

UNRAVELING THE THREADS OF WOMANHOOD: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IN SASAK SOCIETY

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Abstract

Sasak society is renowned for its adherence to moral principles, humanism, and strong religious beliefs. Nevertheless, several research indicate the persistent existence of gender discrimination, particularly targeting women. This study seeks to examine the formation of the concept of 'being a woman' in Sasak culture, encompassing its many manifestations, underlying causes, and consequences for the social framework, particularly for women in Sasak society. This study employed a qualitative methodology, gathering primary data from several sources including regional chairman, religious leaders, Penelando customary authorities in Sasak, women fulfilling the role of housewives, and males serving as heads of households. The data collected from these sources utilizing the interview method is subsequently analyzed using Foucault's framework of power relations. The research reveals that in Sasak society, the construction of 'being a woman' entails the perception that domestic work is inherent to women. The formation of 'womanhood' in Sasak society is intricately linked to the ideology of male hegemony over women. This architecture significantly influences the occurrence of social issues, including the dual burden faced by women, the marginalization of women in the public domain, and the restricted availability of economic resources for women. Due to the intricate nature of power in the creation of gender, it is imperative to do more research with a broader pool of participants. This will enable the identification of more comprehensive concerns and the exploration of the dynamics within current power dynamics.

Keywords: Sasak society; Power dynamics; Social construction; Subjugation of women

Abstrak

Masyarakat Sasak selama ini dikenal sebagai masyarakat yang menjunjung tinggi nilai-nilai moral, humanis dan religiusitas yang tinggi. Namun demikian, beberapa penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pada sisi lain masih terdapat fenomena diskriminasi gender, khususnya pada perempuan. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi konstruksi 'menjadi perempuan' di masyarakat Sasak yang meliputi bentuk, faktor penyebab hingga implikasinya pada struktur sosial khususnya perempuan di masyarakat Sasak. Penelitian ini dilakukan melalui pendekatan kualitatif, dengan sumber data primer penelitian yang mencakup ketua wilayah, tokoh agama sekaligus ketua adat Penelando di Sasak, perempuan sebagai ibu rumah tangga, serta laki-laki selaku kepala keluarga. Data yang diperoleh melalui metode wawancara dari sumber data tersebut kemudian diinterpretasi dengan menggunakan pendekatan relasi kuasa Foucault. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa bentuk konstruksi 'menjadi perempuan' di masyarakat Sasak adalah bahwa pekerjaan domestik dianggap sebagai kodrat perempuan. Konstruksi 'menjadi perempuan' di masyarakat Sasak ini berkaitan erat dengan wacana dominasi laki-laki terhadap perempuan. Konstruksi tersebut berdampak pada munculnya problem-problem sosial seperti adanya beban ganda perempuan, marginalisasi perempuan di ruang publik, hingga keterbatasan akses sumber ekonomi bagi perempuan. Mengingat sifat kekuasaan dalam konstruksi gender yang sangat kompleks, maka perlu adanya penelitian lanjutan dengan informan yang lebih luas, guna mengidentifikasi persoalan-persoalan yang lebih komprehensif serta mengungkap dinamika relasi power yang ada.

Kata Kunci: Masyarakat Sasak; Relasi kuasa; Konstruksi sosial; Domestifikasi perempuan

A. INTRODUCTION

Sasak society, which is considered a society that upholds high moral values, humanism and religiosity, has a gender construction that tends to be discriminatory. Gender discrimination is a denial or restriction attached by society on the grounds of gender or sex, resulting in a rejection of recognition of involvement or equal rights between men and women in all aspects of life (Subhan 2004). Stereotyping, subordination, marginalization, overburdening and even violence are forms of gender discrimination (Rohmaniyah 2017). It is also largely found in the Sasak community (Khaerani 2017). Gender is a sign system that is permeated by power, and the construction of gender describes the discourse of heterosexuality in which power is constructed (Jhon Scott 2011). Here then it can be understood that gender construction in Sasak society is a construction built on male dominance over women.

