

# Social Construction of Women Holding the Position of *Tunggu Tubang* in South Sumatra

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## Abstrak/Abstract

*Wanita Tunggu Tubang secara paradoks memegang baik posisi terhormat maupun subordinat dalam komunitas Semende. Mereka bekerja untuk melestarikan budaya dan melakukan tugas mereka, namun pada saat yang sama mereka harus menghadapi berbagai masalah di ruang publik. Pertanyaan penelitian ini adalah bagaimana posisi ini secara sosial dibangun, dan teori yang diterapkan untuk menjawab pertanyaan adalah teori konstruksi realitas sosial. Pendekatan yang dipakai adalah kualitatif, dengan paradigma konstruksionisme kritis dan teknik sampling kriteria. Kegiatan para wanita dalam penelitian ini diamati dalam jangka waktu dua minggu, dan dua informan kunci dengan pekerjaan yang berbeda, kelas sosial, dan tempat tinggal diwawancarai. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa konstruksi yang bias gender telah diproduksi dan direproduksi melalui penyebaran keyakinan seperti itu sejak kecil dan dominasi Merajes di ranah sosial. Selain itu, perempuan Tunggu Tubang melihat posisi dan peran mereka sebagai takdir dan identitas budaya yang harus mereka terima. Namun, perspektif semacam itu tidak begitu luas di kalangan informan yang tinggal di daerah yang lebih maju karena gaya hidup mereka lebih berorientasi ekonomi dan praktis.*

The *Tunggu Tubang* women paradoxically hold both a respectable as well as subordinate position in the Semende community. They work to preserve the culture and perform their duties, yet at the same time they have to face various problems in the public sphere. The research question herein is how this position is socially constructed, and the theory applied to answer the question is that of the construction of social reality. The method chosen is that of the qualitative research, coupled with the critical constructionism paradigm and criterion sampling technique. The activities of the women in this study were observed in a period of two weeks, and two key informants with different jobs, social classes, and places of residence were interviewed. This study indicates that a gender-biased construction has been produced and reproduced through propagation of such belief since childhood and dominance of the *Merajes* in social realms. In addition, *Tunggu Tubang* women perceive their position and role as their destiny and a cultural identity which they have to assume. Such perspectives, however, are not as pervasive among informants living in more advanced areas as their lifestyle is more economy-oriented and practical.

## Kata kunci/Keywords:

*Tunggu Tubang, perempuan, konstruksi sosial, matrilineal, gender*

Tunggu Tubang, women, social construction, matrilineal, gender

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## Introduction

When a father or a man is regarded by the community as the head of the family as well as the decision maker, the mother or the woman will usually be entrusted with the responsibility to pass on the cultural values to the children. Among these cultural values parents extend to their children are those regarding identity, role, and gender expectation (Woods in Samovar 2010: 62). Gender role is what will affect how individuals understand and perceive the world. In general, the society places women in the domestic territory, with a series of duties which are deemed naturally associated with them, such as to bear and give birth to children, to bring them up, and to manage house chores (Kasiyan, 2008: 55).

The system that places women in the domestic sphere is called the patriarchal system, in which gender-biased values, including in customary, educational, religious, political, economic, and other values, prevail (Hereyah, 2012: 83). Purnama (2001: 41-57) wrote about the position of women in various customs in Indonesia, including women in Belis, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) who were victimized by the local customs of marriage involving a dowry system resembling business transactions. Similarly, for Batak tribes, females are not deemed as valuable as males because males carry the family name; consequently, many families prefer having male rather than female children. Furthermore, female Batakneses often do not have control over their own body such as during the Negget ceremony performed by the female's husband's family which aims to increase the chance of pregnancy and having male children. Meanwhile, Sasak tribe in Lombok Island considers women as immature if they are unable to weave or make clothes. Moreover, although female members of the tribe assume great obligations and responsibilities, similar to the Batak tribe, families prefer sons to daughters. Purnama also analysed the case of Java's *Mbok Jamu* (female herbal drink seller) who must carry a basket of bottles of herbal drinks wrapped in cloth that they sling around their shoulder while wearing kebaya, Javanese traditional attire, whose design restricts their movement.

There are many more customary regulations that are disadvantageous for women. Candraningrum (2015: 4-5) wrote that "forced marriage, virginity test, female circumcision, and so on, are still practiced in cities that claimed to have been modernized. Another expert, Situmorang (2015: 116), explains that customs and religions are not the only institutions that marginalize women, as the state also often discriminate them. Thus, women are regarded as a symbol of sanctity, the mother of life, who need to be protected as they are deemed weak, and as a consequence, such belief pushes women deeper into the domestic domain. Situmorang gave examples of some local government policies that were unfavorable for women, including the implementation of Sharia in Aceh back in 1999.

Those cases of discrimination against women make them more subjugated under male domination, and they tend to believe that such subjugation is natural and predetermined. Vida (2012: 49) explains that gender biases underlying the social construction has often made women unaware of their potentials or how they should develop these potentials. Most women in the regions think that they do what they do as a token of dedication and devotion to their family.

Even the matrilineal system enforced in Minangkabau that gives women a special position in the community "can no longer serve as a protection and empowerment tool for millions of women and children of Minangkabau. Therefore,

the task of *Bundo Kanduang* in the decision-making system is weakening and turning into mere decoration in Minangkabau customary system." (Fakih in Verayanti et al, 2003: viii)

In addition to *Bundo Kanduang*, there are still many tribes who adopt matrilineal culture, such as the people in Semende with their *Tunggu Tubang* custom. If *Bundo Kanduang* emphasizes the role of women in decision-making process, *Tunggu Tubang* is a custom in which women are the protectors of family inheritance and family integrity. In serving its role as a protector, women must keep the family inheritance and integrity away from conflicts. Nevertheless, despite the significant role which women assume, Semende women are still subjugated under patriarchy embedded within the local customs; although Semende's matrilineal customary law appears to glorify and support its female members to occupy important positions within the community, yet such support is merely symbolic. Though the matrilineal customary law makes women feel like they hold high positions, it is not tangibly reflected in their daily life.

