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Matrilineal Marriage Traditions and Hegemonic Masculinity in Marah Rusli's *Sitti Nurbaya*

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Matrilineal Marriage Traditions and Hegemonic Masculinity in Marah Rusli's *Sitti Nurbaya*

Abstract

This article offers an intensive analysis and discussion regarding the practice of hegemonic masculinity in the matrilineal marriage tradition belonging to the Minangkabau ethnic group in the western part of Indonesia's Sumatera archipelago. The rules of Minangkabau matrilineal customs that still place men as policymakers for women are a contributing factor to the practice of hegemonic masculinity. The data source used to examine the problem is an Indonesian novel set in Minangkabau society and culture entitled *Sitti Nurbaya* by Marah Rusli. Text data obtained from the novel *Sitti Nurbaya* were analyzed using content analysis techniques. After analyzing the stages of data reduction, data display, and data verification, it was found that two matrilocal marriage traditions in Minangkabau society show the practice of hegemonic masculinity, namely a) *kawin bajapuik* tradition; and b) the tradition of polygamy. The hegemonic masculinity in both traditions is characterized by the superiority of male power in regulating the conditions of marriage and the emphasis on female obedience as subordinate objects. This study is considered to have greatly contributed to the initial study of masculine literature in the Minangkabau matrilineal society, the study of the revitalization of its gender mainstreaming, as well as efforts to find out the description of the social reality of Minangkabau society in the early 20th century.

Keywords: hegemony, masculinity, Minangkabau, matrilineal, marriage tradition, *Sitti Nurbaya*

Tradiciones Matrimoniales Matrilineales y Masculinidad Hegemónica en Marah Rusli's *Sitti Nurbaya*

Resumen

Este artículo ofrece un intenso análisis y discusión sobre la práctica de la masculinidad hegemónica en la tradición del matrimonio matrilineal perteneciente a la etnia Minangkabau en la parte occidental del archipiélago de Sumatra en Indonesia. Las reglas de las costumbres matrilineales de Minangkabau, que todavía colocan a los hombres como responsables de las políticas para las mujeres, son un factor que contribuye a la práctica de la masculinidad hegemónica. La fuente de datos utilizada para examinar el problema es una novela indonesia ambientada en la sociedad y la cultura de Minangkabau titulada *Sitti Nurbaya* de Marah Rusli. Los datos de texto obtenidos de la novela *Sitti Nurbaya* se analizaron utilizando técnicas de análisis de contenido. Después de analizar las etapas de reducción de datos, visualización de datos y verificación de datos, se encontró que dos tradiciones matrimoniales matrilineales en la sociedad Minangkabau muestran la práctica de la masculinidad hegemónica, a saber a) la tradición matrimonial *bajapuik*; y b) la tradición de la poligamia. La masculinidad hegemónica en ambas tradiciones se caracteriza por la superioridad del poder masculino en la regulación de las condiciones del matrimonio y el énfasis en la obediencia femenina como objeto subordinado. Se considera que este estudio ha contribuido en gran medida al estudio inicial de la literatura masculina en la sociedad matrilineal de Minangkabau, al estudio de la revitalización de su incorporación de la perspectiva de género, así como a los esfuerzos por descubrir la descripción de la realidad social de la sociedad de Minangkabau a principios del siglo 20.

Palabras clave: hegemonía, masculinidad, Minangkabau, matrilineal, tradición matrimonial, *Sitti Nurbaya*

The Minangkabau ethnicity who lives in the western part of the Sumatran archipelago, Indonesia, is special because until now they still maintain matrilineal kinship practices. Following the matrilineal substance, in Minangkabau lineage and inheritance are given to women without involving the father into the mother's clan (Schneider et al., 1961). As heirs, women in this tribe are also responsible for educating children and their families (Handrianto, 2017; Fahmi et al., 2020). However, this rule is very ambiguous because in its implementation it still prioritizes male power; mother's side (hereinafter referred to as *mamak*) who regulates and controls all decisions related to the lives of mothers, siblings, and niece (child of a sister on the mother's side--hereinafter referred to as *kemenakan*) (Azwar et al., 2018). This illustrates what anthropologists call the tension puzzle of the life of the matrilineal male as a major contributor to *nieces* at the expense of his biological progeny (Mattison et al., 2019).

On the one hand, the existence of *mamak* in socio-cultural practices in Minangkabau indeed benefits the masculine gender group, but on the other hand, it is detrimental to women. Women in this tribe do not have the authority in managing the inheritance from the mother's family because it must be based on the *mamak's* decision. Even in choosing a potential husband, they still have to follow *mamak's* decision. This situation is in stark contrast to the lives of women from other ethnicities who practice matrilineal kinship. For example, women from the Khasi tribe settled in India. Women in the Khasi tribe are much luckier because they can manage various assets from their mother's family and receive an inheritance according to their rights (Bharadwaj, 2017). The difference in the lives of Minangkabau women and Khasi ethnic women in India indirectly shows that matrilineal practices in Minangkabau are constructed based on the strength of the hegemonic masculine gender.

