society that prioritizes heterosexual relationships (Frasl, 2018). It depicts courage, self-discovery, and self-transformation, where physical strength is not enough to pursue dreams, but endurance and determination are (Rikhana et al., 2024). The protagonist in this story represents concern for her existence and personal identity (Lee, 2018). She is willing to transform, changing from her original form as a mermaid to a human, symbolizing the loss of her personal agency and physical form to pursue the love she craves. It is a story with various meanings hidden beyond its symbols and plot (Roshini & Rajasekaran, 2023). The story is not just about love, tragedy, or fantasy but carries a theme that makes it more than a general fairy tale. It is about a woman's sacrifice for a man she loves and his happiness (Mitchell, 2020). It illustrates the strengths and risks of pursuing dreams. While the mermaid's journey reflects agency and determination, it also raises questions about self-identity and whether love must require sacrifice.

This study aims to compare the two stories with a focus on analyzing how the gender, agency, and transformation of the two protagonists and the sacrifices made are seen from the perspective of feminism by examining how the two negotiate the role of women in patriarchal structures. This study contributes to understanding intercultural literature by highlighting women's agencies in Western and Eastern traditions. This study reveals the difference between the sacrifices of *Princess Mandalika* and *The Little Mermaid*, where the sacrifice of *Princess Mandalika* is a symbol of selfless collective sacrifice for the harmony of society. In contrast, the mermaid's sacrifice is a personal desire to achieve what she dreams of. All these sacrifices are the result of the pressure of the patriarchal system that makes them follow the expectations of the community.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Folklore has long been a cultural artifact reflecting social values, gender norms, and philosophical beliefs. Among the many stories passed down from generation to generation, *Princess Mandalika* from Indonesia and *The Little Mermaid* by Christian Andersen are stories about women's sacrifice. Several researchers have studied both stories, particularly from the perspective of literature, culture, and femininity. *The Little Mermaid* is a story about femininity, self-actualization, and human sexuality. Andersen balances religious ideals with human desires, causing an ideological compromise that reflects his beliefs (Lee, 2018). This story represents universal concerns about identity and self-concept, making it relevant to her fairytale setting. Andersen's storytelling approach is more conservative, cautious, and concise in discussing this theme.

Roshini and Rajasekaran compared Disney's *The Little Mermaid* with Andersen's original version. Disney's *The Little Mermaid* has had a more positive outcome for the protagonist with a disability than Andersen's version. The fairytale and the film portray disability by treating disabilities as a child (Roshini & Rajasekaran, 2023). Disney and Andersen emphasized the body's abilities as a desirable trait, meaning that only through transformation (Ariel has legs) can the disability obtain success and romance in life. The study calls for a more inclusive narrative in mass media to counter existing representations of disabilities and promote a more accepting community.

The Little Mermaid, both Andersen's and Disney's versions, reflects the theme of transgender identity (Spencer, 2014). By describing in parallel the development of transgenic identities and the transformation of mermaids, the study highlights themes such as mind-body dissonance, family conflicts, and self-censorship. This study places the mermaid narrative as a narrative that has the potential to come out and indicates that transgender criticism is a valuable extension of queer theory to analyze gender and sexuality representations in literature.

Meanwhile, several studies have also analyzed *Princess Mandalika*. Zain analyzed the value of character education in *Putri Mandalika* and *Tiwok-iwok*. *Princess Mandalika* and *Tiwok-iwok* have several character education values such as religion, nationalism, independence, mutualism, and integrity (Zain, 2024). This research is a rich source of moral and ethical education, shaping the value of character-building in cultural narratives. These two stories shape individual and communal virtues and strengthen social harmonization and national identity.

Al-Madia and Ichsan researched the cultural values in the story of *Princess Mandalika* by analyzing the content in the form of a textbook about the story of *Princess Mandalika*. This story contains several cultural values, including the artistic value of human relations with nature, society, and other people (Al-Madia & Ichsan, 2022).

