

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY IN THE TRADITION OF WOMEN PROPOSING MARRIAGE

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Abstract

This study examines the hegemony of masculinity within the tradition of women proposing to men in Lembor Village, Lamongan. While this tradition seemingly grants women agency, it remains embedded within patriarchal structures that reinforce male dominance. The novelty of this research lies in its critical approach, employing Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity to analyze power dynamics in gender relations. Using qualitative methods, data were collected from 15 participants, including women who proposed marriage (6), male counterparts (4), family members (3), and community leaders (2). The study utilized semi-structured interviews to explore personal experiences and social perceptions, complemented by participant observations of marriage proposal rituals. Additionally, literature reviews encompassed previous ethnographic studies, gender theory, and local marriage customs to contextualize findings. Results indicate that, despite women initiating marriage proposals, major decisions including marriage approval, dowry negotiations, and wedding arrangements are still controlled by the male's family, reinforcing gender hierarchies and positioning women in a subordinate role. Furthermore, societal perceptions stigmatize women who actively propose, as they are deemed to violate traditional femininity. While the tradition offers limited space for women's initiative, it ultimately adapts patriarchal norms rather than dismantling them. These findings highlight how hegemonic masculinity remains deeply embedded within cultural traditions, shaping gender relations through structural dominance and symbolic power.

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity, proposal tradition, gender relations, patriarchal dominance.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji hegemoni maskulinitas dalam tradisi perempuan melamar laki-laki di Desa Lembor, Lamongan. Meskipun tradisi ini tampaknya memberikan kebebasan bagi perempuan, tradisi ini tetap tertanam dalam struktur patriarki yang memperkuat dominasi laki-laki. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada pendekatan kritisnya, yang menggunakan teori hegemoni maskulinitas Connell untuk menganalisis dinamika kekuasaan dalam relasi gender. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif, data dikumpulkan dari 15 peserta, termasuk perempuan yang melamar (6), rekan laki-laki (4), anggota keluarga (3), dan tokoh masyarakat (2). Penelitian ini menggunakan wawancara semi-terstruktur untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman pribadi dan persepsi sosial, dilengkapi dengan observasi partisipan terhadap ritual lamaran. Selain itu, tinjauan literatur mencakup studi etnografi sebelumnya, teori gender, dan adat istiadat pernikahan setempat untuk mengkontekstualisasikan temuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa, meskipun perempuanlah yang mengajukan lamaran pernikahan, keputusan-keputusan penting termasuk persetujuan pernikahan, negosiasi mahar, dan pengaturan pernikahan masih dikendalikan oleh keluarga laki-laki, sehingga memperkuat hierarki gender dan menempatkan perempuan pada peran yang lebih rendah. Selain itu, persepsi masyarakat juga memberikan stigma terhadap perempuan yang aktif melamar karena dianggap melanggar feminitas tradisional. Meskipun tradisi ini menawarkan ruang terbatas bagi inisiatif perempuan, tradisi ini pada akhirnya mengadaptasi norma-norma patriarki dan bukannya menghilangkan norma-norma tersebut. Temuan-temuan ini menekankan bagaimana hegemoni maskulinitas masih tertanam kuat dalam tradisi budaya, membentuk hubungan gender melalui dominasi struktural dan kekuatan simbolik. Studi ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya mendekonstruksi hegemoni maskulinitas untuk mendorong dinamika gender yang lebih adil dalam tradisi pernikahan.

Kata Kunci : hegemoni maskulinitas, tradisi lamaran, relasi gender, dominasi patriarki.

Background

Hegemonic masculinity is a concept that describes how social norms and values shape perceptions of the ideal form of masculinity, in which men are regarded as superior to women and other expressions of masculinity. According to R.W. Connell, hegemonic masculinity encompasses social practices that reinforce male dominance within patriarchal structures, not only through violence but also through cultural and institutional means¹.

In a patriarchal society, hegemonic masculinity establishes a hierarchy among men themselves, in

which certain forms of masculinity are regarded as superior to others. For instance, men who meet ideal standards such as physical strength, courage, and independence often receive greater recognition and privileges.² Moreover, this hegemony also serves to reinforce traditional gender roles and hinder progress toward gender equality.³ Thus, understanding hegemonic masculinity is essential for analyzing gender dynamics within a broader social context.⁴ This concept helps us understand how norms of masculinity operate in various aspects of life and their impact on gender relations.⁵

¹Oktarizal Drianus, 'Psychosopha Ejournal.Lp2msasbabel.Ac.Id/Index.Php/Psc', *Journal of Psychology, Religion, and Humanity*, 1.1 (2019), 36–50.

² Masyhuri Susmawati, Hamidsyukrie ZM, Ananda Wahidah, 'Tradisi Nyesekek : Belenggu Bagi Perempuan Suku Sasak Ditengah Hegemoni Maskulinitas', *SOSIOGLOBAL: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Penelitian Sosiologi*, 8.2 (2024), 115–27.

