

Salasika

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Redefining Shadow Puppets Performed by Solo Raya Female Puppeters on YouTube

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ABSTRACT

The research aims at exploring how female puppeteers from Solo Raya use YouTube to introduce shadow puppets to the wider world, focusing on their role as custodians of Javanese culture online. It underscores their pivotal role as custodians of Javanese culture in the digital realm, where female puppeteers meticulously safeguard and reinterpret shadow puppet traditions on YouTube, ensuring the enduring legacy of moral narratives, philosophical depth, and artistic intricacies for both local communities and international viewers. Using a feminist research design informed by post-feminist theory and citizen diplomacy, the findings are based on data from 14 female puppeteers, who served as key informants, collected via YouTube. Female puppeteers deliver traditional shadow puppet performances, challenging male-dominated narratives and empowering women in cultural transmission. This research continues to consider YouTube's role in enabling female puppeteers to speak back against earlier male-dominated narratives while also changing who performs. Results show that these women puppeteers, through the YouTube platform, cultivate widespread global appreciation for Javanese culture, advancing gender equity within traditional performing arts, and significantly enhancing Indonesia's national soft power.

KEYWORDS: *female puppeteers, shadow puppet, Javanese culture, YouTube*

INTRODUCTION

In a shadow puppet show, the puppeteer plays a very important role. The puppeteer is fully responsible for the course of the shadow puppet show, such as the storyline, the flow of dialogue, the dynamics and movement of puppet characters, the harmony of the music from gamelan, and the narrator (Supriyono et al., 2008; Suhardjono, 2016; Fernández et al., 2022; I Kadek et al., 2024; Trihapsari et al., 2025). As explained by Ismah (2017), a puppeteer must be able to create stories with educational value for the community, such as those on religion, ethics, habits, norms, and problems or issues that occur in today's society.

The puppeteer, or *dalang* in Indonesian, in a shadow puppet show holds a pivotal, multifaceted role central to the entire performance. The puppeteer is fully responsible for orchestrating the narrative flow of the shadow puppet play,

including managing the storyline, directing the dialogue, and controlling the intricate movements and dynamics of the various puppet characters (Ardhianto, 2019; Tisna et al., 2024; Chotimah, 2024). This role demands mastery over synchronizing the puppets' gestures and expressions with the accompanying gamelan to create an immersive and harmonious theatrical experience (Foley, 2005; Haryanto & Hendro, 2019; Renda & Wangi, 2025). The puppeteer also serves as the narrator, skillfully weaving stories rich in cultural and moral significance. As Supriyono et al. (2008) emphasize, the puppeteers' duties go beyond puppet manipulation—they set the rhythm, mood, and emotional tone that resonate deeply with the audience.

According to Ismah (2017), skilled puppeteers are more than performers; they are creative storytellers who must be able to craft narratives that convey educational and social values for the community. Shadow puppet stories typically incorporate teachings on religion, ethics, societal norms, and contemporary issues, such as morality, community behavior, and cultural heritage preservation (Setiawan, 2018; Pandin & Glorino, 2020). The puppeteer thus acts as a mediator between traditional cultural expressions and present-day social concerns, using shadow puppetry to reflect on, critique, and educate the audience about prevailing conditions and values.

Moreover, the puppeteer's artistry encompasses technical proficiency in controlling light and shadow to create convincing effects that bring the puppet figures to life—making them appear to walk, dance, fight, laugh, and express emotions—a skill that requires a deep understanding of the craft. Beyond performance, puppeteers often engage in the design and construction of the puppets themselves, selection or adaptation of scripts, and occasionally in community outreach or educational programs to share the cultural heritage embodied in the art.

The role of the puppeteer in a shadow puppet show is a blend of artistic creativity, cultural ambassadorship, narrative authority, and educational mission. The puppeteer upholds and renews centuries-old traditions while ensuring the stories remain relevant and meaningful to contemporary audiences, thereby preserving an important cultural legacy through their performances (Prasetya et al., 2024; Santoso, 2025). This combination of responsibilities underscores why the puppeteer is considered the heart and soul of shadow puppet theatre, integral not just to entertainment but to sustaining collective cultural identity and moral discourse in the community.