Although several studies exist, feminist comparative analyses are still limited in number. Previous research has tended to analyze individual stories, often focusing on regional or cultural significance rather than comparing the two stories. The study aims to fill the gap by applying Irigaray's theory to compare how the two narratives build women's identities and sacrifices. Thus, this study contributes widely to understanding how patriarchal societies across traditions shape women's roles and agencies in folklore.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative comparative analysis using cultural feminism theory to analyze how *Princess Mandalika* and *The Little Mermaid* portray gender roles, female agency, and self-sacrifice. Cultural feminism explores how women's experiences, values, and contributions are shaped by societal expectations, often emphasizing the importance of caring for family, community, and self-sacrifice as women's intrinsic qualities. By analyzing both stories using this lens, the study examines how the protagonist navigates societal pressures and whether his sacrifices reinforce or defy traditional gender norms.

Cultural feminism provides a theoretical framework for analyzing how their respective cultures perceive the protagonists' sacrifices in *Princess Mandalika* and *The Little Mermaid*. This theory explores whether these acts of self-sacrifice empower women or reinforce traditional gender norms that position them as bearers of social harmony. By applying this theory, this study examines how societies idealize femininity and whether these narratives offer alternative interpretations of women's power and agency.

The primary data of *Princess Mandalika* comes from written sources, including a collection of Indonesian folklore that documents the story. Meanwhile, in *The Little Mermaid*, the data is sourced from the film of the same name produced by Toei Animation. The data comprised journal articles, e-books, and critical essays on feminist literary studies, folklore, and comparative mythology. The writers collected the data through textual analysis, scene and dialogue, and an intensive literature review of folklore interpretation from a feminist perspective.

For the data analysis process, this study uses thematic analysis to identify the motives of sacrifice, transformation, and gender expectations in both stories. This study uses a comparative approach to compare how the sacrifices of each protagonist occur in their respective cultural and philosophical contexts. The study also analyzes how the sacrifice reflects or defies Irigaray's concept of the female subject, which is determined based on male desires and obedience to society. This study aims to unravel how these two narratives construct and perpetuate gender norms across different traditions.

IV. FINDING AND RESULT

This study uses the theory of cultural feminism to analyze gender, agency, transformation, and the sacrifice of the two main female characters. Cultural feminism reclaims and validates women's attributes, sees masculinity as the root of oppression of women, and advocates for a society free from masculine values (Alcoff, 1988). It highlights the essential differences between men and women, often relates to superior virtues to women based on biological or cultural differences, and encourages solidarity through sharing experiences (Lewis, 2019). It traditionally assesses the quality of women where society prefers to see them with the values expected of them (Raine, 2024). It sees women as socialized from an early age to play roles such as mothers, nurturers, and peacekeepers, to develop differently from men, and to make decisions based on ethics of care and relationship-centered principles.

Princess Mandalika and *The Mermaid's* Gender Roles and Agency

Princess Mandalika is a beautiful, simple, independent, and humble princess. She is polite and behaves well with everyone, including ordinary people. Her beauty and kindness spread throughout the country until all the princes of the neighboring kingdoms heard about it. Based on cultural feminism, the gender roles depicted in *Princess Mandalika* align with traditional values such as humility, politeness, independence in daily life, and being attentive to others. Cultural feminism emphasizes that women have inherent morals and emotional strength that society sees in their role as caregivers, peacekeepers, and selfless sincerity.

Princess Mandalika embodies ideal femininity, demonstrating kindness, politeness, and humility. Cultural feminism sees these traits as part of women's moral strength, emphasizing their natural tendency to care and emotional intelligence. Although *Princess Mandalika* has independence, her independence does not contradict patriarchal norms but strengthens traditional femininity. She is free to leave the palace unescorted. However, her behavior remains gentle, close, and considerate of her people, signaling that women can be independent but must meet expectations according to their gender roles. Her love of greeting and associating with her people reflects the role of women's relationships in society. According to cultural feminism, women have more social relations orientation than men due to their caring and nurturing nature, and the depiction of *Princess Mandalika* as a figure loved by her people aligns with the belief that women naturally create social harmony and cohesion.