³ Hesti Gustriliani, Baiq El Badriati, and Nurul Susianti, 'Gender Dan Kewirausahaan (Studi Sosial Ekonomi Mahasiswa Fakultas Ekonomi Dan Bisnis Islam

Angkatan 2019 Uin Mataram)', *An-Nisa*, 16.2 (2023), 91–104 <<https://doi.org/10.30863/an.v16i2.4222>>.

⁴ Sumekar Tanjung, 'Pemaknaan Maskulinitas Pada Majalah Cosmopolitan Indonesia Sumekar Tanjung Dosen Program Studi Ilmu Komunikasi Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII), Yogyakarta', *Komunikasi*, 6.2 (2012), 91–104.

⁵ Deddy Suprpto, 'Representasi Maskulinitas Hegemonik Dalam Iklan', *Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengembangan Sains Dan Humaniora*, 2.1 (2018), 1 <<https://doi.org/10.23887/jppsh.v2i1.14004>>.

Hegemonic masculinity is a concept that explains how social norms and values shape perceptions of the ideal form of masculinity, in which men are regarded as superior to women and other expressions of masculinity. According to R.W. Connell, hegemonic masculinity is not limited to specific physical characteristics or behaviors but also involves social practices that reinforce male dominance within patriarchal structures. This concept highlights that domination does not always occur through violence but is often sustained through culture, institutions, and social persuasion.

In a patriarchal society, hegemonic masculinity creates a hierarchy among men themselves, where certain forms of masculinity are perceived as superior to others. For instance, men who embody ideal traits such as physical strength, courage, and independence often receive greater recognition and privileges. Moreover, this hegemony also serves to reinforce traditional gender roles and hinder progress toward gender equality. Thus, understanding hegemonic masculinity is essential for analyzing gender dynamics within a broader social context.

Human beings always require the presence and support of others in their lives, as they are inherently social creatures who continuously adapt to their environment and interact with one another. When patterns of social interaction and interpersonal bonds within a society function effectively, human life can proceed harmoniously. For instance, in the marriage traditions of Lembor Village, the matchmaking and proposal processes still adhere to social norms that regulate relationships between men and women, ensuring social order despite changes in gender roles. Social interactions are thus well maintained. In this context, individuals seek a life partner to

accompany them in their interactions, which ultimately leads to the practice of marriage.

Marriage is a practice ordained by Allah SWT to ensure that human life develops in a proper and orderly manner. This relationship not only fulfills biological needs but is also an inherent part of human nature. In the context of Islamic marriage law, there are essential elements that encompass both obligations and acts of worship, aiming to fulfill the physical and spiritual needs of individuals.⁶ Therefore, marriage is regarded as a divine decree (*sunnatullah*) that applies to all living beings.

In the Indonesian language, the term *pernikahan* refers to the act of uniting or bringing together and is also used to describe sexual relations. Another term commonly used is *perkawinan*, which derives from the word *kawin*, meaning the process of forming a family with the opposite sex through sexual relations or intercourse.⁷ In Islam, scholars from various schools of thought agree that a marriage is considered valid only when conducted through the *akad ijab qabul*. In this context, *ijab* refers to the offer made by the first party, while *qabul* signifies the acceptance by the second party. The *ijab* and *qabul* must be carried out between the woman being proposed to and the man proposing, or through their representatives, such as a *wali* (guardian). A marriage is not deemed valid merely based on mutual consent without a clear contractual agreement (*akad*).

However, the marriage process does not end with the *ijab qabul* alone. Before marriage, there are prescribed stages in Islamic teachings, one of which is engagement (*khitbah*). Engagement is encouraged in Islam as a means of understanding a prospective spouse's character and background. It serves as an objective and strategic measure to help couples anticipate and address potential

⁶ Santoso, 'Hakekat Perkawinan Menurut Undang-Undang Perkawinan, Hukum Islam Dan Hukum Adat', *Jurnal YUDISIA*, 7.2 (2016), 412.

⁷ zainal anshari Ahmad mutohar, 'Pendidikan Akhlak Dalam Pandangan KH. Abdul Muchith Muzadi', III.4 (2020), 118–38.

challenges in married life, ensuring they are better prepared to build a harmonious relationship.⁸

During the engagement phase, several stages take place, one of which is matchmaking (*perjodohan*). Matchmaking serves as the initial step in selecting a life partner, which is essential for establishing a family. This stage holds significant importance as it marks the beginning of an individual's journey toward building a family structure that serves as the foundation for life and the growth of future generations. Therefore, matchmaking is a crucial process that helps assess an individual's readiness in terms of physical, cognitive, and financial aspects before entering into marriage.⁹

In certain communities, the practice of matchmaking remains closely tied to traditional or cultural customs, requiring strict adherence to established rules and procedures. In some regions, there is a longstanding tradition of arranging marriages between men and women, commonly known as *lamaran* (proposal), which has been passed down from generation to generation. This tradition is rooted in strong interpersonal interactions and oral communication, allowing it to become deeply ingrained and institutionalized within society, ensuring its continued observance over time.