The findings of Febriyanti's (2016) and Dova (et.al)'s (2016) research conclude that there are two factors which enable the survival of *Tunggu Tubang* tradition in the current modern era. First, the tradition is embedded in the customary law. Second, the tradition represents what its adherence want. Febriyanti further explains that the customs have been altered and adjusted accordingly to adapt to the present time. Consequently, some of *tunggu tubang*'s customs are no longer practiced as more and more women embark on professional careers and leave the *tunggu tubang*'s traditional customs. Regardless, traditional leaders still emphasize the need to preserve cultural values (Dova, et.al, 2016). Another study on *Tunggu Tubang* conducted by Hutapea and Thamrin (2009) suggests that male power, in this case is *Meraje*, or the uncle of the *tunggu tubang*, will remain a dominant and appreciated figure; thus, *Meraje* somehow has the authority to impose certain limitations on the *tunggu tubang*. The *Merajes*'s orders, when they are perceived as helpful in improving the *tunggu tubang*'s performance, must be obeyed. Hence, although Semende's *Tunggu Tubang* tradition accords women with due respect, the role of men is still very important because of the *Meraje*'s superiority over the *tunggu tubang*.

Despite the importance of preserving the tradition of *tunggu tubang*, the shortcomings of the tradition, as explained by the abovementioned research, illustrate how women are at a disadvantage; the women who still properly carry out their duties as *tunggu tubang*, despite the problems that it brings, do not have the ability to influence or alter the customs imposed on them. Conceptually, the customs can remain because they are habits that are successfully constructed, institutionalized, socialized, manifested, and re-

alized in the concept of *tunggu tubang*.

From the perspective of communication science, the research question related on the position and role of women as a *Tunggu Tubang* is how they have been socially constructed, particularly how the objective and subjective reality of *Tunggu Tubang* is constructed. This research aims to contribute to the science of communication, especially in the field of gender and cultural construction, as well as to voice the interests of women. Some studies of women's roles in cultural inheritance have been done by Alfrahmi (2015), who examined the construction of women politicians in Minangkabau society, and Arifin (2015), who reviewed the marginalization of women in serving their duty as *Tunggu Tubang* by using an anthropological perspective and emphasizing the matrilineal concept in Minangkabau.

Apart from the importance of preserving the culture of *tunggu tubang*, the results of the above research show that those who have position as *Tunggu Tubang* do not have the ability to intervene in the rules imposed on them. Conceptually, the system continues to be carried out because it is a habit that is constructed, institutionalized and socialized until it manifests in adat, and is internalized in the self-concept of *tunggu tubang*. Meanwhile, the study of social construction from the perspective of communication and the study of local culture from the perspective of anthropology and cultural communication (Sarwono, 2013) do not sufficiently cover the role and position of women in the context of local culture. In the communication perspective, the research question is how do women culturally constructed cultural actors have the opportunity to voice their struggles in carrying out the roles entrusted to them? In particular, how does the construction of objective and subjective reality of *Tunggu Tubang* women?

The significance of this study is as follows. Some previous studies related to the position and role of women in matrilineal societies are studied in political, sociological, and cultural perspectives. Moreover, some other previous studies using the construction of social reality concept in communication perspective paid little attention to the role and position of women in local culture. So far, in this country, the existing studies in the field of communication & gender emphasize on the representation of women in the media. With the empathy developed by the author, it is expected that the results of this study can encourage the emergence of feminist communication studies, especially on expressing the local women interests. While the social significance of this study is to evocative women's awareness in matrilineal society to have more bargaining position, and in developing the tasks entrusted to them.

## Literature Review

To answer the abovementioned research question, the researchers primarily use the construction of social reality theory of Berger and Luck-

mann (Berger & Luckmann, 1990: 40-41) and use several other concepts, namely gender bias (Lengerman & Brantley 2003:417; Richmond-Abbott 1992:4-6), and values matrilineal society.

## The Construction of Social Reality Theory

Littlejohn (2011) explains that social construction theory of reality belongs to a sociocultural tradition that does not emphasize the structure or form of oversight of the individual, but rather focus on the shared meanings and interpretations constructed in society and examines their impact on the constructions of organizational life (e.g., regulations, norms). According to Littlejohn, social construction is the result of a symbolic interaction between members in a community group. Thus, it can be concluded that the theory of social construction intersects with the science of communication in terms of achieving mutual understanding, understanding, and meaning in the communication process.

Berger and Luckmann (1990) further explained that there is a continuous process between people and the society. People constantly gather information beyond their consciousness. They interact with each other within particular social and cultural environments, and at the same time, they collect new information which is adjusted accordingly to their prior knowledge. Based on this process, people's behavior will be based on either: (a) their interpretations of the newly gathered information, (b) the mixed between the newly gathered information and their prior knowledge, or (c) solely their prior knowledge as they rejected the newly collected information. This is how the process of social construction of the reality repeatedly occurs.

In an attempt to understand the theory of the social construction of reality, one should understand the concept of reality and knowledge first. Reality refers to something implicit in social interaction that is derived from human thoughts and actions and socially expressed in everyday life. The construction of reality does not only occur isolatedly within a person's mind, but is also exchanged and kept in the mind through intersubjective experience by exchanging meanings during one's interaction with others. The construction will be preserved and passed on to the next generation so that it prevails in human existence. According to Berger and Luckmann (1990: 29-32), the basis of knowledge in everyday life is the process of objectivation, which refers to social interactions between individuals where the intersubjective world takes shape. Such knowledge is shared by every people who perform regular, normal activities in their daily lives.