Putri Mandalika adalah sosok putri yang sederhana, mandiri dan rendah hati. Putri Mandalika tumbuh menjadi gadis yang cantik, sopan, santun dalam berbicara dan bertingkah laku. Putri selalu keluar sendirian tanpa pengawal. Bila berpapasan dengan rakyatnya, putri selalu menyapa dengan tersenyum, ramah dan santun sehingga dia sangat disayangi rakyatnya. (Asriyani et al., 2020)

Princess Mandalika is a simple, independent, and humble princess. Princess Mandalika grows up to be a beautiful, polite girl in speaking and behaving. Princess always goes out alone without a bodyguard. When crossing paths with her people, the princess greets them with a friendly, polite smile, so they love her.

According to the lens of cultural feminism, *Princess Mandalika's* significant role is not as the primary ruler but as one of moral leadership through her kindness and selflessness. Her personality, humility, emotional connection, and modesty are valued. However, they reinforce the traditional expectation of women that women should prioritize the well-being and harmony of their communities over personal ambitions. According to cultural feminism, society should appreciate these traits, but they should also highlight how society defines the dignity of women through their service to others above personal achievement.

Meanwhile, the men in *Princess Mandalika*, especially the princes, are portrayed as dominators and decision-makers, reflecting the traditional gender roles in which men hold power and control over essential choices, as depicted in this dialogue.

Berita tentang kebaikan hati dan kecantikan paras dari Putri Mandalika tersebar sampai ke berbagai kerajaan di Pulau Lombok, sehingga semua pangeran di Pulau Lombok berlomba-lomba untuk melamar sang putri. Hal tersebut yang membuat sang putri merasa bimbang untuk menentukan pilihannya. (Asriyani et al., 2020)

The news about Princess Mandalika's kindness and beauty spread to various kingdoms on the island of Lombok, so all the princes of the aisle of Lombok competed to propose to the princess. This made the princess feel indecisive about making her choice.

Princes from various kingdoms actively compete for Princess Mandalika. It reflects the traditional view that men are leaders, conquerors, and holders of control, while women are the recipients of their decrees. Instead of allowing Mandalika to make her decisions, the princes' actions revolve around their desires, reinforcing that men dictate most of life's decisions, especially with marriage and fellowship. Women usually act as peacekeepers or mediators, marry or become betrothed to a prince, or serve as gifts for men who win a royal competition. These practices reflect patriarchal norms where men, rather than women themselves, determine their future.

The princes are depicted as ready to fight against each other to get Mandalika, showing their role as heirs and decision-makers. On the contrary, Princess Mandalika responds to it with self-sacrifice rather than confrontation, indicating that men take an active and aggressive role. These princes represent the holders of power, which is in harmony with the patriarchal structure where men dominate leadership and governance. Their rivalry shows how male authority relates to their status, control, and dominance over men and women.

According to cultural feminism, *Princess Mandalika* reflects how traditional gender expectations shape male dominance in leadership and decision-making. These princes are not just suitors; they are symbols of male control over political and social issues, while Mandalika is the ideal femininity for peace and security. Cultural feminism criticizes this balance of power while acknowledging that Princess Mandalika's moral power offers a different influence.

Marina, meanwhile, in Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, reflects traditional gender expectations, with an emphasis on self-sacrifice, emotional compassion, and passive endurance. She is gentle, reserved, and selfless, a character often attributed to women in patriarchal societies. The main goal is not ambition or personal independence but because of the prince's love and acceptance, which describes women's fulfillment as coming from relationships rather than self-actualization.

One of the representations of traditional gender roles is their willingness to accept suffering for love. She risks her voice, a part of her most important identity, and suffers from physical pain to be close to the prince. It reflects the expectation that women must tolerate violence secretly in love affairs. Marina's silence is a metaphor for the suppression of women's voices. By giving up her voice in exchange for the chance to meet the prince, her actions align with the traditional gender expectation that women should be seen, admired, and wanted but not heard. It reflects a broader social norm where beauty and affection rather than intelligence determine women's values. Through Marina, *The Little Mermaid* demonstrates the complexity of gender roles. It portrays women as strong individuals but limited by social expectations, prioritizing their love over self-determination.

Marina: May I go with you?

Grandma: No, You may not. You are still a child, Marina.