The *lamaran* (proposal) tradition in Indonesia is a significant moment in the marriage process, involving both families of the prospective bride and groom. Generally, the proposal takes place after the couple has become acquainted and mutually agreed to advance their relationship to a more serious stage. The process typically begins with the groom's family visiting the bride's home to formally express their intentions. During this event, the groom's family presents symbolic

offerings, such as food, fruits, or specific items, as a gesture of respect and a sign of sincerity in their proposal.

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In the northern coastal region of Lamongan, particularly in Lembor Village, the *lamaran* (proposal) tradition differs from common practices. Typically, in most traditions, the prospective groom presents a symbolic engagement gift, such as a ring, as a sign of his commitment to marrying the bride. However, in the northern Lamongan community of Lembor Village, it is the woman who proposes to the man in the matchmaking process. This tradition is carried out in accordance with the *abangan* customs passed down from previous generations to the present. However, this practice has sometimes led to perceptions of inequality in society, as it may be seen as not honoring women especially by those unfamiliar with its deeper cultural significance.

In his 1950 research, Clifford Geertz categorized Javanese society into three groups: *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi*.¹⁰ Clifford Geertz positioned the *abangan* community as those who believe in animistic spirits. In other words, *abangan* are considered Muslims who believe in God but

⁸ Muqoffi, 'Fenomena Penyesatan Dalam Tradisi Praktik Pertunangan Di Sampang Madura', *Journal of Social Community*, 4.14 (2019), 69–80.

⁹ Rofiatul Nurhasanah, Winin Maulidya Saffanah, and Nur Syifaul, 'Silaturahmi Keluarga Di Desa Karangsari

Kecamatan Bantur Kabupaten Malang', 4 (2023).

¹⁰ Shoni Rahmatullah Amrozi, 'Keberagamaan Orang Jawa Dalam Pandangan Clifford Geertz Dan Mark R. Woodward', *Fenomena*, 20.1 (2021), 61–76 <<https://doi.org/10.35719/fenomena.v20i1.46>>.

do not necessarily practice Islamic teachings in a detailed manner. Instead, they prioritize deeply rooted traditional customs. Based on this perspective, the *lamaran* (proposal) tradition in Lembor Village can be categorized as part of *abangan* culture according to Geertz, as it continues to uphold ancestral traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation.

A woman's life purpose is often perceived as solely centered on marriage and family-building, leading to most of her time being spent within the household. In this context, women become financially dependent on men, as domestic work does not provide monetary compensation.¹¹ Moreover, women often find themselves trapped in an environment that does not support their personal development. In Javanese cultural concepts, women are perceived as weak individuals in need of protection. Consequently, it is not surprising that this perception places women in a subordinate position compared to men. From this perspective, the tradition in Lembor Village, where women propose to men, can be seen as a reflection of inequality. This practice, when viewed through the lens of gender disparity, treats women as objects being offered to men rather than as equal partners in marriage.

The study titled "*Hegemonic Masculinity in the Tradition of Women Proposing Marriage* (Case study in Desa Mlinjon Kecamatan Suruh Kabupaten Trenggalek)" examines the tradition of women proposing to men in Mlinjon Village, Trenggalek. The findings highlight that women have the right to initiate a marriage proposal, challenging conventional norms that typically place this role on men.

This study, which employs a qualitative method through interviews and observations,

found that this tradition does not contradict Islamic law or the *Kompilasi Hukum Islam* (KHI). The local community views this practice as a way to honor previous generations while also providing an opportunity for both parties to become acquainted before marriage. Additionally, the proposal is considered a crucial initial step in the marriage process, allowing both individuals to assess their prospective spouse's qualities and prepare themselves mentally and physically for married life.

Based on this, it is interesting to examine the tradition of women proposing to men from the perspective of gender sociology using Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodological approach. This approach enables an analysis of how social norms are produced, maintained, and accepted by society in daily practices, including within the marriage system.¹² Although this tradition appears to give women an active role in choosing their life partners, in practice, it remains shaped by patriarchal norms that position men and their families as the dominant decision-makers. Thus, the practice of women proposing to men is not a form of female emancipation but rather a continuation of hegemonic masculinity.¹³

Hegemonic masculinity in this context is evident in how male dominance remains intact, even when women appear to take the initiative. Hegemonic masculinity operates through cultural and social mechanisms that condition women to remain in a subordinate position, even in situations where they seemingly have an active role.¹⁴

In this tradition, women who propose must still navigate social mechanisms controlled by the male side, including the determination of the *mahar* (dowry), the timing of the marriage, and the approval of the groom's family. This indicates that

¹¹ Arief Budiman, *Pembagian Kerja Secara Seksual Sebuah Pembahasan Tentang Peran Wanita Di Dalam Masyarakat* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 1985).