According to Berger & Luckmann (Bungin, 2011: 24), the process of the social construction takes place in a dialectical social interaction between three forms of reality, namely subjective reality, objective reality, and symbolic reality. Objective reality is social phenomena found in everyday life and often presented to individuals



as facts. Symbolic reality, on the other hand, is the objective reality in symbolic forms such as art, fiction, and media contents. Whereas, subjective reality is the social reality formed derived from both objective reality and symbolic reality and formed in the individual's mind.

The essential elements of Berger and Luckmann's theory are the concepts of internalization, externalization, and objectivation. Parera (1990: xiv) explains that the life world implies that the world is small, complex, and complete where humans interact with their environment and its values through both physical and social interactions. According to Berger and Luckmann, the societal symptoms of a society should be analyzed, and it is the duty of the experts to discover the essence of the society, which can be seen from the behavior of its members.

McQuail's study (2002: 55) further clarifies Berger and Luckmann's thinking, which is not very easy to understand. Based on McQuail's understanding, Berger and Luckmann believe that a person will feel that the world in which they live is real and beyond the limit of his perceptions and beliefs, and the world will remain that way even when the person no longer lives. But they also understand that at the same time, people have different perceptions of the reality. According to him, such difference is not solely caused by the different ways people experience their reality, but also because their perception has an impact on their behavior toward others. In social interaction, the person will produce and reproduce their beliefs until they become their reality. Thus, reality does not merely exist, but it is constructed by the society and the people. The most important thing in this process is conversation or talk.

Berger and Luckmann's theory is also further explained by Eriyanto (2002: 16-17) who clarifies the theoretical elements mentioned above. According to him, the main thesis of the theory is that "people and society are continuously dynamic, pluralistic, dialectical products". Society is nothing but a human product, but it continuously bounces back on its producer. Conversely, human beings are the result or product of the society.

The dialectical process has three stages: externalization, internalization and objectivation.

Externalization is the stage when an individual enters the world physically and mentally. At this stage, the person attempts to balance the world's expectations for them and his own personal will. In the balancing process, the person tries to adjust themselves according to the socio-cultural environment in which they live. Meanwhile, objectivation is the continuation of subjectivation when what has been produced by someone is over time also produced by others until it eventually becomes the adopted value or culture which is used as a means to organize human life objectively. Thus, what first emerges as subjectivity undergoes the process of institutionalization until it becomes an objective reality.

This illustrates how repeated process in society can re-affirm the habits of an individual. Thus, the construction of reality is strongly influenced by society and its various situations and conditions, whose existences are independent of the members of the society but later will be instilled in the members's life.

### *Gender in Patriarchal Society*

The second concept will be employed in this study is gender bias. Before going further, it is better to discuss feminist concepts and gender. Muthali'in (2001: 22) explains that basically gender is a grammatical identity or classification which functions to classify an object in its groups. This classification is broadly related to two sexes, each of which is often formulated in the feminine and masculine categories. The sexes are described as human biological characteristics obtained from birth so that they are biologically divided into male and female sexes, with different physical characteristics. This biological characteristic will be attached forever and cannot be exchanged.

Muthali'in explained that the term gender is used to mark the differences in everything that is found in society with sexual differences. The differences referred to include language, behavior, thoughts, food, time space, property, taboo, technology, mass media, fashion, education, profession, production tools and household appliances. At first, the differences mentioned above are natural or natural, then through social construction or nurture (Megawangi in Kumurur, 2010: 50). The proponent of the nature argument believes that the differences between men and women are natural and should be accepted. This group believes that due to the biological differences between men and women, the roles and tasks of women and men in the society should be different. In contrast, the proponent of the nurture argument believes that the differences between men and women are purely the result of socio-cultural environment, which consequently causes the division of roles and duties of women and men. According to this group, particular roles and duties can be assigned to men and women interchangeably, but there are also roles and duties, such as giving birth or breastfeeding, that must be strictly assigned to men or women. As a result of the stringent view on gender roles, the position of women in most situations is not only different to that of men, but also often less fortunate or lower. Such situations can prevail in a patriarchal society, in which women are still regarded as objects and subordinates. In the case of Indonesia, where gender-biased culture is deep rooted and has long been institutionalized, it will be difficult to make changes in the community unless these changes are integrated with the public interest (Sarwono, 2013).

### Women Position in Islam

Another concept used in this research is the different views regarding women's leadership caused by different interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith, which were mostly made by men. Sri Suhandjati Sukri (cited in Alfrahmi, 2015) explains that the injustice women experience in the name of religion or political economy is related to interpretations of Quran and hadith which unwittingly incorporated patriarchal values deeply rooted in the community. According to her the interpretations of hadith and fiqh tend to marginalize women due to the Quranic verse on Eve and Adam. The interpretation of this verse often claim that Eve, representing females, were made from Adam's, representing males, rib. This kind of interpretations belittles the role of females in the society as it believes that females are made possible by males. Meanwhile, Sri claims that the Quran never explicitly mentioned that Eve was created from Adam's rib, but rather "from him God created his wife". Therefore, according to Sri, the ambiguous nature of the verse should require the interpreters to include the experience of women as well in analyzing the verse; the interpretations should not revolve exclusively around males or females, but rather males *and* females.

### Matrilineal Society

The last concept used in this research is matrilineality. The difference between matrilineality and patrilineality can be seen from the following characteristics: (1) In regard to lineage, a matrilineal system requires a child's lineage to be descended from their maternal lines, while a patrilineal system requires a child's lineage to be descended from their paternal lines. In many communities, this pattern of bloodline succession is usually arranged within a tribe or clan. (2) In regard to family heritage, in a matrilineal system, family inheritance is passed down to daughters. In a patrilineal system, on the other hand, family inheritance is passed down to sons. (3) In regard to roles in marriage, a matrilineal system believes that following marriage, a husband is expected to move to his wife's home (matrilocal), although in most cases the husband is still allowed to retain his membership in his original clan/tribe/community. Meanwhile, marriage in a patrilineal system expects the wife to move to her husband's home and join his clan/tribe/community. (4) In regard to power relation and access to resources, in a matrilineal system, power is concentrated in the hands of the female members. In contrast, in a patrilineal system, power and control over access to resources are in the hands of the male members.