Marina: But I can swim better than my sisters.

Grandma: You could be badly hurt by the icebergs. You are still so small.

Sisters: There may be terrible animals along the seashore. That's right, they will growl at you. Naughty human boys may throw stones at you.

Marina: But you always tell me how pleasant it is on the surface of the sea. (Katsumata, 1975, 09.00)

This dialogue reflects gender roles by cultural feminist expectations, where Marina is treated differently from her brothers and is forbidden to explore the surface. This dialogue also illustrates that women are weak and need to be

guided and protected. The role of Marina's grandmother and older siblings reflects the view of cultural feminism that views women as nurses who must ensure the safety of their weaker and younger selves. Marina, who expresses her belief that she can swim, challenges the notion that she is incapable due to her young age. However, society does not accept it, reflecting how traditional gender roles often oppress women. It is in line with cultural feminist critiques of the structure of society that limits women's opportunities based on their fragile nature. Society believes women like Marina must be protected and not take risks. People overlook them even when they possess specific abilities simply because they are women. It is different from men, for example, Fritz, Marina's friend dolphin. He is smaller and younger than her but free to explore the ocean because he is a male.

Marina: Oh, my Prince. Please, young prince. Don't die. Please, dear God, no. Don't let them die. Oh please, my prince....His lips moved. I saw them. He's alive. Don't worry. My prince, I'll stay with you till you're all right...Wake up, you must wake up now. (Katsumata, 1975, 22:10)

Based on the theory of cultural feminism, women have a gender role as nurses, caretakers, and figures willing to sacrifice. Women must have qualities such as compassion, emotional depth, and caregiving. Marina's attitude and actions that save and fall in love with the prince portray the traditional notion of women as figures responsible for men's safety and welfare. She is more concerned about the prince's safety than her own.

Marina expresses her concern, despair, and love when the prince is unconscious. It reflects the gender norm where women are often portrayed as expressive and caring figures, while men are silent, passively accepting women's affection. Marina's attention to the prince reflects that a woman's goals are often associated with her care and love for men. Many traditional narratives define a woman's happiness, fulfillment, and identity through her relationship with men, such as *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, and *Snow White*. In this case, Marina is not just helping the prince; she emotionally depends on his safety because she has hope for the prince's safety. It aligns with the critique of cultural feminism, which argues that society often expects women to shape their lives around men rather than pursuing their personal goals.

Marina's gender role signifies her as a romantic female figure who is selfless, pure-hearted, and devoted to a man even though she does not receive anything in return. It reflects a common point in literature and the media, where women's love is unconditional, reinforcing that women's dignity is often associated with their ability to love and sacrifice to others, especially men.

Princess Mandalika's agency reflects cultural feminism's emphasis on women's moral strength, emotional intelligence, and leadership in line with societal expectations. Instead of fighting patriarchy openly, she navigates power structures through strategic decision-making and relational influence, signaling that agency can exist through direct resistance. Her ability to communicate with other kingdoms, gather crowds, and shape the future of her people emphasizes women's power in building unity and harmony. Through the theory of cultural feminism, Mandalika's actions show a form of empowerment where feminine virtues such as wisdom, duty, and innocence become a source of strength rather than submission.

Putri Mandalika memerintahkan pengawalnya untuk mengirim surat kepada masing-masing kerajaan yang berisikan permintaan Putri Mandalika untuk berkumpul di Pantai Kute Seger pada hari yang sudah ditentukan dengan membawa semua rakyatnya. Di Pantai Kute Seger itulah tempat diumumkannya siapa yang akan dipilih oleh Putri sebagai pendamping hidupnya. (Asriyani et al., 2020)

Princess Mandalika ordered her bodyguards to send a letter to each kingdom containing a request for Princess Mandalika to gather at Kute Seger Beach on a predetermined day with all her people with them. At Kute Seger Beach, it was the place where she announced who would be chosen by Putri as her life companion.