¹² Harold Garfinkel, 'Studies in Ethnomethodology'.

¹³ R. W. Connell, 'Growing up Masculine: Rethinking

the Significance of Adolescence in the Making of Masculinities', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 14.2 (2005), 11–28 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/079160350501400202>>.

¹⁴ Connell.

the practice of women proposing is not a challenge to male dominance but rather an adaptation of patriarchy that adjusts to social changes.¹⁵

To deepen this analysis, it is essential to further examine how the social and symbolic constructions within this tradition reinforce gender inequality. Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *symbolic domination* can help explain how women in this tradition accept and reproduce patriarchal norms as something "natural" and "normal."

Findings from interviews with women who have proposed marriage in Lembor Village reveal that, despite taking the initiative in the marriage process, they remain subject to the groom's family's decisions regarding the dowry amount, wedding timing, and final approval. This confirms that the tradition does not fundamentally alter gender hierarchy but rather adapts hegemonic masculinity to a more modern social context.

Moreover, a feminist perspective within gender sociology can provide a deeper understanding of how women participate in this practice, ultimately reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. Data from participatory observation indicate that women who propose marriage often face social stigma, such as being perceived as lacking self-worth or violating norms of propriety that prioritize men as the dominant party.

By expanding this study with broader references and strengthening it with empirical data, this research can make a more substantial contribution to understanding power relations within the tradition of women proposing to men. It also reaffirms how male dominance persists through symbolic and structural mechanisms.

1. Operational Definition

a. Hegemony of Masculinity

The concept of hegemonic masculinity became popular through the work of Connell (1987, 1995) and Connell and Messerschmidt

(2005)¹⁶. Drawing from interdisciplinary studies, Connell developed this concept in response to academic interest in prioritizing the study of masculinity within the framework of gender relations. This concept is heavily influenced by Gramsci's notion of hegemony, which describes it as an ideological practice that sustains and legitimizes the interests of the ruling group in society at a given period.

According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity refers to the most dominant and socially respected form of masculinity, serving as an ideal aspiration for men. This hegemonic status differentiates itself from other gender identities that do not conform to dominant standards, positioning it at a higher level.

For example, alternative masculinities do not meet the criteria of hegemonic masculinity but still align with prevailing social norms, without significantly challenging the dominant form. As a result, these forms are considered to support the continuity of hegemonic masculinity and benefit from their involvement in the existing structure. On the other hand, there are forms of masculinity that directly contradict hegemonic standards, leading to their marginalization or subjugation under hegemonic masculinity. In this context, hegemonic masculinity represents and enforces power over other masculine identities as well as over women. It is regarded as the most socially respected form of masculinity and serves as an aspirational model for many men, even though it does not necessarily reflect the lived identity of the majority or even all men.

In Western societies and communities that have undergone Westernization, hegemonic masculinity is often associated with an identity commonly understood as "macho." This identity encompasses traits such as assertiveness, aggression, courage, resilience in the face of threats or difficulties, and strength in overcoming challenges. Consequently, hegemonic masculinity

¹⁵ Connell.

¹⁶ Connell.

is frequently linked to behaviors that emphasize bravery and power while rejecting weakness, emotional expression, or dependence on others.

As Connell has stated, such an identity is not always easily maintained or naturally desired; in fact, hegemonic masculinity represents a constructed and idealized set of norms rather than the general reality of men's lives. Nevertheless, hegemonic masculinity establishes normative standards that many men aspire to and use as a benchmark for evaluating their own identities.

b. Gender Roles in the Tradition of Proposing
Tradition is not something static;

Although often perceived as a legacy of the past, tradition can also adapt and evolve over time. Piotr Sztompka states that tradition consists of "material objects and ideas originating from the past but still present today," indicating that tradition can serve as a bridge between history and modern identity. In general, tradition is understood as a set of practices that are continuously performed and passed down from generation to generation. In this context, tradition encompasses customs, beliefs, and values that bind a society together, making it an integral part of its cultural identity.

The function of tradition in society is highly significant, including legitimizing existing norms and values, as well as serving as a symbol of collective identity that strengthens loyalty to the community. Moreover, tradition provides individuals with a space to find meaning in their lives, particularly in navigating the challenges of the modern era. Thus, tradition not only serves as a reminder of the past but also as a foundation for building a better future.

The role of gender in the tradition of women proposing to men in Lembor Village reflects a complex social dynamic. Although, on the surface, this tradition appears to provide women with an active role, an analysis from the perspective of gender sociology reveals that gender construction and hegemonic masculinity continue to dominate this practice. This tradition grants women an active

role as initiators of the proposal process. However, this freedom is often constrained by social norms that continue to position men in a position of control.