According to the historical records of the Minangkabau community starting at the beginning of the 20th century, there are indeed several traditions containing the practice of hegemonic masculinity. Among them are the marriage traditions of the nobility on the west coast and also in the central area of the city of Padang. At that time, the marriage of a noble family that was considered ideal was a marriage between fellow nobles only. In practice, the bride-to-be must provide money with a nominal amount

determined by the groom's family plus valuables as a condition for the application to be accepted (Alfi, 2019). After the application is received, the woman's family must also be willing to carry out the *baralek gadang* tradition (a magnificent wedding party) equipped with women's obligations to prepare various needs to start a new household (Ramanta & Samsuri, 2020).

In the future, the superiority of male power in the life of the Minangkabau ethnic community still has an impact on the lives of women. Several cases in Minangkabau society in the modern era show the transfer of inheritance rights from *kemenakan* to *mamak* (Mutolib et al., 2016). Another case that worsens the image of Minangkabau men is violence in marriage which causes the loss of women's contributions in the domestic and public sphere (Lestarini et al., 2021). These facts do not only exist in real life but have been described by Indonesian writers in novels with the theme of the socio-cultural life of the Minangkabau people (Bustam, 2016) and novels with the theme of gender relations between men and women matrilocally. marriage in Minangkabau (Syahril, 2018).

Historical records of marital traditions and conflicts over the inheritance of inheritance that occurred in the Minangkabau tribe are closely related to the problem of gender inequality that often occurs in patriarchal societies in various countries. For example, the case of women in a patriarchal society in India who are trapped in forced marriages that impose social dominance for the formation of the ideals of masculinity (Gunwant & Gaur, 2016). The cultivation of sympathy for the dominance of *mamak* masculinity in Minangkabau also resembles the case of forcing acceptance of the ideal masculine cultural rules of American patriarchal society against traditional Korean society (Howson & Yecies, 2016). Furthermore, cases of violence experienced by Minangkabau women in marriage are the same as cases of masculinity domination operating in patriarchal marriages in European countries (Mandibaye, 2021) and also in Turkey (Yeniasır & Gökbulut, 2020).

The findings of these cases become a consideration for re-criticizing the practice of matrilineal kinship in Minangkabau which is indicated to contain the practice of hegemonic masculinity which aims to idealize the power of masculine gender over feminine gender subordination. This thinking is also reinforced by the fact that violence against women in the household and in

economic development in third world countries is an ever-present and dangerous case in gender policy-making for women (Connell, 2005). Associated with the life of the Minangkabau people, this ethnic group is part of the Indonesian population which is still labeled as a third-world country. This fact further strengthens the four points of view that underlie the importance of this research, namely a) Minangkabau matrilineal customary rules stipulate women as heirs to the inheritance of their mother's family, but men are prioritized as owners of power; b) various marriage traditions in Minangkabau appear to be very supportive of women's rights, but in practice, they suppress women's interests; c) in some cases, the power superiority of Minangkabau men is inherent in the practice of hegemonic masculinity; and d) Indonesian literary works set in Minangkabau culture, especially those containing gender relations issues, are important to criticize because they have contributed to presenting local masculine-themed fictions that can influence broader social change. So based on these four points of view, this study aims to analyze and re-discuss the problem of hegemonic masculinity in the practice of matrilineal marriage traditions of Minangkabau society, especially as depicted in the novel *Sitti Nurbaya* by Marah Rusli (Rusli, 2011).

The selection of *Sitti Nurbaya*'s novel as the object of this research is also supported by several rationales that are relevant to the discussion of masculinity issues. The study of the problem of hegemony masculinity contained in *Sitti Nurbaya*'s novel is relevant to the trend of critical masculine studies in various countries which are starting to believe that the study of literary works that raise the issue of masculinity can make a very broad contribution in understanding gender political issues that can represent everyday life. men according to the masculine cultural construction that lies behind it (Ferry, 2013). This is evidenced by the increasing number of critical masculine studies that take literary works as objects to reveal these issues, including the construction of masculinity in Aboriginal ethnicity in Australia (Hadaegh & Heidari, 2018), the construction of masculinity in British society (Tingting, 2017), patriarchal masculinity in a group of black male plantation workers in South America (Łobodziec, 2015), even the masculinity construction of military soldiers who fought in the post-9/11 Afghanistan war (Haq & Rashid, 2018).

Another consideration is choosing the novel *Sitti Nurbaya* by Marah Rusli as the object of research because this novel is a modern Indonesian literary document that represents the problem of masculine gender dominance in the marriage tradition of the Minangkabau community, especially in the early 20th century. Marah Rusli's involvement as an Indonesian writer in reflecting on these problems is also in line with Gramsci's view that the author tries to form an expression of cultural awareness with the ideology of hegemonic leadership through literary works that contain historical, social, and political complexities related to certain social classes (Anwar, 2012). In addition to that reason, judging from the innovation and novelty of the research results, this research is very innovative because it no longer examines the problem of hegemonic masculinity in a patriarchal culture, but in the matrilineal marriage tradition in Minangkabau. This innovation theoretically refutes the opinion of gender sociologists who state that hegemonic masculinity only occurs in patriarchal societies, even though history shows that matrilineal has turned into patrilineal since women's power in the Greek era was defeated by male rebellion. On that basis, it is quite rational if women's power in Minangkabau is still overshadowed by the hegemony of masculine ideology (Baal, 1987).