Cultural feminism sees Princess Mandalika's agency as strong, where she influences the constraints of her social role as a woman. Although cultural feminism is often valued more traditionally, cultural feminism also knows that agency can manifest in a way consistent with cultural expectations of women's behavior. In the above quote, the Mandalika decree sends a letter. It gathers all the princes and their subjects, reflecting her capacity to initiate public activities that form the course of her life, even though it occurs in a patriarchal culture, such as choosing a prospective spouse. While traditional gender norms still influence her actions as passive recipients of men's decisions in terms of marriage, the act of gathering them signifies a form of leadership that exhibits emotional and social intelligence, a quality often associated with femininity in cultural feminism.

In this context, Mandalika's agency does not have to be a direct but firm confrontation in its social role, arguing that women can run their agency through their emotional virtues, relational power, and social influence. Her actions indicate that society frames women's agencies through their ability to handle and guide relationships, even in a system that traditionally limits their power. Although Mandalika's actions do not directly challenge the patriarchal structure, they demonstrate her emotional and social intelligence by reinforcing her leadership role within the scope of the feminine virtue tradition.

Princess Mandalika's agency is seen not in power or disobedience but in moral strength, wisdom, and selfless devotion to its people. Cultural feminism values traditional feminine qualities, such as nurturing, sacrifice, and peacekeeping, as a source of power rather than a weakness. Society does not see Mandalika's decision to sacrifice herself as a mere surrender to patriarchal norms but as an act of collective concern and responsibility, reflecting women's power in prioritizing communal harmony over self-interest.

In contrast to liberal feminism, which criticizes the lack of direct resistance, cultural feminism sees her decision as an expression of her feminine agency through self-sacrifice. Mandalika does not passively accept male control and takes control according to cultural values of women's virtue and responsibility. Her decision to turn into *Nyale* (sea worms) for the benefit of her people shows a form of transformational power, in which women are read through her love and moral authority, even though she will suffer a considerable loss.

This perspective also raises questions: whether her agency reinforces the expectation that women should sacrifice themselves for a more significant cause or whether the perspective highlights the different forces of femininity. According to cultural feminism, her actions show how the role of women in society can shape communities through qualities often underestimated by the patriarchal system.

On the other hand, Marina's agency is very complex. Traditional gender roles confine her to caregiving, self-sacrifice, and showing affection toward male figures. However, she also has personal will and emotional strength as a form of female power. Marina's ability to love deeply and caringly and remain devoted to the prince reflects a form of agency in harmony with the traditional values of femininity. Cultural feminism sees agency in women's ability to care, empathize, and bond emotionally.

Father: You know our race has lived typically for 3,000 years, but we can still meet with an accident and die anytime. As your poor mother did.

Marina: Forgive me, Father.

Father: I forbid you to go swimming alone, and you are not to play with Fritz.

Grandma: Please, don't be too harsh on Marina. She'll only become harder to control if you are too strict with her. Fritz told the leader of the patrol that Marina saved the life of a human who would surely have drowned in the stormy sea. (Katsumata, 1975, 23:52-24:17)

Marina's agency can be seen in Marina's courage against gendered limitations, for example, when her grandmother forbids Marina to explore life above sea level. Marina and Fritz secretly swim to the surface. Marina opposes gender restrictions imposed by her grandmother, who applies traditional safety and protection rules. Her curiosity and determination make her push boundaries. When Marian sees the prince's ship sink, she fights danger to save him. This moment indicates that Marina has courage and autonomy; she makes decisions and acts without waiting for permission or fear of consequences. She has physical strength and independence, beating the traditional expectation that women must be saved rather than saviors.

Marina: The only one who can help me now is the sea witch.

Fritz: The sea witch?

Marina: Yes, she may know a magic spell that could change me into a human girl.

Fritz: You want to change into a human?

Marina: If I want to see him, what else can I do?

Fritz: But Marina, the sea witch, lives in the middle of that horrible seaweed jungle. You can't go there. You could be killed.

Marina: I must. It's my only chance. (Katsumata, 1975, 28:31-29:00)

Marina is a female mermaid who has a strong will. Instead of passively waiting for her fate, Marina takes control of her destiny. Although her motivation is love, her choice involves excellent sacrifice and personal risk, demonstrating her willingness to suffer for something she believes in. Her decision to meet a witch and be willing to bear the consequences for a new life opportunity reflects her emotional strength and determination, a quality that is embodied in cultural feminism.