Women who propose are expected to demonstrate seriousness, financial stability, and alignment with the traditional values approved by the man's family. This indicates that although women take the initial step, they remain within the framework of masculine rules that govern the process. The power relations between women and men in this tradition are not equal. Women often have to meet specific requirements set by the man's family, such as dowry or the ability to manage household needs in the future. This places women in a subordinate position, where they must prove themselves more rigorously compared to the men being proposed to.

The sociology of gender perspective views that the social norms and expectations supporting this tradition continue to reinforce patriarchal values. Women who propose may be seen as violating traditional gender norms, yet they also face pressure to maintain feminine attributes that align with societal expectations. Meanwhile, men do not experience similar social pressures, highlighting a double standard in gender roles. In this tradition, masculinity remains a symbol of authority. Although women who propose appear to take an "active" role, they still operate within a framework dictated by men.

Rather than challenging the hegemony of masculinity, this tradition instead reproduces male dominance through more subtle means. The gender roles within the tradition of women proposing to men in Desa Lembor reflect a duality between change and preservation. From the perspective of gender sociology, this tradition demonstrates how the hegemony of masculinity persists through symbolic and structural control. While it provides an opportunity for women to take a more active role, existing social mechanisms and gender norms continue to uphold male dominance in relationships. This analysis

underscores the importance of deconstructing hegemonic masculinity to create more equitable gender relations.

c. Proposal

In the context of marriage in Indonesia, the proposal holds a rich and diverse significance, depending on local customs and traditions. Generally, a proposal is a process in which a man formally asks a woman to become his wife. According to scholarly discussions on engagement traditions, this practice is not merely a formality but also a crucial first step in establishing a serious relationship leading to marriage. A proposal serves as a means for both parties and their families to get to know each other more deeply and to ensure that they share a mutual understanding before committing to a more serious union.

In addition to being a crucial step toward marriage, the proposal also serves as an important moment to bring together two families in a harmonious setting. This process creates an opportunity to strengthen social ties and establish a foundation for communication between both parties. Within the Indonesian cultural context, a proposal is not merely about the couple getting married but also about uniting two extended families, reflecting values of kinship and togetherness. This makes the proposal a reflection of Indonesia's strong collective culture, where marriage is regarded as a social affair involving the community rather than just an individual commitment.

The proposal tradition also provides an opportunity for both families to express their expectations, values, and vision regarding marriage. In many Indonesian cultures, this moment is often used to discuss future plans, such as wedding arrangements, living arrangements, and household preparations. Through this dialogue, the proposal serves as a platform for both parties to understand each other and ensure alignment in values, thereby minimizing potential conflicts in the future.

From the perspective of Islamic law, a

marriage proposal is not merely a civil matter but also involves religious aspects. This process is required to be carried out with careful consideration to prevent future regrets. In practice, proposals often involve various rituals and customs that differ across regions, reflecting Indonesia's rich cultural diversity. Additionally, a proposal can be seen as an initial commitment that signifies the man's seriousness in establishing a lawful and enduring relationship.

In addition to its symbolic and spiritual aspects, a marriage proposal also carries significant socio-economic dimensions. In certain traditions, the groom's or bride's family typically presents *seseurahan* a collection of gifts symbolizing their commitment to supporting the future household. These items serve not only as symbols but also as tangible contributions that demonstrate sincerity in the relationship. In some regions, *seseurahan* is even designed to reflect the financial capability and readiness of the family to support the couple's life together.

However, in the modern era, the tradition of marriage proposals has often undergone transformations in both form and meaning. Some younger generations choose to simplify this process for reasons of efficiency or differences in perspective on tradition. Nevertheless, the core values of a proposal such as commitment, interfamily communication, and symbolic respect remain relevant and serve as a fundamental foundation for building a strong relationship. These changes illustrate that marriage proposals are not only capable of adapting to societal developments but also continue to be an essential part of the journey toward marriage.

2. The Theory used

The theory used in this research is the hegemonic masculinity theory proposed by Raewyn Connell. This theory serves as a foundation for understanding how certain forms of masculinity become dominant within the social and cultural structures of a society, as well as how

this dominance shapes relationships between men and women.

According to Connell, masculinity is not an inherent biological trait of men but rather a social construct that varies according to cultural, historical, and social contexts. The concept of hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant form of masculinity within a society, which not only establishes the ideal standard for men but also reinforces a gender hierarchy that prioritizes men while placing women and other forms of masculinity in a subordinate position (Connell, 2005).¹⁷ Connell (2005) explains that hegemonic masculinity operates through various mechanisms, such as social institutions, cultural representations, and gender norms, making male dominance appear natural and unquestionable.