After studying various concepts and previous research, the thesis of this research is that the construction of objective reality occurring within the Semende community is gender-biased in nature because of the local culture and religion which do not provide any opportunities for fe-

male *Tunggu Tubang* to amend the culture or, in terms of communication, cannot express their opinions on their role as *tunggu tubang*. Meanwhile, the construction of subjective reality takes part on daily basis during various occurrences and struggles which continuously produce and reproduce values that are often unfavorable for women. This is illustrated by female *tunggu tubang*'s belief that their roles in the society is predestined rather than socially constructed. All of this created a dilemma for female *Tunggu Tubang* as although their role in the society is depicted as respectable and honorable, in reality they are relatively powerless in their daily life.

### Theoretical Assumption

From various concepts and previous studies, the thesis of this research is as follows: the construction of objective reality occurs in the Semende society is gender bias because the local cultural background, and religion that does not provide opportunities for *Tunggu Tubang* women to intervene its culture or, by voicing their interests. Meanwhile, the construction of subjective reality occurs in various things and struggles experienced in everyday life in the production and reproduction of values that do not take on women side. In the sense that *Tunggu Tubang* women tend to interpret their position as destiny, and it is not an option because not everyone can get that position if they are not born as the first daughter. The dilemma she experienced was having a position but not having the power to voice her interests in decision making.

### Research Methodology

This research employs the paradigm of Heiner's critical constructivism using qualitative approaches (as cited in Creswell, 1998: 15, Neuman, 2006: 91), namely inductive and idiographic approaches. The Critical Constructivism paradigm focuses on the meaning of a social problem constructed. At first glance this paradigm has in common with the constructivism paradigm which focuses on how a problem is constructed in the reality of life, the difference lies in the emphasis of this paradigm on the role of elite or dominant groups that construct problems in their interests (Heiner, 2006: 9-11). This paradigm does not see the construction of social problems in life as something that occurs naturally, but non-dominant people have always been the object of the emphasis of the dominant and powerful. In this research, the dominant group could be the men who have power such as *Meraje* who shape people's mindsets about how to construct reality through everyday norms and values.

In accordance with the problems and paradigms chosen in this study, the research approach used is qualitative because researchers want to fully understand the backgrounds and daily lives of their informants, and allow researchers to be closer to their objects. The research subjects

were selected using convenience sampling (Patton, 2002: 230). Considering the resource persons are those who have a position in the community and have many tasks, the researcher chooses the sampling who are willing to give their time to be interviewed several times in a natural interview situation. It was not difficult for researcher to get informants with considerable knowledge of the research's topic as in 2015, one of the researchers had lived in the village Semende for one year. During that time, a researcher observed several female *Tunggu Tubang* when performing their roles. Based on this observation, the researchers looked categorized female *Tunggu Tubang* into three types, namely those who are not originally from Semende and have migrated to one of its villages at some point in their lives, those who transferred their *Tunggu Tubang* status to their brother, and those who were born, raised, and live in Semende throughout their lives. The researchers also found that differences in the social status of *Tunggu Tubang* have led to different interpretations of their role, duties, and responsibilities as *tunggu tubang*.

Following the observation, the researchers concluded that the informants for this study should be those who have four particular criteria. First, they must be born, raised, and still living in the same village in Semende. Second, they must be still actively performing their duties as *tunggu tubang*. These two criteria are deemed necessary so that the informants can explain how they accept, produce, and reproduce the values and the roles of *Tunggu Tubang*. Third, the informants must have children. This criterion is crucial for researchers to understand the process of construction and reconstruction of values, particularly the roles of females, in family. Lastly, informants must come from different socioeconomic backgrounds. This is to help researchers understand the correlation between the *tunggu tubang's* background and the roles and tasks they assume. After shortlisting the informants, there are two key informants, one of whom was a housewife, who were willing to do an in-depth interview.

Data collection was conducted in 2 weeks in April, 2018, through in-depth interviews. In general, questions were related to the positions, duties, roles, struggles, and the advantages of being *Tunggu Tubang* in a family and the community, the form of communication used in producing and reproducing values, the process of introducing and instilling values to children, especially those who will assume the role of *tunggu tubang*, and the relationship between *Tunggu Tubang* and *Meraje*.

This research employs the method of data coding proposed by Strauss (Neumann, 2014: 481), in which the process of qualitative data coding is divided in three stages, namely open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Additionally, researchers analyse data inductively by creating

categories or themes in conducting conceptual analysis. The analysis includes detailed information about members of Semende community with close ties with *Tunggu Tubang* (e.g., the community leaders or *Meraje*) and places or events in which *Tunggu Tubang* tradition often takes place.

Data analysis was conducted according to Creswell's study (2014: 197-200). The validity of data was tested through triangulation (Gibbs cited in Creswell, 2014: 201). Here, the researchers conducted an interview with the community leader, a retired teacher who was appointed as the head of Semende Darat Ulu Customary Council. During the interview, the researchers inquired about the values of *Tunggu Tubang* tradition and compared the community leader's answers with the answers of *Tunggu Tubang* informants.

The limitation of this study lies in the fact that the location of the research is relatively difficult to reach, impeding researchers from conducting optimal interviews during field research. In addition, the limited time available for field research also made it difficult for the researchers to conduct detailed observation that could have been done to complement the findings from interviews.