After she loses her voice, Marina attempts to communicate with the prince using body language, expressions, and dance to show how much she loves him. Despite her silence, Marian still tries and perseveres. She finds an alternative to expressing feelings by showing that a woman's power is not only in voice but in nonverbal communication, emotional strength, and perseverance. It is in line with cultural feminism, which emphasizes that the form of female agency does not have to be by the male-centered goal of domination and control over women.

Mandalika's and The Little Mermaid's Transformation

Princess Mandalika's transformation into a *Nyale* represents the change from an individual identity to a communal welfare and unity symbol. Through the lens of cultural feminism, this transformation shows how society often frames women's sacrifice as an act of moral force, reinforcing traditional gender roles while also demonstrating the power of femininity in shaping society's well-being.

...impiannya hanya ingin melihat ketenteraman tumbuh di atas bumi Pulau Lombok. Kemudian sang Putri melanjutkan dengan mengatakan bahwa dirinya untuk semua orang, sang Putri tidak dapat memilih salah satu dari para Pangeran. Hal tersebut karena diyakini akan berdampak pada terjadinya pertumpahan darah .. Putri Mandalika melemparkan dirinya ke laut ...Tidak lama kemudian, muncul binatang kecil dari laut yang jumlahnya sangat banyak. Kemunculan tersebut dipercayai sebagai jelmaan Putri Mandalika. (Asriyani et al., 2020)

..her dream is only to see peace grow on the earth of Lombok Island. Then, the princess says she belongs to everyone and cannot choose any princes. It is because it is believed to impact the occurrence of bloodshed.

Princess Mandalika threw herself into the sea... Not long after, small animals appeared from the sea that were very numerous. The appearance is believed to be the incarnation of Princess Mandalika.

The transformation of Princess Mandalika into *Nyale* represents selfless action and love for society by carrying out traditional gender roles that associate women with sacrifice, care, and moral strength. Instead of choosing personal happiness through marriage, she prioritizes the well-being of her people by exercising the cultural feminist notion that women's strength lies in their collective responsibility rather than their ambitions.

Her decision to merge with nature by jumping into the sea and reappearing in the form of *Nyale* signifies the concept of women's most profound connection to life, fertility, and renewal, which is highly valued in cultural feminist thought. This transformation is not only a loss but a form of empowerment, where Mandalika becomes the eternal guardian of its people by giving them unity through an annual ritual called *Bau Nyale*. With her sacrifice in line with patriarchal expectations that often equate femininity with self-denial, cultural feminism also considers it a form of agency in traditional constraints, where women are given the form of care, devotion, and legacy that she leaves behind. So, the transformation of Mandalika into a cycle shows the duality of feminine agency; the transformation strengthens the narrative of patriarchal sacrifice and elevates cultural feminists, moral ideals, and women's spiritual strength as societal guides.

In cultural feminism, women as peacemakers play a role in creating harmony by prioritizing empathy and sacrifice. It is reflected in fairy tales where female characters often sacrifice for peace, such as *Cinderella*, who accepts suffering (Parsons, 2021), or Belle, who is willing to live with and love the Beast (Banks, 2021), and Padmavati must commit to Jauhar (Sumarsono, 2025). Regarding self-sacrifice, there are differences in people's views on sacrifices made by men and women. Men usually sacrifice for their interests, which helps them achieve success. In contrast, women's sacrifices, which are often seen only as part of their obligations, either as a mother or as a woman, do not make them achieve a single progress (Lyngdoh, 2018). Women's sacrifice is often overlooked and seen only as an obligation rather than resilience and selfishness.

Unlike Princess Mandalika, Marina's transformation into *The Little Mermaid* has zero personal motivation and interests. Marina's transformation is like a double-edged sword, representing her agency in achieving dreams and the barriers of traditional femininity that bind women's dignity to love and sacrifice. Cultural feminism sees women's experiences, emotions, and caregiving, so Marina's transformation is interpreted as an expression of femininity through devotion and endurance and reflects social pressure on women who must obey male-centered ideals.