Traditionally, puppeteers are required to have the endurance to sit for 7-8 hours (overnight) for a single shadow puppet show based on a specific story (Ramonita et al., 2023). In their spare time, puppeteers are also cowhide cutters, preparing the material to make shadow puppets (Wang et al., 2022; Oruh et al., 2021; Ramonita et al., 2023). For this reason, a puppeteer must have stamina, energy, and endurance. Society's demand for physical strength makes the profession of puppeteer more suitable for men (Ismah, 2017; Jurkowski, 2018; Bell, 2018).

With digital technology, a shadow puppet show takes only about 2-3 hours. Changes in the rhythm of puppetry through digital technology provide great opportunities for female puppeteers. Based on the results of the researchers'

survey in Solo and its surroundings, there are several female puppeteers who are well known to the public including Nyi Sri Harti Kenik Asmorowati, twin puppeteers Nyi Seruni Widaningrum and Nyi Seruni Widawati from Surakarta, Nyi Saryanti from Sragen, Nyi Nia Dwi Raharjo from Sukoharjo, Nyi Retno Wijayanti from Kulonprogo, Nyi Elisha from Yogyakarta and many more. Through personal You Tube channel, female puppeteers can introduce their puppet show to global audience. The use of digital media makes it easier for female puppeteers to assert their presence and serves as a means of breaking down patriarchal boundaries in the art of puppetry.

In line with postfeminist theory, which emphasizes women's agency and empowerment through adaptable, creative strategies (Dosekun, 2015; Banet-Weiser et al., 2020; Hanifah et al., 2024), female puppeteers use digital media to assert their presence and challenge patriarchal constraints in puppetry. The idea that women can use artistic expression to reclaim space and voice while navigating and subverting patriarchal systems from within is supported by post-feminism. Since digital media embodies the postfeminist commitment to redefining power dynamics and expanding opportunities for women's visibility and participation in cultural spheres, it offers a powerful platform for female artists to challenge traditional gender boundaries.

As an epistemological breakthrough, women from the perspective of post-feminism possess the capacity to comprehend the distribution of power and their autonomy within gender relations, reflecting equal interaction between men and women in social realities (Sorrentino, 2021), and seek to challenge gender norms within social realities that remain heavily influenced by the pervasive structures of patriarchy (Firdausy, 2022). The post-feminism approach also emphasizes the importance of art as a tool for inclusive empowerment and social change, particularly for female artists navigating various obstacles in developing countries (Spitzer, 2023), and emphasizes that women's struggles can be pursued through artistic means within patriarchal systems, underscoring the importance of adaptable and creative empowerment strategies for women (Benschop & Lewis, 2025). As a response to traditional feminism, post-feminism is described as "relating to the ideas and attitudes which ignore or reject feminist ideas of the 1960s and subsequent decades. Women are now free to choose for themselves, according to post-feminism's emphasis on personal autonomy and choice (Ajit, 2016; McRobbie, 2019; Keisu & Brodn, 2023; Toubbali, 2024)

Based on the background above, the research problem concerns the contribution of Central Java female puppeteers as citizen-diplomacy actors in introducing shadow puppetry globally through digital technology. This grassroots activity serves as a powerful expression of cultural identity and a living bridge connecting local heritage to international audiences. Non-state actors like artists and community groups use traditional performance and crafts not only to preserve cultural knowledge but also as tools of public diplomacy to foster emotional connections and mutual understanding across borders, supporting governmental efforts and enriching cultural diplomacy through authentic and sustained cultural engagement (Bier & White, 2021; Khang, 2024; Roy et al., 2024). Citizen diplomacy empowers ordinary individuals to positively

influence international relations by establishing personal connections with people from different countries. It manifests in various ways, such as student exchange programs, cultural festivals, volunteer activities, and interactions through social media. Unlike formal government-to-government diplomacy, which can often be seen as rigid and exclusive, citizen diplomacy is more open and fosters direct, personal interactions across cultures (Lee & Ayhan, 2015; Williams, 2018; Purwasito & Kartinawati, 2019; Popkova & Michaels, 2022; Henriksen, 2024; Kodal & Temel, 2025).