In the context of the tradition where women propose to men in Desa Lembor, hegemonic masculinity continues to shape gender dynamics. Although women are given the opportunity to take the initiative, the ultimate decision remains in the hands of men and their families, reflecting how masculine dominance is maintained within the social structure. This aligns with the perspectives of Connell and Messerschmidt (2005)¹⁸ that hegemonic masculinity is not always coercive but often operates symbolically and structurally through social legitimacy. In other words, women who propose do not necessarily challenge patriarchal norms but rather function within a framework of rules still controlled by men.

Therefore, this study employs the theory of hegemonic masculinity to analyze how social practices within this tradition do not necessarily serve as a space for women's emancipation but rather illustrate how existing gender norms continue to be reproduced and maintained. By examining how hegemonic masculinity operates within gender relations in the community of Lembor Village, this research aims to contribute

to the understanding of how traditional practices can function as instruments that uphold gender inequality, even when they appear to allow for change.

Method

a. Types of research

This study employs a qualitative research method aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of social phenomena within a specific cultural context, namely the practice of women proposing to men in Lembor Village. The qualitative method was chosen because it allows for an exploration of meanings, experiences, and perspectives of individuals involved in this tradition without limiting the analysis to numerical data or statistical generalizations. This research focuses on exploring social interactions, cultural values, and gender constructions within the practice of women proposing. By utilizing this method, the study can interpret the phenomenon more holistically, enabling a deeper understanding of the dynamics of power relations within the community.

b. Research Approach

The approach used in this study is the critical approach, which focuses on analyzing power relations within social and cultural structures. This approach is relevant for examining how patriarchal gender norms continue to be maintained despite shifts in social practices. As explained by Connell (2005), hegemonic masculinity operates not only through direct coercion but also through symbolic and structural mechanisms that legitimize male dominance¹⁹. Hegemonic masculinity operates not only through physical domination but also through cultural legitimization, which establishes male roles as the accepted norm in various aspects of life, including marriage institutions. In the context of this study, the critical approach helps reveal how women who

¹⁷ Connell.

¹⁸ Connell.

¹⁹ Connell.

take the initiative in marriage proposals still function within a social system that prioritizes men as the primary decision-makers. Thus, this approach enables a deeper analysis of the social mechanisms that sustain hierarchical structures in gender relations in Desa Lembor.

c. Research subject

The research subjects in this study were determined using a purposive sampling technique, selecting participants based on criteria relevant to the research objectives. The primary subjects included women who proposed marriage to men, in order to understand their experiences and negotiation strategies within a patriarchal social system; men who were proposed to, to explore their perceptions of this tradition and how they negotiate their gender roles; and the families of both parties, particularly parents and cultural figures who play a role in marriage decisions and the preservation of cultural norms. Additionally, members of the general community with in-depth knowledge of this tradition were included to provide a broader perspective. The selection of research subjects considered variations in age, educational background, and social status to enrich the understanding of gender dynamics within this practice.

d. Data collection technique

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and literature review. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, allowing for flexible questions that facilitated further exploration of research subjects' experiences and interpretations of gender roles and authority in the marriage proposal practice. Participatory observation involved directly observing the proposal process, social interactions, as well as cultural symbols and expressions that illustrate gender hierarchy within this tradition. This observation also recorded how the community reproduces or responds to patriarchal norms in

daily practice. Meanwhile, the literature review analyzed customary law documents, previous research, and relevant theories, particularly those related to hegemonic masculinity and gender relations in patriarchal societies.

e. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted in stages, beginning with data reduction, which involved sorting and organizing data from interviews, observations, and literature reviews based on emerging thematic categories such as patriarchal norms, women's roles in marriage proposals, male family dominance, and women's negotiation strategies. The reduced data were then presented in a descriptive narrative format to illustrate the social dynamics within this tradition. Subsequently, conclusions were drawn and verified by comparing field findings with Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity to determine how this practice reproduces or challenges dominant masculine norms.

To enhance the validity and credibility of the study, a data triangulation strategy was employed by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and literature reviews to ensure consistency of information and minimize subjective bias. Through this approach, the research aims to provide a more in-depth analysis of how hegemonic masculinity continues to operate within the tradition of women proposing to men in Desa Lembor, despite the existence of space for women to take the initiative.

Results and Discussion

a. Research findings

This study aims to analyze how hegemonic masculinity continues to operate within the tradition of women proposing to men in Desa Lembor and how gender norms influence women's position in the marriage process. Based on an interview with ND, a woman directly involved in this tradition, it was found that

although women have the opportunity to propose, the ultimate decision remains in the hands of the man's family. For instance, even though ND and her fiancé had agreed to marry, the determination of the wedding date, the dowry amount, and the customary rituals were entirely decided by the man's family. Moreover, the groom's family holds the authority to accept or reject the proposal, leaving women in a state of uncertainty until the final decision is made. These findings indicate that this tradition is not a deconstruction of patriarchy but rather a mechanism that continues to reproduce hegemonic masculinity within a seemingly changing social structure.