Marina's quest for Sea Witch's whereabouts illustrates her greatest desire to become human to meet the prince she loves. This action defies the idea that a woman must wait for her fate. Instead of accepting her destiny as a mermaid, she chooses her path, albeit for reasons of love. From the search for the Sea Witch, the agency in feminine ideals can be seen; she is not rebellious but makes decisions independently.

Sea Witch: I know very well what you've come to request. Do you think any secrets are safe for me? ... It is true that love makes us blind. You want me to change into two legs so you can walk on land like humans do, don't you?

Marina: Yes, mum. That's right. Please help me.

Sea Witch: You shall have your wish but with an awful price. First, once you have received a human form, you can never become a mermaid again, which means... you will never see your father, grandmother, or sisters again. You love him enough to lose all this? What if he loves you not? Second, if you cannot win the prince's love for yourself, your heart will break the morning after his marriage to another, and you will turn to foam... and third, you must give me your voice, your most beautiful voice of any at the bottom of the sea. (Katsumata, 1975, 33:50-35:12)

Marina loses her voice to transform from a mermaid to a human. It symbolizes that in a patriarchal society, women's voices do not need to be heard. When Marina achieves physical mobility and beauty as a human being, the stereotypes attached to women, on the other hand, cause her to lose the ability to speak and explain that women are judged by the beauty of their faces, not by their intelligence. It is a criticism of gender roles from the perspective of feminism.

In *The Little Mermaid*, transformation is characterized by longing and loss. Marina wants to transform into a human, symbolizing her deepest desire to be free from her aquatic boundaries and experience romance in human life. In achieving this metamorphosis, she must pay a heavy price; she loses her voice, symbolizing her unique identity and power. Her transformation feels bitter; although she achieves human likeness and the possibility of gaining his love, she cannot reconcile losing her identity. At its climax, Marina turns into foam in the ocean, an action that reflects both her physical form and the mortal nature of her dreams. This metamorphosis also carries a record of transcendence as she transforms into the spirit of the water, showing that while she cannot attain her human life in a conventional sense, her essence persists in the form of liberation.

Cultural Context and Narrative Traditions

Women in the Sasak community must meet specific criteria as written in ancient manuscripts such as the *Lontar Kotaragama Manuscript*, the *Dewi Rengganis Manuscript*, and the *Megantaka Manuscript*. In these three texts, women must be brave and loyal, devote all their lives to their husbands in the world and the afterlife, be polite, and adhere to moral and social order (Wirata, 2015). The three texts show that the expectations of the Sasak community towards women reflect a patriarchal system that prioritizes self-sacrifice, loyalty, and good moral behavior while limiting

women's autonomy and implementing gender hierarchy. These expectations of women also burden women and condition on their success in fulfilling their traditional roles as wives and moral guardians rather than as individuals with their aspirations and agency.

The Sasak community is a patriarchal society, so women must submit and obey all orders of their husbands. Because it follows a patriarchal structure, there are women's rights that are not fulfilled, and there are obligations that women must perform. While men have a higher place than women, men get more priority. In the Sasak society, there are three differences in social classes, the highest of which is the aristocratic class (Rahman, 2013; Zuhdi, 2012). There is a rule in marriage where a man from the noble class can marry a woman from a different class, but a noblewoman is not allowed to marry except with a nobleman (Hidayat et al., 2023). If violated, the Sasak woman will lose her nobility and be exiled from her family.

In the Sasak tradition, the story of *Princess Mandalika* is a story of a woman's tragedy that connects deeply to community and spiritual values. Within this cultural framework, society sees the sacrifice of the princess as a critical, almost ritualistic act that maintains a cosmic or social balance. Society considers the sacrifice of the princess as an obligation to the community's prosperity. It reflects a culturally approved role in which female sacrifice is a noble commitment and an offering necessary to appease spiritual forces or ancestral demands. In Sasak mythology, the ideal feminine may involve selflessness and devotion to the collective good. Society considers Mandalika's sacrifice as an example of cultural virtue, although it continues to raise questions about agency. The narrative implies that individual desires are second only to societal needs and expectations, a dynamic that reinforces and critiques traditional gender hierarchies.