Connell's Theory of Hegemonic Masculinity

Gramsci explained that hegemony is a pattern of moral and intellectual leadership from the dominant class who holds the control of power over the controlled class to create the same moral language and run with full awareness (Femia, 1980; Herrmann, 2017). The concept of hegemony which was originally popularized by Gramsci is now used significantly to examine patterns of power in various fields, including the field of literature (Ives, 2004). Based on the idea of Gramscian hegemony, gender sociologist RW Connell transfers it to the study of gender relations. The idea of hegemony is manifested by Connell in a systematic sociological theory of gender which still pays attention to the involvement of cultural and historical control known as hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018).

Hegemonic masculinity is a form of gender practice that gives a dominant position to the masculine gender to realize cultural ideals and

institutional strengths of the collective or individual according to the strategy that was accepted when hegemony was practiced by subordinating women (Connell, 2005; Yang, 2020). When this concept has gained legitimacy, it will effectively take control of gender practices by directing all policies according to masculine ideology (Howson, 2006). Connell further explains that hegemonic masculinity arises because the norm of male sex roles gets patriarchal legitimacy to emphasize femininity and impose power based on gender differences (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Hegemony is related to race, class, and gender. With hegemony, men have the opportunity to produce general social practices that are formed from the main components of gender relations. With this hegemonic gender relationship, men gain access to other social structures to carry out their gender politics (Connell, 2005). Here it can be understood that hegemonic masculinity is not something that is established, there is always the possibility of contradiction with non-hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). For this reason, the politics built by men in that concept will be involved with other categories of masculinity, namely subordinate masculine, complex masculine, and marginal masculine (Singh, 2020).

Connell also stated, because femininity is always vulnerable to internal contradictions, historical disturbances, and changing situations, to realize the position of hegemonic masculinity, at least three models of gender relations are needed as tools of hegemony, namely power relations, production relations, and cathexis. Power relations are shown by masculine political legitimacy that subordinates women in all aspects of life and is dominated by men. Production relations embody hegemonic masculinity through a different division of labor between men and women based on gender. Cathexis (sexual desire) also plays a role in the configuration of hegemonic gender practices by placing the practices of sexual desire as a form of gender identity (Connell, 2005; Connell, 2009).

The pattern of hegemony in masculinity does not mean domination and violence. Hegemony in masculinity is achieved through culture, institutions, and the obedience of the hegemonic group to the intellectual leadership pattern offered through the persuasion of the supremacist owner (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) to legitimize unequal gender relations between masculine and feminine gender (Messerschmidt, 2018). The intellectual strategy is considered natural, so that the structure becomes invisible, is considered normative, manifested in the institutionalized culture of

heterosexual marriage (Şenel, 2017). But to understanding the construction of hegemonic masculinity is not an easy thing, because in some cases, masculinity is shaped by the articulation of a gender system that is oriented to global processes. It is therefore important to analyze hegemonic masculinity based on a basic framework at the local, regional, and global levels (Messerschmidt, 2018).

Method

This article is sourced from the results of qualitative research; using data in the form of words, not numbers, and the subject is focused on social groups or individuals. The analytical method used in this research is the content analysis method which consists of a set of systems analysis techniques of various types of texts; explores the main idea in it then interprets it and for the sake of certain symbolic expressions also relates its interpretation to the interpretation of other texts (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). Its application in this research is the study of the text in the novel to explore the content and understand its meaning, especially to understand the issue of hegemonic masculinity in the marriage tradition of the Minangkabau ethnic community. This is relevant to the research components involved in qualitative research, one of which is literary works (Saldana, 2011).

The data source of this research is a modern Indonesian novel with Minangkabau local color entitled *Sitti Nurbaya* by Marah Rusli (Rusli, 2011). This novel was first published in 1922 by Balai Pustaka publishers in Indonesia and has so far been republished 48 times. Methodically the selection of the novel *Sitti Nurbaya* by Marah Rusli is a source of research data that is in line with the six models that can be used in critical masculine studies. One of the six models is to use literary works (literary models) with objects including novels, game texts, historical study texts, travel, and sports texts as data sources (Beynon, 2002). The type of data used in writing this research article is the written text in the novel *Sitti Nurbaya* by Marah Rusli, which includes words, phrases, sentences, narrative paragraphs, and dialogues between characters that describe the problem of hegemonic masculinity in the marriage tradition of the Minangkabau ethnic community. To get the right data, the collection technique is carried out by the stages of

a) reading the data source; b) unitizing (taking the correct data by marking the text, and c) recording and inventorying (Creswell, 2014). The application, at the reading stage, is the intensive reading of the entire text in all parts of *Sitti Nurbaya*'s novel. Furthermore, in the *unitizing* stage, each unit of text data is marked according to the points in the research problem formulation. The final step is to record and inventory the data that has been marked and entered into the text data record related to traditions in the Minangkabau matrilineal marriage system.