Citizen diplomacy serves as a crucial support to cultural diplomacy and the promotion of a culture of peace by creating opportunities for dialogue and cooperation between nations. It encourages both sides in a conflict to engage, collaborate, and build mutual understanding, ultimately fostering a "culture of peace" that can transform conflict outcomes (Liu, 2015; Fulda, 2019; Lee, 2020; Scott-Smith, 2024). This approach emphasizes that meaningful change in conflict dynamics stems from gradual shifts in attitudes among a critical mass of people across society, including decision makers, civil society, and ordinary citizens, highlighting the collective role of all societal levels in sustaining peace through cultural engagement.

Furthermore, the researchers map previous research to demonstrate the novelty of this study. The following is a concept map of previous studies.

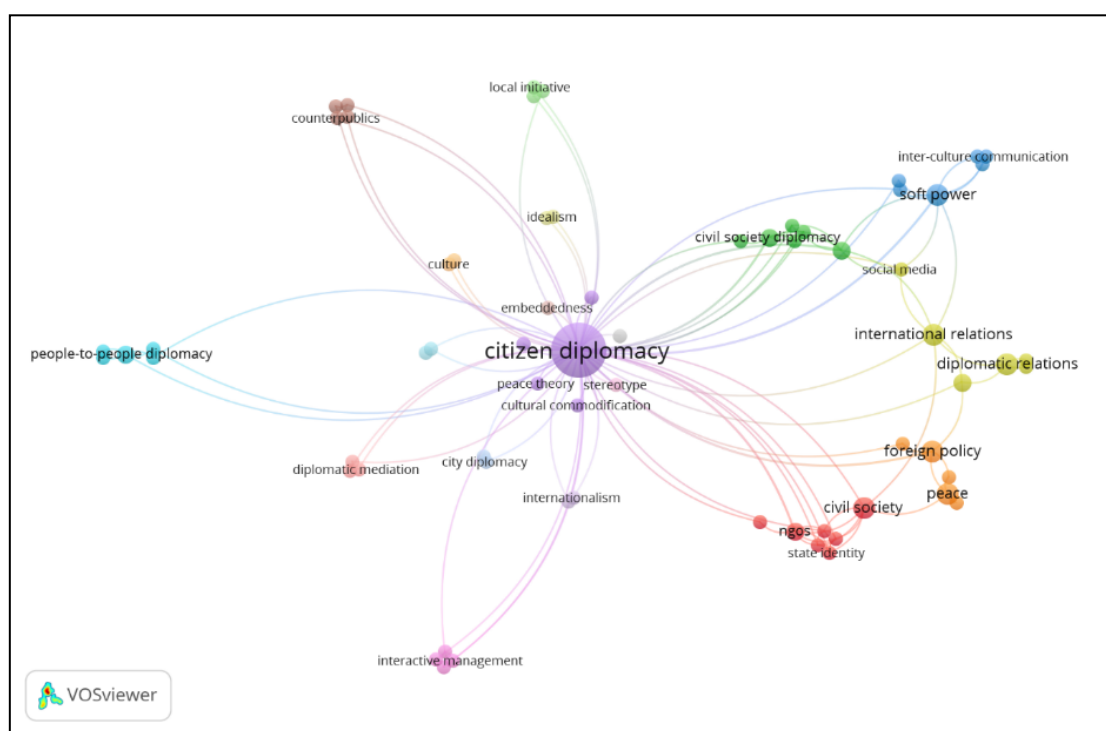


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Citizen Diplomacy (Processed by authors, 2025)

The figure above presents a concept map on citizen diplomacy, in which the citizen diplomacy node describes the dimensions of idealism and how it integrates cultural values and peace (Barash, 2010; Leeper, 2018; Rusakova et al., 2018; Schneider, 2005; Villanueva, 2018). Citizens play a vital role in promoting

national culture by actively engaging in and showcasing traditional arts. This ongoing involvement not only enhances cultural resilience but also strengthens international cultural connections, thereby amplifying the diplomatic value embedded in traditional cultural expressions (Faucher & Zhu, 2025).