It puts Mandalika in a unique matrix of gender roles in Indonesia, where sacrifice is not just a personal loss but an act imbued with a culture that resonates with the identity of community and spiritual permanence. The researcher notes that society should read narratives like this against a ritual and cosmological background different from Western narrative traditions.

Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* depicts personal sacrifice, the loss of her voice, and physical suffering to achieve the love and identity she desires. It reflects the European cultural setting, emphasizing individual desires and personal transformation. Whereas Mandalika's sacrifice is framed by social and spiritual obligations, the mermaid's journey is motivated by an inner yearning for a unique existence that defies social norms and natural order.

The transformation in *The Little Mermaid* is emblematic of the tension between what is sacrificed and what is sought. While metamorphosis, she is the gateway to human love and the hope of living forever, not without cost. The narrative describes duality, an act of sacrifice of intrinsic quality (her voice, her mermaid identity) that continues to be the path for a new prefix, and a story warning of the dangers of ignoring one's essence of external validation.

While Princess Mandalika's sacrifice is associated with a ritualistic and communal ethos, The Little Mermaid's sacrifice is a personal, introspective act of transformation. These differences explain how cultural contexts shape gender narratives. In the Indonesian version, sacrifice strengthens collective cultural identity, while the European narrative prioritizes the sacrifice of the individual to go beyond gender roles.

In the context of Sasak culture, Lombok, the story of *Princess Mandalika* is linked to local cultural rituals and expectations. Society sees Mandalika's offerings as the obligations set by tradition and the collective needs of its community. By accepting her fate, she transforms her traditional role as a passive figure into a figure filled with spiritual and social significance. In this story, sacrifice is tragic and a transformative act that redefines female agency within a specific cultural framework. *The Princess Mandalika* story may limit individual agency through culturally sanctioned obligations, but it is also an empowered embrace of one's fate for the greater good.

It contrasts with *The Little Mermaid*, which offers a different sacrifice model; the mermaid's sacrifice is a tragic loss caused by societal and gender expectations. Silence and rejection are forced by a life that prioritizes patriarchal norms, where women have to pay dearly for their desire to leave their traditional roles. Mandalika's offerings can empower and transform its identity into a communal and spiritual renewal symbol. This sacrifice has two meanings: an expensive cost and an act that gives honor and meaning in its cultural context. In *The Little Mermaid*, sacrifice is a tragic loss. In the story, the mermaid's decision causes irreversible self-transformation, reflecting a patriarchal demand where women must sacrifice their deepest essence for the sake of a status that they desire but cannot achieve.

V. CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the themes of gender, agency, and transformation in *Princess Mandalika* and *The Little Mermaid* using a feminist lens, especially cultural feminism. Both narratives highlight the traditional gender role where female characters are expected to be independent, selfless, nurturing, and willing to sacrifice. Princess Mandalika's decision to sacrifice herself for the peace of the people of Lombok reflects a noble and collective selfless attitude. In contrast, Marina's sacrifice for love and her existence as a human being is unattainable, showing the ingrained notion that women's suffering and devotion determine their worth.

Although this sacrifice reinforces patriarchal practices, cultural feminism provides a perspective that frames it as an act of moral and emotional force rather than as oppression. Mandalika's transformation into a *nyale* reflects a legacy of unity and protection, while Marina's tragic fate reinforces the consequences of self-sacrifice within a limited gender framework. The study uncovers the complexity of female agency by comparing these two protagonists, illustrating how

societal expectations shape women's roles across cultures. In addition to highlighting the burden of women's sacrifice, these stories also demonstrate the resilience and influence women can achieve even within the confines of patriarchy.

Further research can analyze how folklore or fairy tale heroines from different cultures form the same theme of sacrifice and agency. Especially when exploring modern retellings, these two stories can reveal changes in people's attitudes and behaviors toward gender roles and self-sacrifice. A more diverse approach that considers race, class, and sexuality can also deepen an understanding of how different identities impact women's experiences of sacrifice and empowerment in literature and culture.

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