## The Result

### About Semende Community and *Tunggu tubang*

Semende (Semendo) ethnics are spread across Bengkulu, Lampung, South Sumatera, particularly in Muara Enim District (Semende Darat) and in Ogan Komering Ulu Regency (Semende Lembak). Arifin (2015: 23-26) explains that every Semende man, in principle, is the *Meraje* in his mother's family, with their level of seniority determines how much the roles of *Meraje* they will serve. The most senior male members of Semende are called *lebu Meraje*, followed by *payung meraje*, *jenang meraje*, and finally the *Merajes*. Male *Merajes* must govern, regulate, control, or even prosecute female *Tunggu Tubang* and all her relatives when they make mistakes.

Symbolically, the term *Tunggu Tubang* refers to the eldest (married) daughter in a family who is in charge of maintaining the family's inheritance, including houses and farmland, which later on will be passed on the the *tunggu tubang's* daughter. Consequently, *Tunggu Tubang* is entrusted with full power by family members to control and utilize her family's assets, particularly the family's house which serves as a gathering place for certain activities such as weddings, funerals, or other customary events. The family's house also provides shelter for relatives who move to Semende, to whom *Tunggu Tubang* must offer hospitality as well.

The fact that the role of *Tunggu Tubang* can only be performed by a family's daughter who is the oldest and married indicates how maturity is an important trait that *Tunggu Tubang* must possess. This might be due to the duties of *Tunggu Tubang* to protect all of her family members



and assume the roles of parents in bringing up or supporting their family members and relatives.

Semenda's culture considers women as weak and unable to earn income; hence, although *Tunggu Tubang* will eventually inherit her family assets, she will remain dependent on her husband to generate income. Therefore, the role of *Tunggu Tubang* is not only revolved around women, but also indirectly around males, namely the *tunggu tubang's* husband. In other words, *Tunggu Tubang* is a symbol of unity between women, who inherits the property of their parents, and their husband. As a result, any decisions related to the utilization of the *tunggu tubang's* assets are in the hands of both the wife and the husband. Therefore, according to the customary law, the husband of *Tunggu Tubang* also has the same authority and right to make use the *tunggu tubang's* assets, including the crops from the farms that are inherited to the couple. Even if the inheritance comes from the *tunggu tubang's* family, the siblings of the *Tunggu Tubang* have less rights over the property compared to the rights of the husband of the *tunggu tubang*. Thus, the *tunggu tubang's* husband has major role in the family, either as the head of the family or as the decision maker related to the management and utilization of the *tunggu tubang's* assets.

For the Semende community, the tradition of *Tunggu Tubang* also means that women are appreciated in the community. This recognition is not only shown in the form of granting their position as the owner and manager of their parents' assets, but also in the community's marriage system.

#### Informants' Background

The brief background of the two informants can be seen in the following table:

The table above illustrates the differences between informant with the initial SN and informant with the initial TS. Informant SN works as an elementary school teacher and has a bachelor's degree; therefore, she can be considered a middle class. Furthermore, her husband is self-employed and has his own business, a mobile phone shop. Informant SN got her middle-class economic status from her parents; SN's mother is the middle child, which means she is not a *tunggu tubang*. After they got married, SN's parents moved out of Semende in order to find a better job so that they could buy a house and some rice fields to pass down to their children later, which would not have been possible if SN's mother had been a *tunggu tubang*. Furthermore, SN is also able to make a better living as her parents' adherence to the tradition of *Tunggu Tubang* is not rigid; under the customary rules, *Tunggu Tubang* has to support her siblings when they are not yet independent, yet since SN's parents still work, they support SN's siblings who are still in high school without obliging SN to do so. Similar with her parents, SN also does not implement the tradition of *Tunggu Tubang* stringently in her household. SN, for instance, does not differentiate the roles and duties of her sons and daughters; both her sons and daughters are expected to be good at cooking, taking care of the house, and doing other domestic works. This is to prepare them live their own life one day. When the time comes, SN hopes that at least her children know how cook their own meals. The case of SN illustrates that the role of *Tunggu Tubang* is not rigid.

In contrast, the second informant, TS, with her poor education and without permanent occupation, in terms of economy belongs to the lower class. However, in the community, TS' family is very well-respected as it is one of the oldest fam-

Table 1. Informants' Background

		SN	TS
1.	Age	53 years old	32
2.	Education	Bachelor's Degree	Junior High School Graduate
3.	Occupation	Elementary school teacher	Housewife
4.	Husband's occupation	Entrepreneur, managing his own mobile phone shop with their son-in-law	Agricultural worker, working in coffee plantation, cutting wood in the forest, plowing the rice fields of others, and also doing construction work
5.	Social Status of Economy Family	Economically belongs to middle class	Economically belongs to lower class, yet socially belongs to prominent class
6.	Gender Equality Education for kids at home	Both girls and boys are enrolled to school and expected to help with the house chores.	Girls are expected to help with house chores. If the girls are smart, she may be enrolled to school and continue her study.

Table 2. Roles and Positions of *Tunggu Tubang*

	SN	TS
1.The meaning of <i>Tunggu Tubang</i> according to the informants	a. To assume the role of guarding the family's assets, which are often in the form of rice field and house.	a. To carry out the task of <i>Tunggu Tubang</i> not just by guarding her family's assets, but also by preserving their value it as inheritance from her ancestors.
	b. To inherit assets that can be used to support their family	b. To perform and perceive her duty as <i>Tunggu Tubang</i> as an honor, particularly in safeguarding her house as a place where family gatherings take place
	c. To feel embarrassed if they cannot give larger donation than that from who are not <i>Tunggu Tubang</i>	c. To feel wary that if she cannot give larger donation than those who are not <i>tunggu tubang</i> , no one will assist her if she holds an event.
	d. Her duties as <i>Tunggu Tubang</i> cannot be optimally performed due to her work as a civil servant teacher.	d. To believe that all <i>tunggu tubang</i> 's duties need to be fully performed so she will not be perceived as negligent and non-performer
2.Subordinate position: Relationship with <i>Meraje</i>	a. <i>Meraje</i> has a veto power and must be obliged.	a. Not to make any decisions without a prior consultation with <i>Meraje</i>
	b. Giving high respect to <i>Meraje</i> is equal with acquiring her family high reputation	b. Respecting <i>Meraje</i> for their own group <i>Meraje</i>
3. The meaning of dowry ( <i>Perbie</i> )	For practical reasons, <i>perbie</i> can be replaced by money amounting from Rp 20 million to Rp 25 million as stipulated by an agreement reached between the family of the bride and the groom.	<i>Perbie</i> is given in the form of a buffalo and cannot be substituted by money.

ilies in the village. TS' house has been lived in by seven generations of *tunggu tubang*, including her, while there have been nine generations of *Tunggu Tubang* in her husband's family.