The research data that has been collected from the source is then analyzed using content analysis techniques assisted by hermeneutic analysis methods. Content analysis using the hermeneutic method is carried out by analyzing the language of the text, then moving on to context analysis, then understanding, interpreting, and having a contextual dialogue with the dynamics of historical reality (Krippendorff, 2004). To get the relationship between the meaning of the text in *Sitti Nurbaya*'s novel with the socio-cultural reality in Minangkabau, as well as the interpretation results according to the hegemonic masculinity theory, the content analysis using the hermeneutic method was carried out in three steps of qualitative research analysis proposed by Huberman (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The three working steps are a) data reduction; b) data display, and c) drawing conclusions or verification. The way it works starts from the reduction step, the data that has been recorded into the data card is then selected according to the substance of the traditional problems in the matrilineal marriage system. In the display step, the reduced data is then displayed in the form of descriptions and relationships between categories. The way it works is by systematically sorting the data that has been reduced. The data presented in the form of descriptions were then analyzed in-depth using several theories, namely a) the theory of the matrilineal cultural system in Minangkabau; b) the theory of hegemonic masculinity, as well as the theory of the relationship between the concepts of masculinity and colonialism.

After the data analysis process by the research problem items is completed, the next step is to holistically interpret all the problem items based on the Minangkabau matrilineal culture theory, the theory of hegemonic masculinity, and its relation to the theory of colonialism masculinity. The result of this holistic interpretation is the answer to prove whether or not there is a hegemonic masculinity practice in the Minangkabau matrilineal marriage tradition described in *Sitti Nurbaya*'s

novel. Finally, in withdrawing the meaning of the holistic research problem, it is narrowed down again so that it can provide a clear answer to the involvement of the matrilineal marriage tradition in Minangkabau with the practice of hegemonic masculinity, as described by Marah Rusli in the novel *Sitti Nurbaya*.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion of the problem of hegemonic masculinity in the matrilineal marriage tradition of the Minangkabau ethnicity as described in Marah Rusli's *Sitti Nurbaya*. Based on the research findings, there are two marriage traditions in Minangkabau that contain the practice of hegemonic masculinity, namely a) *kawin bajapuik* tradition (marriage with the rule that women give money to the prospective groom) and b) the tradition of polygamy.

Masculinity Hegemony in the *Kawin Bajapuik* Tradition

The practice of matrilineal marriage traditions in Minangkabau described in *Sitti Nurbaya's* novel shows that women give more respect to men based on their social status. This reality can be found in the life of noble family groups. A noblewoman who proposed to a man of noble descent had to agree to all the terms of marriage put forward to her. The bride-to-be must provide a certain amount of money as a condition for applying for the groom. This tradition is commonly known as *kawin bajapuik*. The money that must be given as a condition for marriage is called *uang japuik* (pick up money) with a certain nominal amount according to the request of the prospective groom's family. If the bride's family cannot meet these requirements, the marriage will be annulled. The tradition of marriage with *uang japuik* is explained in the following novel text.

“Berapa uang jemputan yang dimintanya?” Tanya Sutan Mahmud pula dengan tiada mengindahkan perkataan saudaranya itu.

“Sudah beberapa kali kukatakan, 300 rupiah,” jawab perempuan itu.

“Tak mau ia dikurangi? 200 atau 250 rupiah, misalnya?” Tanya Sutan Mahmud.

“Kalau kepada tukang ikan ia dikawinkan, tentu tak usah menjemput sedikit jua. Tetapi engkau tentu maklum, anakku tak boleh dan tak suka kukawinkan dengan sembarang orang saja. Apakah jadinya dengan keturunan kita kelak?” (“How much money did he ask for the pick-up?” Asked Sutan Mahmud also ignoring his brother's quote.

"It's been said several times, 300 rupiahs," the woman replied.

"Don't want to reduce it? 200 or 250 rupiahs, for example?" Asked Sutan Mahmud.

"If he is married to a fishmonger, of course, there is no need to meet even a little. But of course, you know, my son can't and I don't like to marry just anyone. What will happen to our descendants in the future?"

"How much money did he ask for a pick-up?" Sutan Mahmud asked also ignoring his brother's words.

"I've told you many times, 300 rupiahs," replied the woman.

"Do you want to reduce it? 200 or 250 rupiah for example?" asked Sutan Mahmud.

"If he marries a fish seller, of course, there is no need to collect a small amount. But you will understand, my son can't and I don't like marrying just anyone. What will happen to our descendants in the future?"). (Rusli, 2011, p.21)

The text excerpt describes the conversation of two brothers, Putri Rubiah and Sutan Mahmud; Minangkabau nobles who settled in the city of Padang during the Dutch colonial period. The two of them argued about the nominal amount of money that Putri Rubiah had to provide as a condition for applying for a nobleman as her future son-in-law. In the conversation, it was revealed that Putri Rubiah had to provide 300 rupiahs so that her proposal was accepted by the family of a nobleman who would become her son-in-law.