Furthermore, ND also revealed that in some cases, women who propose to men do not immediately receive certainty, as the man's family often considers social and economic factors before approving the marriage. For example, in one case she was aware of, a woman who had proposed had to wait for months before receiving a response from the man's family, as they wanted to assess whether the prospective bride's family background met their standards. This indicates that while this tradition may appear to provide women with the opportunity to take the initiative, it still operates within a social system that positions men and their families as the primary decision-makers in marriage. Consequently, this tradition does not genuinely challenge hegemonic masculinity but rather reproduces a power structure that continues to favor male dominance.

ND stated that the tradition of women proposing to men in Desa Lembor has existed for a long time and has become an established societal practice. Despite the fact that women initiate the proposal, social norms implicitly dictate that the final decision remains in the hands of the man's family.

"Even though I proposed, I feel that a lot still depends on the approval of the man's family. In our culture, the man's family often determines whether the relationship will continue or not." (interview, ND: 2024)

This reflects how hegemonic masculinity, as explained by Raewyn Connell, continues to maintain the dominant position of men within the village's social structure, even as women begin to take an active role in the marriage process. In her view, ND perceives a clear inequality, despite the seemingly progressive act of women proposing to men.

"Even though it is the woman who proposes, it is still the man who is considered to be in control." (interview results, ND: 2024)

The dominance of masculinity in the village is not only evident in men's role in accepting marriage proposals but also in their control over key decisions related to marriage, such as the wedding date, the amount of dowry, and the customary procedures that must be followed. This is further confirmed by DN, another woman who had a similar experience. DN explained that in her case, even though she was the one who proposed, the final decision still depended on the approval of the man's family, which considered social and economic factors before agreeing to the marriage. This testimony demonstrates that the practice of women proposing to men still operates within a social system that upholds male dominance in decision-making structures.

Furthermore, ND added that although this tradition allows women to propose, there is still a social perception that views women who take an active role in proposing as "undesirable" or "too assertive." According to her, while this tradition is gradually gaining acceptance among some members of society, resistance remains, particularly among more conservative groups.

"Some people think that men should be the ones who are more active in proposing, and if women propose, they will be considered as lacking 'self-respect' or not respected enough." (interview results, ND: 2024)

This is reinforced by a statement from a traditional leader in Desa Lembor, who emphasized that although women are allowed to propose, men's social status remains higher within

the local cultural structure, ensuring that norms prioritizing men's roles in marriage are preserved. On the other hand, ND revealed that despite the many inequalities within this tradition, women continue to demonstrate courage and determination in choosing their life partners.

"I feel that this tradition provides us with a small space to express our intentions and courage." (Interview result, ND: 2024)

However, interviews with other informants, including DN and several families who have undergone this tradition, revealed that although women have the opportunity to propose, many aspects of marriage remain under the control of the groom's family. One example found in this study is how women who have proposed still have to wait a long time for a decision from the groom's family, as they typically consider economic factors and social status before accepting the proposal.

From the various data collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and analysis of customary documents, it can be concluded that while the tradition of women proposing to men in Desa Lembor provides women with a space to take the initiative, the power structure dominated by masculinity continues to control many aspects of this practice. Data triangulation, conducted by confirming findings with multiple sources including women who have undergone this tradition, the groom's family, and traditional leaders reinforces the finding that male dominance remains strong in marriage decision-making. This indicates that although there is a small space for women to take the initiative, the tradition ultimately reproduces patriarchal norms that sustain men's authority within the social structure of Desa Lembor.

The description of these research findings illustrates how interviews with ND reveal the impact of hegemonic masculinity within the tradition of women proposing to men in Desa Lembor. While there is some space for women to take an active role, power ultimately remains in the

hands of men and their families. Despite changes in certain social aspects, hegemonic masculinity remains strong and continues to limit women's autonomy within this tradition.

In addition to the interview with ND, this study also gathered insights from another informant, DN. In an interview with DN, a woman who had personally experienced the tradition of women proposing to men in Desa Lembor, it became evident how deeply embedded hegemonic masculinity is in this practice. DN explained that while women are given the opportunity to propose, the final decision always rests with the man's family. This finding highlights that, despite a formal space for women to take initiative, men ultimately retain control over the relationship.

According to DN, although women can propose, society at large still perceives men as the dominant party. In her own experience, DN proposed to a man she liked, yet despite being the one to take the first step, the proposal process remained heavily influenced by considerations from the man's family. DN felt that even though she initiated the proposal, the final decision was still in the hands of the groom's side, which continued to hold greater authority in determining whether the relationship would proceed.