Studies on gender, especially related to women in Sasak society so far only focus on three aspects, namely: *first*, related to gender discrimination which in this case is more experienced by women starting from subordination and so on which then has an impact on the lack of women's role in development in Sasak society (Khaerani 2017). *Second*, the role of language in constructing gender where Sasak speech is full of hidden ideologies that contain various motives and patterns that stereotype women in Sasak society (Setiawan 2019). *Third*, studies on gender, especially women in Sasak society, have so far studied more about the biases contained in the division of roles or work. In this context, based on the results of research conducted by Ulyan Nasri, gender biases in the division of roles or work are caused by the division of roles or work that refers to the construction of women as mothers while men as fathers (Nazri 2018). From previous studies, very few and

even none have specifically studied power relations in the construction of "being a woman" in Sasak society.

This paper tries to fill the void of studies that have been conducted so far, especially related to power relations in the construction of "becoming a woman" in Sasak society. To reveal or find comprehensive answers related to the existence of kusa relations in the construction of "becoming a woman" in Sasak society, this article will answer three questions, namely, first, how are the forms of construction of "becoming a woman" in Sasak society? Second, what factors are the background or causes of the construction of "becoming a woman" in Sasak society? Third, finally, what are the implications of the construction of "being a woman" for Sasak women? This paper tries to portray the existence of power relations in the construction of "becoming a woman" in Sasak society both in terms of forms, factors and implications for women in Sasak society. Gender discrimination experienced by women in Sasak society is contrary to the principles of morality, humanism and religiosity in Sasak society such as equality to equal opportunities and so on.

The study of power relations in the construction of "being a woman" in Sasak society is important because it will reveal the understanding of Sasak people as well as the dynamics of power that dominate people's knowledge, especially related to gender construction. This is important because this construction contributes to the emergence and perpetuation of social problems such as double burden, marginalization and even limited access for women. The division of labor based on the understanding of gender that is considered natural will tend to create discrimination. This will then lead to the marginalization of women in the social structure of Sasak society. Various policies that do not see this aspect will not be able to have an effective impact because of the

cultural-historical barriers that have not been identified in the social construction of Sasak society.

B. METHODOLOGY

The object of this study is the Sasak community while the location of this research was conducted in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara Indonesia. The reason why this research was conducted in Sasak society is that Sasak society has a complex socio-cultural structure. This is a special attraction to see how Sasak people conceptualize "women". This construction will ultimately have an impact on the entire social system of society ranging from education, social, economic, religious and so on in viewing and positioning the role, function and contribution of women. The issue of power relations in the construction of "being a woman" in Sasak society is important to explore because it will reveal the existence of gender-related social problems which are experienced by women ranging from double burden to marginalization.

The research method used in this research is descriptive qualitative research method, which is research whose data is in the form of verbal data which is analyzed without using statistical numbers. If numbers are found in this study, they are only as supporting data (Moelong 2011). In this study, researchers used Michel Foucault's power relations approach. The use of the power relations approach in this study aims to explore the relationship between power and knowledge built in the construction of "being a woman" in Sasak society. To obtain data from a study, techniques are needed in collecting data. In this study, researchers used the interview method, namely, data collection techniques carried out by means of one-sided questions and answers carried out systematically with the aim of obtaining data related to the research topic.

In this study, researchers used a semi-structured interview method. Researchers provide questions that are not too centered

on one question but can develop according to the needs of the researcher. This research involved five informants as primary data sources, namely "A" and "S" as the head of the family, "M. P" the head of the area, a religious figure as well as the traditional leader of Penelanda, and finally "M" and "I. J" as housewives. The selection of traditional and religious leaders as data sources is because traditional and religious leaders are people who know the socio-cultural structure and history of the community. So that they will know more about the construction of "being a woman" in Sasak society. While the selection of Sasak people, both men or especially women, is because Sasak people are a group of people who carry out and accept the implications of the construction of "being a woman".