The 300-rupiah note has been adjusted to the level of the male nobility title that will be proposed by Putri Rubiah, namely a nobleman with the title Sutan. Although her younger brother, Sutan Mahmud, objected to the amount of money, Putri Rubiah still agreed for two reasons. First, Putri Rubiah understood that the man who would become her daughter-in-law came from a family of the highest nobility and was therefore worthy of respect. Second, Putri Rubiah did not want to refuse or offer again the requested amount of money because according to her, noble women-only

deserved to be married to noblemen. Based on the description of the incident, it can be seen that there are two reasons behind the emergence of the practice of hegemonic masculinity in the marriage tradition of Putri Rubiah's family, namely a) men of aristocratic descent have been considered as the masculine gender group with the most respectable social status, so they deserve to be obeyed and given credit high appreciation in a marriage; b) the strategy of strengthening intellectual power used by Minangkabau aristocratic men by exploiting their nobility status has created unequal gender relations but is considered normative because it is supported by the feminine gender group. This second conclusion is reinforced by the description of the attitude of Putri Rubiah's who agreed to give *uang japuik* for 300 rupiahs, according to the request of her prospective son-in-law.

Following the events in the quote, the male noble character who has succeeded in realizing the configuration of gender practice through *kawin bajapuik* is Sutan Mansyur. With the support of his aristocratic title, Sutan Mansyur succeeded in confirming the norms of the male sex role through the marriage tradition which legitimized the superior position of men and emphasized subordinate femininity. With this strategy, Sutan Mansyur succeeded in presenting himself as part of the ideal masculine gender group that has power relations and is institutionalized in the form of heterosexual marriage. This predicate naturally shaped Putri Rubiah's awareness to position Sutan Mansyur as a man who deserves to be rewarded with some money and obey his orders. Even without committing acts of violence, Sutan Mansyur managed to gain supremacy which was used to control the feminine gender following the political ideals of the masculine ideology that was aspired to in the culture of his society. The case in Putri Rubiah's family also illustrates the idealized cultural behavior by the ruling community at that time. The idealized cultural behavior is the hegemony of power which aims to build access to a hierarchical social structure with the position of masculine gender as the owner of superior power and feminine gender as subordinate.

By referring to the case of the *kawin bajapauik* in Sitti Nurbaya's novel, it can be understood that hegemonic masculinity occurs if the configuration of gender practices succeeds in creating hierarchical relationships without acts of violence. This strategy was successfully carried out by Sutan Mansyur. He achieves hegemony with supremacy that prioritizes the logic

that noblemen have respectable social status. Therefore, women who want to make him a husband must respect him with equal value. With this strategy, Sutan Mansyur gained higher power which resulted in the absence of equal access between men and women in making decisions. With a nobility title, Sutan Mansyur has also succeeded in organizing the pattern of relations in three gender hierarchical structures, namely using power to determine the amount of *uang japuik* that must be provided by women, making rules about what things women must prepare for marriage, and control the way women value the manhood of a noble who will bear him a child.

On the one hand, *kawin bajapuik* tradition in Minangkabau aims to respect the aristocratic status of men, but on the other hand, it harms women because it shows unequal gender relations. Whereas according to the teachings of *Tambo Alam Minangkabau* (the Minangkabau community's way of life), the status of women who become wives must be the same as those of men who become husbands. This balance can be created through the role of the wife as the mother who educates her children in the family and the husband as the breadwinner. Unfortunately, this provision contradicts other regulations which state that the practice of traditional marriage is a form of obligation that is imposed on women. The reason is women are heirs of matrilineal families. If the marriage cannot be realized by the female family, then the lineage will become extinct (Navis, 1986). It is this consequence that causes some Minangkabau people, especially in noble families, to agree to respect the social status of men with the *kawin bajapuik* tradition.

In the real-life of the Minangkabau people, the tradition of *uang japuik* in marriage already exists. Scientists and researchers of Indonesian culture reveal the fact that the habit of giving money for pickup has developed in Minangkabau society since the 18th century, especially in the Padang Pariaman district and also in the Padang city area. In these two regions, the tradition of picking up the ball is applied to families who come from noble descent with the titles *sidi*, *bagindo*, and *sutan*. The amount of money given by women varied, depending on the peerage attached to the man to whom he was applying. Although times have changed until now the tradition of picking up money continues to grow and is carried out by the Minangkabau tribe who lives in the Padang Pariaman and Padang City areas. The difference is that nowadays the tradition of picking up money is no longer based on a nobility title, but is based on the educational status and wealth status of a man (Navis, 1986). Several research results in the 2000s found

the fact that in several areas of Padang Pariaman, namely the villages of Tiku, Kuranji, south Tiku, and Agam, the tradition of giving *uang japuik* to men was maintained as a tradition that must be carried out before the marriage contract took place (Anisa et al., 2021; Martha et al., 2020). This fact is also evidence that *kawin bajapuik* tradition described in Marah Rusli's *Sitti Nurbaya* is a picture of the social reality of Minangkabau society which began in the 18th century and some areas of Minangkabau is still maintained as a cultural identity.

Hegemonic Masculinity in the Tradition of Polygamy

Another tradition in matrilineal marriage in Minangkabau described in *Sitti Nurbaya*'s novel is polygamy. Polygamy is reflected in the life of a group of Minangkabau aristocratic men who do not have a modern educational background and do not work in government institutions. Marah Rusli explains in his novel that noblemen from this group have a habit of marrying many times. This habit was considered a natural thing, and even became a lifestyle that was considered necessary by the Minangkabau nobility in the city of Padang during the Dutch colonial period. A description of this tradition is found in the following quotation.