"I proposed first, but still all the decisions were in the hands of his family. I felt like I could only wait for their answer, not really have control over the relationship." (interview, DN: 2024)

Additionally, DN mentioned the stigma often faced by women who propose. In Desa Lembor, society tends to perceive women who take an active role in proposing as less feminine or even as being overly eager. For some, this tradition appears to contradict societal expectations that women should be more passive in matters of marriage. This reveals an imbalance in how society accepts the roles of men and women in the proposal process. While the tradition seemingly allows women to take initiative, it does not fully dismantle patriarchal norms. Instead, it reinforces

the idea that women who step outside traditional gender roles may face social scrutiny. This stigma serves as a form of social control, discouraging women from fully exercising their autonomy in choosing a life partner. Consequently, even though women have the opportunity to propose, the broader societal framework still favors male authority in marriage decisions.

“Many people said I was too bold or even hasty, when in fact I just wanted to express my choice. In the end, the ones who have the authority are still men and their families. Women can indeed propose, but they still have to wait for their decision” (interview, DN: 2024)

DN also feels that although there has been a slight shift in societal perceptions regarding women proposing marriage, hegemonic masculinity remains deeply entrenched. Women may be increasingly accepted in taking the initiative, yet the groom’s family continues

“I hope that in the future, women can truly have a voice in determining their own path in life, without always being limited by unfair social rules.” (interview results, DN: 2024)

From DN's perspective, although this tradition provides women with the opportunity to take the initiative, she hopes for a significant shift in society's perception of women's roles in marriage. DN aspires for a more open and supportive society that promotes gender equality, allowing women to have greater control over their lives without being confined by the persistent patriarchal structures.

Discussion

The experiences of women involved in the tradition of proposing to men in Lembor Village reveal a contradiction between the active role they assume and the persistent dominance of masculinity. Although women are formally given the opportunity to initiate the proposal, the final decision remains in the hands of the man’s family, which sets economic, social, and cultural conditions before accepting or rejecting the proposal. As highlighted by ND and DN, women who propose still face full control from the man’s

family in determining the wedding date, the amount of dowry, and the social validation of the relationship.

These findings indicate that this tradition does not serve as a form of women's emancipation but rather as a patriarchal mechanism that adapts to modern conditions without fundamentally shifting the gender power structure. Thus, the tradition of women proposing to men in Lembor Village is more of a patriarchal adaptation than a challenge to hegemonic masculinity.

From the perspective of Connell's hegemonic masculinity theory, this phenomenon reflects how hegemonic masculinity operates through symbolic and structural mechanisms to maintain male dominance within social institutions, including marriage. Although women are given space to take the initiative, the social system still conditions them to conform to patriarchal norms that position men as the primary authority holders.

Data analysis also reveals the presence of social stigma against women who propose, as they are perceived by some members of society as "too bold" or "lacking self-respect." This suggests that although women are formally allowed to propose, they still face social pressure to uphold a feminine image aligned with traditional gender expectations. In other words, the power structure within this tradition has not undergone substantial change but has merely been modified to include female participation, which remains controlled by patriarchal norms.

The implications of this study extend beyond academic discussions on gender and hegemonic masculinity, offering relevance for social policy and women's empowerment programs. The findings indicate that although women have the space to take initiative in marriage, they remain constrained by patriarchal norms that limit their autonomy. Therefore, a more systematic approach is needed to support social transformation, such as inclusive gender education within local communities and policy interventions that promote equality in marital decision-making.

Moreover, this study provides a foundation for further research on how gender norms can be negotiated and redefined within broader social contexts, particularly in societies where patriarchal structures remain deeply entrenched.

This study has limitations in terms of data coverage and the depth of its critical analysis. Although interviews with ND and DN provide valuable insights into women's experiences within this tradition, the study has not yet fully explored how men and their families systematically uphold the gender hierarchy. Additionally, while a critical approach has been employed, a more in-depth analysis is needed to examine how this practice operates within the framework of cultural capital and symbolic domination, as proposed by Bourdieu.

Further research should consider how women who propose develop negotiation strategies in response to these social constraints and whether any patterns of resistance emerge in their daily practices. Thus, while this study provides an initial contribution to understanding gender dynamics in marriage traditions in Desa Lembor, further exploration is required to strengthen its critical arguments.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the tradition of women proposing to men in Desa Lembor represents a duality between change and the preservation of gender norms. Although this tradition allows women to take the initiative in the marriage process, masculine dominance remains the central element controlling its social dynamics. The final decision in the proposal process still rests in the hands of the man's family, including the acceptance of the proposal, the determination of the dowry, and the wedding schedule. This indicates that the changes occurring do not constitute a deconstruction of patriarchy but rather an adaptation of masculinity norms that continue to uphold gender hierarchy.

Furthermore, women who propose still face social stigma that reinforces traditional gender expectations, where their assertiveness in taking an active role is often perceived as a violation of decorum, which traditionally positions men as the dominant party in marriage. Thus, although this tradition provides women with the space to demonstrate initiative, the power structures sustaining hegemonic masculinity continue to operate, keeping women in a subordinate position.

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