The role of citizens as non-state actors in cultural diplomacy has become increasingly significant, particularly through the utilization of digital technology to introduce and promote traditional arts on the international stage. Digital platforms enable these actors to disseminate cultural expressions widely, circumventing traditional diplomatic channels and engaging global audiences more directly and effectively. This digital engagement not only enhances the visibility of traditional cultural heritage but also facilitates intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding, thereby strengthening the broader goals of cultural diplomacy.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method with a feminist approach. This approach was chosen for this research project because of its suitability to investigate social, cultural, and gender phenomena in depth, particularly the role of female puppeteers in the context of cultural diplomacy through shadow puppet performance art. The qualitative method is understood as an approach that emphasizes the exploration of meaning and interpretation of a subject matter, rather than the statistical measurement of data. A case study approach was chosen for this research project as it allows for the investigation of the distinctive and specialized attributes of female puppeteers in Solo Raya who have used digital media as a means of cultural promotion and advocacy.

The research is based on primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through direct interaction with 10 key informants, female puppeteers who are active in shadow puppet performances in Solo Raya (Wonogiri, Klaten, Boyolali, Sragen, Karanganyar, and Surakarta). In-depth interviews were conducted to gain insight into participants' challenges, experiences, and strategies in dealing with gender stereotypes and patriarchal culture. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing the researchers to flexibly elicit information from informants about their personal experiences, challenges, and contributions to puppet performance. This approach allows the researcher to obtain comprehensive data and gain insights into the nuances of female puppeteers' first-hand experiences. Participatory observation involved direct observation of shadow puppet performances, both those performed live and those broadcasted through social media platforms such as YouTube. This technique provides further insight into the dynamics of the performance and the interaction of puppeteers with the audience. In addition, data were also collected from written and digital sources, including video recordings of performances, news articles, and historical records related to the development of female puppeteers in Solo Raya. This documentation serves to strengthen and supplement the research findings. A brief survey was conducted to assess audiences' general perceptions of the role and reception of female puppeteers in shadow puppet performances, particularly in the context of digital media.

The data analysis was supported by triangulation based on interviews with three distinct sources: 1) 10 female puppeteers as the key informants who provide primary data regarding their subjective experiences, challenges, and strategies in navigating gender inequality within puppeteer profession in Solo Raya, 2) philologists who provide historical and textual contexts, which helps contextualize the findings by tracing the historical roles of women in Javanese puppet and identifying traditions or historical factors that may have influenced the current gender dynamics, 3) cultural figures who offer insights into contemporary cultural and social structures of Solo Raya community. By comparing the lived experiences of puppeteers with the historical background (from philologists) and the current cultural reception (from cultural figures), the research can build a comprehensive and critically informed picture of challenges and empowerment efforts faced by Javanese female puppeteers from a feminist perspective. The feminist perspective ensures that the triangulated data is not just summarized but critically interrogated through the lenses of power, inequality, and the potential for social change.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Shadow puppet (*wayang*) can be said to be one traditional form of puppet theatre native to the archipelago. This traditional art has received international recognition, culminating in its designation by UNESCO as a 'Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity' on 7 November 2003. Shadow puppetry is not only a performing art form but also a medium for storytelling that reflects the values, beliefs, and history of Indonesian society (I Kadek et al., 2024).

The word *yang*, which denotes something that is constantly shifting rather than stationary, is the root of *wayang*. The term *wayang*, which refers to a moving and hazy shadow, is then created by prefixing it with *wa*. In addition to being tangible, this shadow represents creativity and serves as a visual representation of the different characters and tales depicted in *wayang* performance art (Bagaskara et al., 2024). A puppet show is a representation of life that includes *pituduh* (life lessons), *piwulang* (teachings), and *sanepan* (metaphors) that convey moral lessons. Puppet show stories depict human behaviors, habits, and life journeys—from birth to death—all of which are natural parts of life. Humans constantly work to preserve harmony in their interactions with God, other people, and nature (Hermawan, 2017; Anggoro, 2018; Ilham, 2019; Perasutiyo et al., 2022).