"Karena hamba, walaupun muda daripadanya, tetapi telah sepuluh orang istri hamba dan delapan belas orang anak hamba. Sungguh pun demikian hamba tiada susah, tiada kekurangan uang, tiada meminjam ke sana ke mari. Dalam Quran pun diizinkan beristri sampai empat orang sekali. Apakah sebabnya tak dituruti itu." ("Because I, though young than him, have ten wives and eighteen children of my servant. Even so, I have no difficulty, no lack of money, no borrowing here and there. The Quran also allows up to four wives at a time. Why is it not obeyed?") (Rusli, 2011:69)

The excerpt of the novel text describes the habits and attitudes towards polygamy of a nobleman named Sutan Hamzah. At a very young age, Sutan Hamzah already has 10 wives and 18 children. Even though he has many wives and children, Sutan Hamzah admits that he is never short of money because his wife is responsible for his finances. Based on his experience, Sutan Hamzah is of the view that polygamy is very suitable for noblemen.

Besides being profitable, according to him, polygamy is also not wrong because it is also allowed by Islamic teachings in the Qur'an. Based on Sutan Hamzah's statement in the excerpt of the text, it can be seen that the tradition of polygamy among Minangkabau aristocratic families is considered something natural, ideal, and not harmful. Because it was considered so, indirectly the practice of polygamy among the Minangkabau aristocratic families at that time became a cultural space that institutionalized the masculine hegemonic power. Masculine power in the polygamous tradition becomes hegemonic because it is supported by the agreement of members of the feminine gender. Evidence of support for the feminine gender is Sutan Hamzah's statement that he already has 10 wives. This means that Sutan Hamzah's marriage will not last ten times if it does not have support of every woman he marries.

Sutan Hamzah's polygamy tradition in *Sitti Nurbaya*'s novel is closely related to the production of power hegemony in the relationship between masculine gender and feminine gender. Important aspects that support the realization of hegemonic masculinity in the polygamous tradition are heterosexuality and the institution of marriage. Heterosexual marriage culture always places men as owners of legitimacy and women as objects of subordination that seem fragile and require superior masculinity. So to prove hegemonic masculinity, men are required to continue to prove their heterosexual orientation through marriage. Sutan Hamzah uses this idea as a gender political strategy to produce social relations that produce the power of masculine hegemony. As a gender political strategy, Sutan Hamzah has succeeded in achieving the most honorable path, becoming a man who is supported by the culture of his people.

After successfully realizing the idea of hegemonic masculinity through the tradition of polygamy, Sutan Hamzah continues to try to maintain his position with more anarchic actions. The nobleman committed acts of gender-based physical violence against his wife who refused Sutan Hamzah's request to have a new wife. As a result of this physical violence, Sutan Hamzah's eldest wife fell ill and eventually died. This violent incident is described in the following quote.

“Sakitnya yang sebenarnya tiada kuketahui. Kabarnya, semenjak ia berkelahi dengan suaminya, sebab ia marah, Sutan Hamzah kawin dengan istrinya yang baru ini, ia tidak bangun lagi, sampai akhirnya ia

mati karena ia kena terjang suaminya itu”. (The real pain I don't know. Reportedly, ever since she fought with her husband because he was angry, Sutan Hamzah married his new wife, he didn't wake up again until finally, he died because he was beaten by his husband.) (Rusli, 2011, p.248)

In the text excerpt of this novel, Sutan Hamzah's acts of physical violence are described against his wife. The form of violence is kicking the limbs which result in illness and death. Sutan Hamzah did this physical violence because his wife was against Sutan Hamzah's wish to marry another younger woman. Based on the description of events in the text, it can be concluded that Sutan Hamzah took two ways to maintain his masculine hegemonic position. First, trying to reach an agreement with his wife through a pattern of intellectual and moral leadership that noblemen are honorable people who are privileged by society and also by Islam to practice polygamy. Second, Sutan Hamzah finally chose a pattern of violence to maintain his superior position because his wife refused to be polygamous again.

Sutan Hamzah's acts of violence against his wife are not a feature of the practice of hegemonic masculinity. The allure of persuasion through institutionalized culture is gender politics which is very much used by superior groups in achieving a hegemonic position. Even so, hegemony is systematically open to violence. That is, if the social group in power does not succeed in gaining superiority through intellectual and moral leadership, then another way is taken by using domination or coercion. It is through this coercion that acts of oppression are made possible to subdue the power of the subordinate group. Sutan Hamzah's violent actions against his wife are a reflection of how the superior group achieves hegemony because intellectually and morally persuasive methods fail. In addition, the acts of violence committed by Sutan Hamzah are also part of the femininity suppression strategy required by the masculine gender in realizing the masculine hegemonic position (Connell, 2012). No less important thing that underlies the acts of violence committed by Sutan Hamzah against his wife is a form of resistance that is not under the concept of femininity idealized by Sutan Hamzah. The emphasis of the ideal feminine concept in the eyes of men is obedience, empathy as a woman's virtue, self-fragility in the institution of marriage that requires male leadership, and acceptance of parenting (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