In addition, to get answers or comprehensive data related to the research topic, here researchers try to trace or review previous research such as journal articles, books and so on related to gender construction, especially the construction of "women" in Sasak society which in this case researchers use as supporting data related to the research topic, namely power relations in the construction of "being a woman" in Sasak society. Meanwhile, to analyze the data in this study, researchers used a descriptive philosophical analysis method, namely describing and describing data based on data from the findings obtained through interviews and the results of previous research both books and journal articles.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. "Being a Woman": The Construction of Traits, Roles and Behavior

a. Women are Identical with Weakness, Irrationality, and Domestic Roles

Etymologically, women come from the word *empu* which means "master", a person who is skillful or powerful (Abdulsyani

2017). Zaitun Subhan explains that woman comes from the word *empu*, which means to be respected. Meanwhile, women's feminists say that woman is a term used in social construction whose identity is determined through the portrayal of women (Subhan, 2004). The construction of "being a woman" in Sasak society, based on the results of the researcher's interview with "M" (housewife) as the data source, that the construction of being a woman in Sasak society is inseparable from the labeling of the characteristics possessed by women. In this case, women are identified with being weak, irrational, dependent on men and so on.

The duties and responsibilities of a woman in the context of Sasak society are nothing more than the duties and responsibilities of domestic work such as cooking, washing, sweeping caring for children and the like. Here then the labeling of the characteristics possessed by women in a narrow sense such as weak, indecisive and so on plays a major role in building the construction of how to "be a woman" in Sasak society. Furthermore, "M" (housewife) said that:

"The difference in roles and division of labor between men and women is inseparable from the physical and physical conditions possessed by men and women. We (women) are weak and our movements are limited. So, a woman's job is to be able and good at taking care of children, husbands and homes. So it's strange if women can't cook let alone take care of their children." ("M", Interview 2021).

The concept of gender that distinguishes between men and women culturally where "women" are seen as soft, emotional and so on are traits that can change at any time (Syafe'i 2015). The concept of "women" has tended to isolate women, where the point of attention has been the system in which women take on the role of women (Abdullah 2001). The concept of gender itself is an identity that a person acquires in the process of socializing with society. As an acquired identity, gender is open or not permanent.

As an open construction, some historical facts show that there are not a few women who are strong, rational, tough and so on (Rohmaniyah 2009). So there are many strong and resilient women in the social life of the community (Amriani & Suardi 2015). For example, women who went to war against Dutch colonialism in the 19th century and so on.

b. Domestic Work as Women's Narrative

The construction of "being a woman" in Sasak society itself is inseparable from the understanding that women are housewives while men are the head of the family. In the context of Sasak society, the division of labor between men and women refers to the Sasak community's understanding of the existence of a closed gender construction. Here, in the context of the Sasak community's understanding, women are constructed within the scope of domestic work which is built on the Sasak community's understanding that domestic work is the nature of a woman. In this case, based on the results of the researcher's interview with "S" (head of the family) as the data source said that, the main task of a man as the head of the family is to earn a living while the woman's job is to take care of the house and care for children. Furthermore, "S" (head of the family) explained that:

"A woman's duties as a housewife cannot be separated from housework, starting from cooking, looking after children, washing and the like. Meanwhile, the task of men as heads of families is to work outside the home to earn a living" ("S", Interview 2021).

The concept of women as housewives consciously or unconsciously plays a role in how women are shaped or constructed in the social system and structure of society. In this case, the construction of "being a woman" and the concepts or terms attributed to women in Sasak society such as housewife and so on are discourses that are built on male domination of women. Here, cooking, washing, sweeping, caring for children and all home

affairs are delegated to women's responsibilities. In the process of socializing gender or more specifically "women" involves power through various aspects ranging from the value system, rites, authority to the existence of cultural control (Marhumah 2011). Related to this, Foucault explains that power shapes knowledge that appears objective even though it is not entirely so (Michel Foucault 2019). For Foucault, discourses of femininity operate as highly repressive forms of power that maintain women's subordination to men by instilling in them a deep sense of bodily shame.

2. Power and Knowledge Relations: Women in the Dominant Discourse of Sasak Society

Michel Foucault has the view that knowledge and power cannot be separated from each other. Foucault explains that power shapes knowledge to appear objective, although this is not entirely the case (Foucault 2019). Power is always articulated with knowledge and knowledge always has an aspect of power. For Foucault, knowledge is acquired in the same way that we acquire language, and our chances of rejecting that knowledge are as slim as our chances of rejecting language (Jones, n.d.).