In Javanese society, a puppeteer holds a highly esteemed position as a pivotal figure who uses the sacredness of the puppet show to teach moral and spiritual lessons. Nyi Panjang Mas, a Mataram Kingdom servant's wife and the first female puppeteer from Java, was an accomplished puppeteer. Patriarchal norms that rigidly define gender roles create structural and cultural barriers for female puppeteers. According to qualitative research conducted in Indonesia, conventional notions of masculinity in the puppeteer profession frequently undermine women's participation in the art of puppetry.

In a shadow puppet show, the puppeteer plays the main role and drives the story. The puppeteer is not only the narrator or storyteller but is also the director, musician, and even scriptwriter (Purwasito & Kartinawati, 2019). The profession of puppeteer also requires the ability to sing in performance. Puppeteers, according to Supriyono et al. (2008), are teachers, illuminators, and entertainers. Meanwhile, the spiritual education performed by a puppeteer must contain aesthetic, ethical, educative, creative, consultative, and recreative elements (Supriyono et al., 2008).

In general, people still assume that a puppeteer in a puppet performance is a man. This performance art clearly provides a lame narrative within the patriarchal culture. Prominently, society believes that only men are suitable to play the role of puppeteers, with all their attributes and abilities, under the guise of traditional values and religious interpretation, which leads to gender sentiment. Starting in the 18th century, women took part in these performances, although their roles were still limited. In the 18th century, women's roles were limited to *pengrawit* (gamelan players) or *sinden* (vocalists). Then, slowly, some women became puppeteers, although very rare (Mello et al., 2019; Fernández et al., 2022)

There are several reasons for the skewed views some people hold towards women who work as puppeteers. First, Sarmiento's study (2022) suggests that only male puppeteers can perform *meruwat*. As a sign of leadership, male puppeteers perform the *ruwatan* ritual to eradicate Murwakala and serve as legitimate leaders who can effectively use puppet performances to spread moral teachings. The second factor behind some people's views on female puppeteers is the perceived violation of norms. In Javanese tradition, the prevailing norm in the puppetry environment is that female puppeteers are educated and develop skills through inheritance from senior male puppeteers (Ardiani, 2019). In comparison, in the Balinese puppetry tradition, female puppeteers are considered spiritually incapable and therefore regarded as strange. These two patriarchal cultures show that female puppeteers are second-class in the performing arts, especially in puppet shows (Hirel, 2022; Marajaya, 2023). Third, Spiller (2024) proposes that puppet performances by female puppeteers are less interesting because female puppeteers are not as physically strong or as endurance-oriented as male puppeteers. Fourth, the domestic role of female puppeteers influences the lack of opportunities for puppet performances (Hannah, 2020; Ginis et al., 2023; Prasetya et al., 2024; Verma, 2025).

According to female puppeteers from Sragen and Surakarta, who are lecturers, because of broader societal biases and gender biases within the cultural realm, female puppeteers are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment from their audiences. Many audiences view female puppeteers with suspicion and contempt despite their artistic ability and command of the traditional craft, frequently stereotyping them as being easily tempted by money or prepared to enter into personal relationships to obtain financial advantage. In addition to undervaluing their professional abilities, this damaging misconception exposes them to rude behavior during or after performances, as well as disparaging remarks and unwelcome advances.

Female puppeteers from Wonogiri, Sukoharjo, Klaten, and Boyolali also stated that the hostile and unsafe environment created by such attitudes prevents them from expressing their full potential and preserving cultural heritage. Broader awareness and cultural changes are needed to address these issues to respect and safeguard female performers in traditionally male-dominated performance venues such as puppet shows and related puppetry traditions.