In the development of the storyline of *Sitti Nurbaya's* novel, it turns out that not all noblemen support the practice of polygamy. The nobleman who rejected the polygamy tradition was named Sutan Mahmud. Sutan Mahmud is described as an educated person who has a position in society as a tribal leader and community leader (*penghulu*) who works under the control of the Dutch government. As someone who has socialized with the Dutch, Sutan Mahmud no longer fully supports the matrilineal marriage tradition in his family environment. Among the marriage traditions he opposes is polygamy. To fight this tradition, Sutan Mahmud offers a new tradition in matrilineal marriage, namely monogamous marriage. According to Sutan Mahmud, a nobleman with the status of a husband should only have one wife and be fully responsible as the head of the household. Sutan Mahmud's attitude is described in the following quote.

Sekalian Penghulu di Padang ini beristri dua, tiga, sampai empat orang. Hanya engkau sendiri yang dari dahulu, hanya perempuan itu saja istrimu tidak berganti-ganti, tiada bertambah-tambah” “Pada pikiranku hanya hewan yang banyak bininya, manusia tidak,” jawab. Sutan Mahmud dengan merah mukanya, “kalau perempuan tak boleh bersuami dua tiga, tentu tak harus laki-laki beristri banyak. (“All these *Penghulu* in Padang have two, three or four wives. only you yourself from the beginning, that woman alone, your wife does not change, does not increase” In my mind only animals that have many wives, not humans,” replied Sutan Mahmud with a red face, “if women can't have two or three husbands, of course it doesn't have to be a man who has many wives,”). (Rusli, 2011, p. 19)

The text excerpt explains Sutan Mahmud's attitude and views on the polygamy tradition which is usually practiced by noblemen in his environment. Sutan Mahmud compared the polygamous habit of the nobles in his environment with the habit of male animals having many female partners. Sutan Mahmud's attitude which contradicts his sister's attitude shows that the ideal masculine type according to Minangkabau noblewomen during the Dutch colonial period was a man who was willing to carry out the polygamous tradition. On the other hand, the ideal masculine according to Minangkabau aristocratic men who have interacted. with other nations are men who only carry out monogamous marriages. The contrasting attitude of noblewomen and noble men shows that during the Dutch colonial period in

Minangkabau there was a clash of attitudes between nobles who still maintained the traditions of their ancestors and nobles who tried to fight traditional values by building a new hegemonic strategy that was oriented towards western masculine culture.

Sutan Mahmud's attitude that equates polygamy with animal habits is also closely related to the hegemonic masculinity version of the patriarchal culture that the Dutch built against the nation they colonized. The clash of Sutan Mahmud's attitude with Putri Rubiah's attitude shows the tension between the efforts of the Minangkabau indigenous people to maintain their culture and the Dutch colonial efforts to instill a patriarchal ideology. Sutan Hamzah's attitude was a representation of the Dutch colonialists who rejected the matrilineal tradition and then replaced it with a monogamous tradition originating from Western culture. This analysis is relevant to the idea of masculinity construction in a society that has been colonized by colonialism. In the context of colonialism, there are two things behind the formation of masculinity, namely the local gender order and the transnational arena. The construction of masculine gender by referring to the local gender order always depends on the ideology of the locality, while in the transnational arena it seeks to break away from local culture and is more oriented towards global values (Kimmel et al., 2005). In that case, Sutan Mahmud is a picture of masculinity that is formed in a transnational gender order, carrying the idea of masculinity with a complex scope, involving ideas in European patriarchal culture. Sutan Mahmud's rejection of the polygamous tradition was a representation of the Dutch attitude that colonized the Minangkabau ethnic group at that time by trying to eliminate the characteristics of the Minangkabau ethnic locality as masculine gender identity and then replace it with a hybrid masculine identity produced based on European patriarchal culture.

To reject the supremacist polygamy tradition offered by Sutan Mahmud to women in a noble family, it is based on the rationality that an ideal household is not led by a wife and *mamak*, but must be led by a husband who is fully responsible for all family needs. With this supremacy, Sutan Mahmud managed to achieve a superior position as a husband and father figure who facilitated all of his wife's economic needs, including sending his son, Samsulbahri, to STOVIA in Jakarta. However, when his wife and children took actions that were considered to be damaging to his ideal

masculine image in society, Sutan Mahmud took firm action by kicking them out of the house. This event is described in the following quote.

Sayang aku, akan uangku yang sekian banyaknya, yang telah kukeluarkan, untuk mendidik engkau. Kesalahanmu ini tak dapat kuampuni, karena sangat memberi aib. Pergilah engkau dari sini! Sebab aku tak hendak mengakui engkau lagi. Yang berbuat demikian, bukan anakku. Jika engkau pun hendak mengikuti anakmu, pergilah bersama-sama. Aku tak hendak melihatnya lagi,” kata Sutan Mahmud pula kepada anak dan istrinya, lalu turun dari rumahnya, pergi ke rumah saudaranya di Alang Lawas. (“I love my money I’ve given so much to educate you. I can’t forgive your mistake, because it’s such a shame. Get out of here! Because I don’t want to admit you anymore. Who did that, not my son. If you also want to follow your child, go together. I don’t want to see him again,” said Sutan Mahmud also to his wife and children, then left his house and went to his brother’s house in Alang Lawas.) (Rusli, 2011, p.200-201).