In the context of Sasak society, almost all elements that form culture have a character that favors or is dominated by male interests. According to the results of the researcher's interview with "I. J" (housewife) as a resource person explained that, the main task of a woman (in the context of Sasak society) is cooking, washing, and other housework, this is inseparable from the connotation that women are housewives. Furthermore, "I. J" (housewife) said:

"When I wanted to go to school, I was taken care of by Tuan guru at the pesantren. However, the community said that women were not suitable for school because a woman's job was to take care of children and cook". ("I. J", Interview 2021).

Based on these interviews, the cultural history of Sasak society constructs women as only suitable in the domestic sector. This can then be seen from several Sasak community cultures that place women in sectors that are considered not too important. For example, in the traditions or culture of the Sasak community such as *maulid*, *mubur* and so on which only put women in the consumption sector. While functional sectors are filled by men. This is inseparable from the conservative view of the community that men are the head of the family as well as the holder of authority in the social life of the community both (Hartati 2018).

The concept of women in the social construction of Sasak society recognizes the term *Inen Bale*. *Inen Bale* itself consists of two words, *Inen* which means mother and *Bale* which means house. Indirectly, this term then refers to the role where women are in charge of taking care of the house starting from cleaning the house, washing, cooking and so on (Wirata 2016). Various mechanisms such as culture or culture become strategic mechanisms to cement power about or over women (Rohmaniyah 2017). In this context, Foucault explains that all discourse has an ideological function. The production of knowledge always goes hand in hand with certain historical power regimes that are specific, therefore every society runs its own truth system that has a regulatory and normalizing function (McNay 1993). Knowledge and power are integrated with each other and there is no moment in time when knowledge will escape its dependence on power" (Foucault & Gordon 1980).

Foucault explains that there are two important opinions when knowledge and power meet with thoughts about humanity. First, truth and rationality are always changing throughout history. Second, with their own knowledge, humans are creatures that are limited by their surroundings (Afandi 2015). In gender socialization, discourses, values, norms, beliefs that represent

certain gender constructions are included in what Foucault calls discourse. According to Foucault, it is in this discourse that knowledge combines with power (Foucault 1978). Social systems and constructions are inseparable from power relations that are manifested in the form of values, norms and regulations. In this case, power does not come from outside, but from an integrated arrangement of rules that allow everything to happen (Foucault 1997). In this context, it can be understood that every idea, teaching, message and understanding about men and women in society always contains the manifestation of power. All knowledge is a consequence of the presence of certain power regimes.

3. Power Relations and "Being a Woman" in Religious Construction

Interpretation of religious teachings in the context of Sasak society is dominated by gender-biased views and biased patriarchal values. Religion that carries the mission of peace and liberates humans from the shackles of oppression, injustice and backwardness just in some verses contained explicitly leads to gender bias, as if favoring a particular gender (male). Here, almost all policies or decisions are taken by men as the head of the family. Furthermore, based on the results of the researcher's interview with "A" (head of the family) as the source of data explained that:

"There is no such thing as a man's repentance towards women (wives) if there are many women. Because when married women (wives) become the responsibility of the husband, therefore "men's orders must be obeyed". Because religion says that the man is the priest while the woman is the mum" ("A", Interview 2021).

In this case, the construction of "being a woman" which is built on the basis of male domination over women is inseparable from the interpretation of gender-biased understanding of religious teachings carried out by the community, in this case the Sasak community. The legitimization of gender-biased religious

understanding causes the perpetuation or rootedness of the concept or construction of "being a woman" in the midst of the social life of Sasak society. One of the feminist criticisms of religion related to the role of religion in strengthening and perpetuating patriarchal culture is basically rooted in three things, namely the issue of patriarchy, androcentrism and sexism (Rohmaniyah 2013). Patriarchy refers to the dominance or superiority of men in religious discourse. Androcentrism itself means that religious traditions are constructed or developed by men from a male perspective and therefore the main focus is men. Meanwhile, sexism is a dominant religious color that gives privileges to men so that it places men as superior but at the same time places women as inferior (Peach 2002).