The ten female puppeteers from Solo Raya collectively affirmed that their participation in the traditional puppetry stage is insufficiently protected. The prevailing lack of security and comfort exacerbates the challenges faced by female puppeteers, significantly impeding their ability to contribute to cultural production and development. This lack of a safe and supportive environment undermines not only their artistic agency but also their potential to sustain and advance cultural heritage. Addressing these vulnerabilities requires a critical intervention that acknowledges the gendered nature of the performing arts domain and implements structural measures to ensure the safety, dignity, and professional recognition of female puppeteers. Such efforts are imperative to enable female practitioners to engage fully and equitably in the cultural sector, thereby reinforcing their contributions to both artistic tradition and socio-developmental objectives.

The landscape of international relations has undergone significant changes characterized by the absence of physical borders between countries. All global events and phenomena that initially moved slowly through mainstream media, both print and electronic, are now presented in real time, quickly, and as they are. One of them is the pandemic that has hit Indonesia, which has also affected shadow puppet performances. Conventional shadow puppet shows have shifted to social media.

The power of social media lies in its role as a means of information, mobilization, socialization, and promotion, as well as a powerful propaganda tool for building networks (Ciasullo et al., 2018). Social media also plays an important role in the social community system, enabling active, widespread relationship-building and communication. Hine (2017) states that social media is a forum for distributing information and messages to the public. During the pandemic, digital platforms marked a major milestone in becoming public spaces. The echo of social media use continues to resonate, making it easier for people to communicate. This is inseparable from government regulations that limit activities outside the home that can cause crowds. Government regulations restricting community activities across various countries are the main cause of the increase in the use of digital technology, such as smartphones. The use of smartphones is not only for obtaining information but also for entertainment, lifestyle, and remote communication, among other things. Data show that device use among adolescents aged 15 to 30 years was highest during the pandemic, followed by those aged 31-40, 41-50, and 51-75 years. The graph below shows that those aged 51-75 (green) are in the safe category, as only a few are heavily engaged in using gadgets.

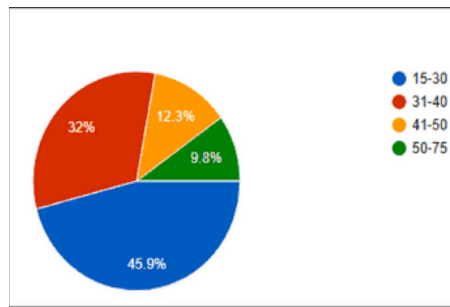


Fig. 1. Ratio of volunteers based on age.

Figure 2. Smartphone usage by age during the global health crisis (Tyagi et al., 2021)

Social media is easy to access and use, making it a means of spreading information and connecting individuals across borders in real time. Topics of discussion on social media are quite diverse, ranging from light matters such as idols, hobbies, interests, and fun to social problems and political issues.

In international relations theory, cultural relations between two or more countries are a very important part of implementing public diplomacy. Alnuaimi et al. (2022) explain that cross-border cultural interaction is not solely initiated by the government but arises spontaneously from the community, with the goal of supporting the achievement of national interests in accordance with foreign policy. This statement is reinforced by Enaifoghe and Makhutla (2020), who explain that cultural diplomacy is a form of public relations in the international context, understood as part of soft power in the current global system. According to Enaifoghe and Makhutla (2020), cultural diplomacy involves the exchange of ideas, information, art, language, and other aspects of culture between two nations or people of different nationalities. The main purpose of cultural diplomacy is to foster understanding among nations. This increased understanding is mainly due to people's support for the political and economic goals of the other country's government. Therefore, the essence of cultural diplomacy lies in a nation's ability to subtly influence other nations through soft power by introducing culture and communication in the international domain to achieve foreign policy goals, while also serving as an international public relations field.

Some of the experts above broadly argue that cultural diplomacy is a form of soft power that promotes a particular nation's culture. Cultural diplomacy is a means of developing mutual understanding between two or more nations, carried out by governments and societies. Cultural diplomacy is also a means of strengthening relations between nations and can influence the foreign policies of other governments to advance national interests.