There are two things about Sutan Mahmud that are described in the text of the novel. First, Sutan Mahmud is a husband and father figure who is oriented to the concept of leadership in a patriarchal marriage. The power as the head of the household is obtained by offering a consensus of moral responsibility. With this offer of consensus to his wife and children, Sutan Mahmud succeeded in realizing the ideals of a new masculine culture, namely hegemonic masculinity oriented to European patriarchal cultural values—man is responsible and becomes the sole ruler in a marriage institution. Second, behind the personality of Sutan Mahmud who is responsible for his children and wife, he is a picture of the character of the colonial nation who will destroy the colonized nation if he is not willing to follow his idealized cultural ideals. This is evident from Sutan Mahmud’s decision to expel his wife and children who are considered to have humiliated him. Even so, Sutan Mahmud’s decision to expel his wife and child also illustrates the failure of the hegemony of Dutch colonial masculinity in subjugating the Minangkabau ethnicity.

Judging from the socio-cultural history of Minangkabau in the early 20th century, the tradition of polygamy described in *Sitti Nurbaya*’s novel has indeed become part of real life. Several research records on the life of traditional Minangkabau aristocrats have shown this fact. In the Agam

region, West Sumatra, from 1837-1942 there lived a group of Minangkabau aristocrats called the Minangkabau traditional elite who carried out the polygamous tradition. Minangkabau noblemen at that time practiced polygamy, including Yahja Datuak. Yahja Datuak has three wives from the marriage of close relatives (endogamy) (Lestari et al., 2017). From different research results it is also stated that in 1931 the Dutch made a report on the number of Minangkabau men who practiced polygamy; as many as 20,127 Minangkabau men with two wives, 2,371 people having three wives, and 455 people having four wives. The study also states that the cause of polygamy during the Dutch colonial period was the insistence of Islamic reformers who wanted to abolish the Minangkabau traditional system with Islamic teachings. Another cause is the abolition of the forced cultivation system which has an impact on expanding the space for Minangkabau men to earn money, in contrast to the role of women who are still confined in the domestic sphere (Sari, 2020). Entering the end of the 20th century, the reality of the polygamous tradition described in *Sitti Nurbaya* is no longer found due to the strengthening of monogamy. Many things are suspected to be the cause of the disappearance of the polygamous tradition from the life of the Minangkabau community. Among them is the shift in the pattern of life of the Minangkabau family from a *batiah family* (a large family; consisting of grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, and children living in the same house) to a nuclear family (consisting of father, mother, and children), and strengthened with the emergence of a ban from the Indonesian government under the Suharto leadership since the early 1970s (Emeraldy Chatra, 2005).

Conclusion

The superiority of male power as a determinant of domestic and public policies in matrilineal relations in Minangkabau is the biggest tool in the configuration of this communal masculinity hegemonic practice. The production of matrilocal marriage traditions that are in line with this provision proves that the practice of hegemonic masculinity is an inseparable part of socio-cultural life in Minangkabau. This fact at the same time refutes the opinion of gender sociologists and masculinity researchers who state that hegemonic masculinity can only occur in a patriarchal society. Based on the

results of research on the novel *Sitti Nurbaya* by Marah Rusli, it is revealed that hegemony masculinity has been carried out by men of Minangkabau aristocratic descent in two marriage traditions, namely a) *kawin bajapuik* tradition; and b) the tradition of polygamy. The strategy for achieving the hegemonic masculinity of Minangkabau men in both traditions is to trigger superior power in regulating marital conditions and emphasize the obedience of women as subordinate objects in household leadership oriented to patriarchal ideology. As part of the social document of the Minangkabau community, the findings on the problem of hegemonic masculinity in Marah Rusli's *Sitti Nurbaya* also reaffirm that literary works with the theme of masculinity can contribute widely to understanding masculine gender political issues, especially gender politics in Minangkabau society. Based on the findings of this study, it can also be seen that the novel *Sitti Nurbaya* by Marah Rusli is one of the works of Indonesian literature that re-describes the social reality of Minangkabau society with the following tendencies, a) the *bajapuik marriage* tradition described in *Sitti Nurbaya* is indeed part of the historical picture of society in the early 20th century and is still run by ethnic Minangkabau, especially in the Pariaman and Padang areas; b) the polygamy tradition expressed in *Sitti Nurbaya*'s novel is also a description of the social reality of Minangkabau society at the beginning of the 20th century, but entering the end of the 20th century this tradition is no longer practiced. The study of masculinity in Minangkabau matrilineal culture is still relatively early, so it is very possible to be developed by further researchers into more complex studies. However, the findings of this study can be implied by cultural institutions, educational institutions, and other elements of society as comparison material in the preparation of public policies, especially gender mainstreaming and also policies based on local culture in the education of women in families and communities.

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