Male superiority is more clearly reflected in the tafsir discourse related to the status and role of women. The first human being in the religious point of view is understood as Adam who is understood as a man. While the second human being is Eve who was created from Adam's rib. Women as the second human being in al-Qurtubi's interpretation do not have the advantages of reason as possessed by men (Rohmaniyah 2008). Regarding the dominance of men over women in the construction of "being a woman", Michel Foucault explains that the knowledge we believe so far is not absolutely objective, but knowledge is in a certain area of authority which has an impact on institutionalized power. In this case, the knowledge system has a reciprocal relationship with the power system that is able to create and maintain certain truths so that the truth is actually only a product of certain practices. For Foucault, power is not centered on a particular person or institution but spreads into the relationships that exist in people's lives such as religion, culture and so on (Adlin 2016).

According to Foucault, power shapes the body to submit to a policy of coercion (Zaidan 2020). Power has very complex networks

and relationships so that power can sneak into every line, place and social system of society. Furthermore, Foucault explains that power cannot be separated from knowledge. Power becomes the space where knowledge is delivered. Here, knowledge is born to legitimize power (Hannan & Abdillah 2019). For Foucault, power is always actualized through knowledge (Afandi 2015). In the context of "being a woman" in Sasak society, the understanding or paradigm built in the concept of "being a woman" is inseparable from the historical male domination of women which comes from socio-cultural and gender-biased religious understanding in Sasak society.

4. "Being a Woman" and the Emergence of Social Problems

a. Marginalization of Women in Public Spaces

Gender construction that creates bipolarity between the roles of men and women ultimately leads to inequalities or social injustices that are rooted in the social life of society (Rohmaniyah 2009). This can be caused by several factors ranging from cultural construction to a gender-biased understanding of religion (Nazri 2018). The construction of concepts of being a "woman" such as motherhood, weakness and so on are very dominant in the social life of the community (Syafe'i 2015). The construction of "being a woman" in Sasak society that makes domestic work as a woman's code has an impact on the marginalization of women in the public sphere. Here there is a kind of gap between women and the public sphere which is the impact of the construction of "being a woman" which is built on the basis of cultural construction and gender-biased religious understanding. The construction of "being a woman" in Sasak society has an impact on access, roles and the division of labor owned by women.

In this context "being a woman" in Sasak society means keeping house, cooking, washing or caring for children. Based on

the researcher's interview with "I. J" (housewife) as the data source explained that, women in the context of Sasak society means being fully responsible for domestic work, washing, cooking and caring for children is an obligation. She further explained:

"The duties and obligations of a woman are cooking taking care of children and looking after the house. This is the responsibility of women as housewives" ("I. J, Interview 2021).

b. Limited Access to Economic Resources for Women

The existence of a gender division of labor associated with the function of women as mothers and men as heads of families in development such as the economic sector has an impact on the subordination of women. In this case, the focal point and the main actors of development are men while women are only in sectors that are considered less important. Women in Sasak society are more involved in domestic economic activities, such as the Raskin (poor rice) program, free gas distribution, home-based businesses and the like. While men are mostly involved in matters of increasing economic income held by the government (Khaerani 2017).

Data in the Sasak community shows that, labor such as midwives, home industries, domestic helpers are 100% female, while mechanics, small and medium enterprises are more dominated by men. In addition, in agriculture, quantitative data shows that about 24.9% are female farmers, while 23.9% are male. However, in this case, access to agricultural counseling such as crop improvement is dominated by men. Indirectly, the role of women is not considered too important even though in some sectors that dominate are women, but women seem to be eliminated or marginalized from development programs such as agricultural intensification which only focuses on male farmers (Khaerani 2017).

c. Double Load

In feminist eyes, women who work outside the domestic sphere experience gender injustice in the form of double burden. Double burden means that one gender receives more work than the other. Women's reproductive role is often considered a static and permanent role (Hidayati 2016). According to "M. P" as the head of the region as well as the customary leader of Pene lando said that:

“A woman's duties will be very different when she is not married or married. Before marriage, a woman's duty is to be devoted to her parents. While after marriage a woman's duties or obligations will widen or expand from being devoted to her husband to taking care of the household and so on.” (“M. P.”, Interview, 2021).

The double burden experienced by women in Sasak society is the impact of the dichotomy of public and domestic roles. Sasak women often have no choice but to undergo this dual role in order to help the family economy and for their survival. As a mother in the social life of the Sasak community inevitably has to work to help the family economy but at the same time is required to be responsible for her domestic roles such as caring for children, cooking and the like. In this context then caring for children, cooking, washing and the like is the responsibility of women so that not many women do different jobs in one time (Khaerani 2017).