In regard to house chores, TS is assisted by her eldest daughter, who after returning home from school is expected to cook, wash the dishes, and take care of her youngest sibling. Although her eldest daughter is very good at doing chores, her intelligence (she has won a number of academic competitions at the district and sub-district level) causes TS to continue sending her eldest daughter to school until she receives higher education. Table 2 below is a summary of the researchers' interviews with the two informants related to their position and their role as *tunggu tubang*.

### The Meaning of *Tunggu Tubang*

The meanings of *Tunggu Tubang* for informants can be translated based on several factors. For instance, according to SN, performing the duties of *Tunggu Tubang* is meant to guard family's assets, which in the case of SN are rice field and house. Meanwhile, according to TS, *Tunggu*

*tubang* carries out her task not just by guarding the heritage, but by valuing it as the treasures passed on by the ancestors. SN's and TS' different understandings of *Tunggu Tubang* might be caused by their different occupations; SN is a career woman while TS is a housewife.

Second, in understanding the status of *tunggu tubang*, SN and TS use different standpoints; SN employs the economic perspective, while TS employs the non-economic perspective. According to SN, by being a *tunggu tubang*, she did not have to start saving from scratch to build a house with her husband since she could collect the money from her family's assets and used it as capital to start trading. On the contrary, TS, who perceives the status of *Tunggu Tubang* from the noneconomic perspective, stated that she felt honored and respected if she could perform her duties as *tunggu tubang*, particularly in providing hospitality for her relatives when they come to visit her. Moreover, a sense of togetherness that it creates is also another positive factor of *tunggu tubang*, according to TS. As family gatherings often only occur when there is a customary



ceremony, TS' house is oftentimes quiet because it is only occupied by her parents and her sibling, while she, her husband and their children live in a hut nearby their rice field. However, whenever her family celebrate events related to *Tunggu Tubang* tradition, TS' family will gather at her house and prepare meals together, creating a sense of togetherness and bond to which TS always looks forward.

Both informants feel that they enjoy the privileges, yet they also have to face struggles caused by their status as *tunggu tubang*. During customary celebrations, for instance, SN always tries to give more expensive gifts or donation because she will feel embarrassed if her relatives, who are not *Tunggu Tubang* like her, can give more expensive gifts. Hence, even at times when she is short of money, SN will do any necessary means, including borrowing money, to pay large donations, which she perceives as an obligation. This makes her feel financially burdened, particularly after rice harvests which are often followed by weddings or other customary celebrations in the following week. SN says that,

*"It is naturally expected that we (tunggu tubang) should give more. If others can attend the celebration and bring one whole chicken, we are expected to bring two chickens because we are tunggu tubang. Besides the chicken, we may have to bring other gifts too. If the groom is our family, we have to help prepare the gifts for the bride. The problem occurs when we are short of money. Sometimes, we even have to borrow (and) make a loan because it's shameful (if we can't offer gifts). But since we feel that it is our obligation, we will do our best and try the hardest (to offer gifts). It is okay if we have to borrow (even though) as a civil servant, the salary is barely enough."*

TS is also engaged in a similar struggle. According to her, part of the duties of *Tunggu Tubang* is to provide more food. When there is a customary celebration, for instance, and people cook together, TS feels like she cannot only bring one, but two chickens. She also has to bring roosters, which is more expensive than hens. If TS does not do this, she feels that in the future when it is her turn to host a customary celebration, people will not be willing to help her cook and make other preparations. According to TS,

*"There are many celebrations here, so we have to spend lots of money. If the celebration is held by a relative, I have to provide chicken and vegetables. If others come bringing one chicken, as a tunggu tubang, I have to bring two. In addition, I also have to bring vegetable and rice. If I do not do this, people will think I am not willing to contribute and in the future, we (TS and her relatives) will not be assisted when hosting a celebration."<sup>1</sup>*

The hardship to earn a good reputation was felt more by SN. Customary celebrations, particularly weddings, can last up to seven days. However, as a civil servant teacher, she cannot leave her work to attend customary ceremonies, yet, as a *tunggu tubang*, SN certainly has to spare her time to attend the seven-day-long wedding ceremonies, a difficult feat considering her work duties. Often time, SN has to ask for the *Meraje*'s permission for her to only attend a portion of the ceremony. SN explains that,

*"It is quite difficult to arrange the time. As a civil servant, even if the celebration is hosted by the Meraje himself, I often cannot get a permission (for a day off to attend the celebration). In that case, I will face the Meraje (prior to the event) and ask, 'Mang, or Uwa, what if I cannot be present here throughout the celebration? The maximum (day off) I can get from the school is only three days.'"*

Informant TS, however, has a different view. TS, as she is not professionally employed, believes that her main responsibility as a *Tunggu Tubang* is to attend celebrations held by close relatives. TS feels that if she does not attend the celebrations held by her neighbors or close relatives, she fails to carry out her duties as *tunggu tubang*. Moreover there are social sanctions, such as public scrutiny, if *Tunggu Tubang* refuses or fails to attend customary events.

Furthermore, for TS, as a *Tunggu Tubang* means she has accepted that as the eldest daughter in her family means that she has to manage her family inheritance, so she will never question the obligations and other burdens that must be borne by her. Since she believes that she is destined to be a *tunggu tubang*, she is confident that she will be able to carry out all of the obligations. In regard to the obligations of *tunggu tubang*, according to TS,

*"If you keep saying they are difficult, you will eventually believe that they are difficult and they will become difficult. But this is her (tunggu tubang) destiny. If it is destiny, she will be able to do it. Look at middle children who are not tunggu tubang. They probably will not be able to meet such obligations as being Tunggu Tubang is not their destiny. Yet, if it is destiny, the person will surely be able to do it. They will not see the obligations as difficult. The only problem is money, which is quite scarce in my family."*

*Tunggu tubang's* challenges are not limited to financial challenges as they also have to support dependent or lone relatives. Hence, their responsibilities are not only those towards their parents.

#### As explained by SN,

*"The primary responsibility (of tunggu tubang) is towards the elderly, not limited only toward your parents. This may include (the tunggu tubang's) grandmother, great-grandfather, or the siblings of (the tunggu tubang's) parents. This may also*

<sup>1</sup> The original answers were in local language, and the researchers translated it into Indonesian first before translated into English.

*include relatives who have disabilities, who are blind, or handicapped Those people are under the responsibility of Tunggu Tubang until they die. Furthermore, for elderly relatives who do not have children, they are entitled to stay in tunggu tubang's house. Certainly, it goes without saying that Tunggu Tubang also has to take care of her parents. Although (the tunggu tubang) may have many siblings, (the tunggu tubang) cannot give the responsibility of taking care of her parents to one of her siblings. It is (the tunggu tubang) who has to take care of them."*

### The View on Tunggu Tubang's Subordinate Position

For both informants, the high position of the *Meraje* is not only due to the very special place especially reserved for them in the community, but also their considerable power in decision making. According to TS, a *Tunggu Tubang* does not have the authority to make decisions because according to the customary system, only men in her mother's lineage have the authority to express their ideas. The women, on the other hand, have to be in the kitchen and serve the *Meraje*.

According to the customary law, the opinions of *Meraje* will be first heard, followed by other family members' opinions. The researchers' observation on the community's discussion and deliberations finds that the *Meraje* has the authority to conclude the discussion and make follow-up decisions which have to be obeyed and implemented by all family members.

Furthermore, the *tunggu tubang's* subordinate position also affects their husband. Despite the husband's status as a male, he still has to obey the *Meraje*. TS explained that in Semende tribe, the statuses of men are divided into two, namely the leader of their household or *Meraje*, that is the leader of the *jurai* (extended family). According to TS,

*"Here, according to our customs, men are the head of the household while Meraje are the head of jurai. This is why everything relating to household becomes the responsibility of the men, while those which concern the jurai become the responsibility of the Meraje."*

Additionally, TS always obeys the *Meraje's* orders related to family inheritance and her family in general as well. Even if TS has devised her own plans with her husband, but how they implement the plans is subject to the *Meraje's* approval. TS even admitted that until the time of the interview, she had always tried to consult the *Meraje* before making any decisions. Such obedience is reportedly encouraged by TS' mother, who always reminds TS to ask permission from the *Meraje*. Regardless, there were times when TS forgot to ask for the *Meraje's*, such as when she planned to improve her rice crops by buying seeds with a better quality compared to the previous year's. Moreover, besides

having the power to influence all decisions of *tunggu tubang*, TJ states that *Meraje's* position in the community also grants them the power to manage customary events.

For TS, to follow *Meraje's* command is to do good things for the *Meraje*. Such conception is due to the fact that the produce and the money she earned from his husband's work are often used to accommodate the *Meraje* when they come to her house and to financially assist the *Meraje* if they hold celebrations. Following this, TS, thus, believes that by obeying *Meraje* is some sort of an investment for the future when she has to accommodate the *Meraje* again.

SN believes that her inferior position compared to the *Meraje's* is caused by not only the customary rules, but also the act of labeling. What SN means by the act of labeling is that she feels if she performs her *tunggu tubang's* duties well, the *Meraje's* image will also be good in the eyes of the community's and family's members. On the contrary, if SN does not perform well, not only she will be labeled as a bad *tunggu tubang*, the *Meraje* will also receive the same label as he is deemed incompetent in directing and managing the *tunggu tubang*. To maintain the good reputation of the *Meraje* is, thus, what motivates SN to continue performing her *tunggu tubang's* role.

According to SN,

*"Meraje is the one monitoring anak belai (another term for tunggu tubang). A person like me is considered as anak belai in front of the Meraje. They should keep an eye on me. I am their responsibility as well because I am the one who takes care of the house and the rice field. If I am not properly behaved or if I fail in carrying out my duties, the Meraje will get a bad reputation in front of the family and the customary leaders. People will think he (the Meraje) is not capable of providing guidance for the tunggu tubang. So he is the one who has to oversee everything. He has to welcome guests and be the spokesperson during public event, such as when distributing alms or conducting the ritual of visiting cemetery, or during customary celebrations. It is very difficult to be one of the Meraje members."*

SN explains that her subordinate position in the community obliges her to maintain a good image and control her emotions. In order to do so, she should not prioritize her self-interests and let others act on behalf of her. For instance, SN claims that she often refrains from having arguments. At times when SN makes a mistake, she even has to admit her fault before her extended family and ask them to make pass judgements on her mistake. Furthermore, when SN is proven correct, she should not feel overconfident about her success as her success, to certain extent, comes from the *Meraje* who guides her.