5. Building Gender Equality in Sasak

Sasak comes from the word sak-sak which means canoe (Wahidah 2019). The Sasak tribe is the indigenous population and ethnic group that inhabits the island of Lombok. (Budiwanti, 2000). In some literature the origin of the Sasak tribe is the Mongoloid race which is a Malay-Indonesian sub-race that is spread in most parts of Indonesia such as Java, Bali, Sumatra and Lombok (Sudirman & Prarijanto 2012). In the context of social and

cultural construction of Sasak society consists of values or norms that are divided into several layers, namely; the first layer, there are overlapping values that motivate Sasak people to become righteous humans such as obedient, obedient, *pacu* (diligent) and so on. In the second layer, there is the value of *maliq* (prohibition or abstinence) which is the law that limits the Sasak people in interacting both with each other and with the surrounding natural environment. Finally, the third layer is collective values for the common good by prioritizing *sangkep* (deliberation) (Wahyudin 2018).

Looking at the values, norms in the social construction of Sasak society, the offer to realize gender equality in Sasak society which focuses on the role and division of labor between men and women is Affirmative action based on humanism. Affirmative action based on humanism is a special action taken to encourage gender equality efforts towards gender justice by paying more attention to certain genders that experience subordination or underdevelopment and injustice through structural channels such as government regulations, local regulations and the like. In this case, the involvement of all parties, especially the State, is very important in realizing gender justice through affirmative action with a humanist dimension. For example, by setting quotas for women in political participation, providing scholarships to girls and so on. The low participation of the community, especially women in the field of education, has an impact on all lines of community life ranging from the economy, politics and so on (Prantiasih 2016).

The construction of society's knowledge has often equated gender and sex (Rokhimah 2015). "Woman" is historically and discursively shaped and always relative to various changing categories in which women can be positioned very differently (Zubaedah 2010). Related to this, the focus on realizing gender equality does not only involve women but the involvement of men is

very important. The involvement of men and women in building or realizing gender equality is known as "gender relations". The existence of relations between men and women with gender justice is expected to form a division of roles and work between men and women that does not exceed the capacity or nature of both. In this case, cooking, washing, caring for children and other domestic work are not the responsibility or nature of women. Conversely, the public sector is not only the right of men but also the right of women as a manifestation of the same rights that humans are born with.

D. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The construction of "being a woman" in Sasak society is inseparable from the existence of patriarchal knowledge power relations that are dominant in the episteme and cultural practices of Sasak society. The construction of "being a woman" in Sasak society is built on the dominance of men over women. The construction of understanding, behavior and traits about women such as housewives, motherhood, weakness, irrationality and so on causes the emergence of social problems. The emergence of social problems related to gender, especially women, such as double burden, marginalization in the public sphere to limited economic access for women is the impact of the construction of "being a woman" in Sasak society. Related to the existence of power relations and knowledge in the construction of "being a woman", the existence of community culture-religion plays an important role in building or constructing how to "be a woman". In this case, the existence of male power relations towards women is internalized into the social system of society such as culture and religion. Religion and culture in this context then become tools or media to maintain male dominance over women.

This paper on power relations in the construction of "being a woman" in Sasak society aims to see the main source of social problems related to gender, especially women. By tracing or finding the root causes of social problems related to gender, especially women, it can break the chain of reproduction of these social problems. By using Michel Foucault's power relations approach, this paper aims to explore the deepest point of a social construction, namely the epistemology that is the basis for building the structure and social construction of society, especially related to gender in this case the construction of "being a woman".

Given the very complex nature of power that is not centralized in certain institutions but spreads into the relationships found in community life, the development of studies is important. Power has very complex networks and relationships so that power is able to sneak into every line, place and social system of society. Sasak society, which is then known as one of the communities rich in culture, traditions and values and norms adopted, adds to the complexity of seeing power relations in gender construction. In this context, the study of gender inequality, especially for women, needs to be developed considering that each region continues to experience developments so that it can identify issues related to gender construction that have not been identified.

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