As a *tunggu tubang*, SN states that she should have the grace to let herself be judged and in front

of her extended family. SN says that,

*"Indeed, we, the tunggu tubang, have to be submissive. We must! Although, for example, we are right, we cannot shout out loud that we are right. We always have to consider the possibility that we may be wrong and let the time reveal if we are right. Let our relatives judge our conduct. Let the others decide. If we are good, we cannot be the one who says it, but let the others decide. If we have done our duty properly, we do not need to claim, "I have done it!" Rather, let the Merajes, the muanai, and the other jenang-jenang say it."*

When a man in Semende marries a *tunggu tubang*, the groom must offer a *perbie* (dowry) in the form of cash or a buffalo for the bride's family to symbolize his desire to manage the bride's family's assets, especially the rice fields because managing the fields require a lot of energy, and men are assumed to be stronger than women. This is where the matrilineal dichotomy occurs; although the assets rightfully belongs to the wife's maternal bloodline, the husband still can manage them.

In her household, SN always makes a decision together with her husband. For SN, following their marriage, her husband also takes the responsibility to support her doing her duties as *tunggu tubang*. Consequently, her husband also has the right to manage her assets, namely rice fields and a house. This is why SN always involves her husband when making important decisions, such as when to renovate the house, how to recruit people to manage their fields, and all other decisions related to financial management. SN believes that if the matters are within the jurisdiction of Semende's customs, the person with the highest authority to make decisions will be a male, often-times the *Meraje*, while women are only supposed to listen and prepare dishes in the kitchen.

Similar with SN, TS also always follows her husband's advice. During the interview, TS, from the beginning, admitted that she had absolutely no power to make decisions in her household; all decisions are made by TS's husband, including decisions concerning TS' assets which she inherited due to her status as a *tunggu tubang*. Furthermore, TS' husband is widely respected in the community as he comes from a very old family in Semende village. Especially, TS' in-laws live in a house in which nine generations of *Tunggu Tubang* have previously lived, a rare case which inspires more respect for the family.

### **Perbie: The Meaning of Dowry**

According to Semende's culture, when a man marries a *tunggu tubang*, he must pay a dowry, often coined as *perbie*, in the form of a buffalo. The *perbie* symbolizes the man's request for permission to enter the house of the *Tunggu Tubang* and to be allowed to participate in managing the inheritance entitled to the *Tunggu Tubang* he is about to

marry. In this age, money can substitute buffalo as *perbie*.

According to one informant, in giving *perbie*, money totaling at Rp 20 million to Rp 25 million can serve as an alternative for buffalo, depending on the agreement between the families. She said that at the present time, money is deemed more practical than a buffalo. However, another informant believed that *perbie* must still be given in the form of a buffalo because it symbolizes how the families of the groom and the bride can be united through marriage.

### **Discussion**

The following discussion attempts to answer the main questions in this research, namely how the tradition of *Tunggu Tubang* is constructed and which traditions are deemed as gender-biased and which can be preserved in the community.

There are several findings that will be discussed further, including how the informants understand their position as *Tunggu Tubang* and how their understanding demonstrates the construction of subjective objective and symbolic reality.

Data analysis shows that subjective reality is mainly constructed through objective reality, that is values are produced and reproduced in the family and in the society through the local culture. In their daily life, *Tunggu Tubang* feel that her status is: a) a destiny that has to be accepted due to her subordinate position in the community; b) a destiny which gives her the privilege to preserve her family's assets and the community's customary values, which consequently lead to; c) men or the *Meraje* has a higher position in the community compared to the *tunggu tubang's*.

The process of the production and reproduction of these three values cannot be separated from propagation conducted in the *tunggu tubang's* early childhood by her mother and the customary patrons (male) while they visit the *tunggu tubang's* house. For example, when the *tunggu tubang's* family holds a social gathering at her house, the guests, among which is the *Meraje*, not only judge the *tunggu tubang's* capability in performing her duties, but also her family's and extended family's aptitude in mentoring her. As part of a collectivist society culture (Harry Triandis in Griffin, 2011: 408), the *Tunggu Tubang* does not only need to 'keep her own face' by performing her responsibilities well during customary events, but she also has to 'keep the face' of her family and extended family, including the *Meraje*, as her guides.

The internalization of women's position in the domestic sphere is not only done through the daily tasks run by local cultural actors, but also from stories passed on from mothers and grandmothers about the history of the local culture. Stories of strong men whose job is to make a living while women, who is deemed physically weak, must stay in the house to manage the family's assets are often circulated, reinforcing the belief that women are figures who generally have an inclination for



raising their family. Therefore, it is understandable that the informants' have been instilled with a conception that their main obligation as *Tunggu Tubang* is to keep and maintain their house and assets, to offer hospitality and accommodation for visitors, to care for sick parents to demonstrate their dedication, as well as caring for dependent families members.

There is a difference in the externalization process of cultural actor who is motivated by education and cultural actor who is motivated by the environment where they live. The cultural actor living in a more advanced area, namely the Pulau Panggung Village in Semende Darat Laut Subdistrict, has higher education and works as a teacher. Such opportunities were available because in the place where she lives, there are numerous migrants, available logistics as well as transport infrastructure, branch offices of several banks, and trading activities. This differs greatly from the condition in Semende Darat Ulu, where the area is more remote and the community is also more traditional. Additionally, most of the people who live in Se-

mende Darat Ulu work as farmers.

The public infrastructures available in advanced regions, in this case the Pulau Panggung Village, enable its population to mobilize rapidly; consequently, people living in advanced regions are quicker to adopt modern values and shed the tradition of *Tunggu Tubang* as adopted in more remote regions. In the advanced regions, the tradition of *Tunggu Tubang* is sometimes no longer compatible with the increasingly modern and practical society.

Meanwhile, in remote regions, the community still believe that the tradition and its cultural values should be respected and preserved at all times. Adopting the role of *Tunggu Tubang* is perceived as an honor, rather than a nuisance as how the modern society perceives it.

To conclude, the conception that the role of *Tunggu Tubang* is predestined has been deeply embedded in the community, resulting in women seem believing that their priority is not to have a high position in the community but rathering to preserve their cultural identity as *tunggu tubang*.

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