The community referred to in this research is the community of art actors, particularly female puppeteers from Central Java. The existence of female puppeteers showcasing their expertise was seen during the pandemic. At that time, governments in various countries received instructions from the United Nations (UN) through the World Health Organization (WHO) to be vigilant, control the virus's transmission, save lives, and protect the vulnerable in their respective regions (Langhof & Gueldenberg, 2021). A shadow puppet show

should be presented as a whole in the form of drama, literature (knowledge of the story raised by the puppeteer), visual art, style, dance, music, and vocal performance, all of which are integrated in one performance (I Kadek et al., 2024). During the pandemic, fans and lovers of the art of shadow puppet performance could not enjoy the show in its entirety and in its ideal form. Javanese people, in particular, still think that puppet shows, especially shadow puppets, are not only a spectacle but also part of their culture. Shadow puppetry is a non-monetary cultural asset that is not solely economically valuable in the present but also provides long-term benefits. Shadow puppets can be used as basic capital for economic development (Efendi, 2023).

Shadow puppetry is a traditional performing art with basic economic, social, and cultural value. The economic impact of shadow puppet performances can be felt by the puppeteers, the puppetry community, and the puppet makers themselves. The economic impact on rural communities differs from that in urban areas. For rural communities, shadow puppetry is a traditional performing art rich in local wisdom and noble values. For urban communities, shadow puppets are often an economically valuable product. Differences in how people perceive shadow puppets can be a source of innovation and creativity for shadow puppet puppeteers. The social and cultural impact is felt by *wayang* fans, who can interact with one another (O'Mara, 2013).

During the pandemic, with mobility limitations, streaming through social media became a very profitable opportunity. Without leaving their homes, people can enjoy a variety of entertainment that is cheap, easy, and fast. One of the shows that appeals to some people is shadow puppetry through YouTube channels. Nyi Kenik's YouTube shadow puppet show is appreciated by the community. Nyi Kenik performed shadow puppetry on 2 May 2020 at the Convention Hall of Masjid Agung Jawa Tengah to celebrate the victory of Sulistyo as a member of DPD RI (Regional Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia). The shadow puppet performance on that day alone was watched by 254,000 audiences. Ten months ago, in November 2023, Nyi Kenik's shadow puppet performance received public appreciation, especially for the voice, which matched the puppet character being played. An audience, @atixbellatrix1723, who watched Nyi Kenik's puppet show in the 2021 performance, was moved to see the woman's achievement. The community, especially among women, is prouder of the presence of a woman puppeteer figure and motivates her to progress and develop.

One puppet show performance by Nyi Kenik takes the *lakon* (title) Wahyu Makutharama. The play depicts the teachings of Hasta Brata (eight teachings) from Sri Bathara Krisna to Arjuna about leadership values (Adisastra & Ni Made, 2021; Hudaya & Nugroho, 2013). Hasta Brata comprises eight leadership philosophies derived from the forces of nature: the sun, moon, stars, earth, ocean, water, wind, and fire (Indrianita, 2017).

According to Nyi Kenik, shadow puppet performances broadcast on YouTube are an attractive form of traditional arts entertainment for people accustomed to gadgets. People can easily and cheaply enjoy traditional arts without having to be in an arts center. Through YouTube, shadow puppet shows

that were previously of a long duration, more than five hours, can be enjoyed in a short time of about one to two hours.

Modern society, which is already familiar with smartphones, is a golden opportunity to introduce traditional culture, especially shadow puppetry. Shadow puppetry, which was boring before YouTube, has become more interesting. Shadow puppetry can be revived and continue to exist as people experience restrictions on activities outside the home. Through YouTube, people have a better understanding of the virtues in shadow puppet shows.

Another shadow puppet performed by a woman puppeteer is Baladewa Muksa, by Nyi Sarwiyanti. The story takes place after the end of the Mahabharata War between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, as a symbol of the triumph of good over evil. The Pandavas, consisting of five knights (Yudhistira, Bima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sadewa), became a symbol of good values that succeeded in defeating the wrath of one hundred Kauravas.

On YouTube, Nyi Sarwiyanti's performance on 2 December 2021 gained 33,422 views. One of the audiences, @agusnurcholis1713, commented that women can have good puppeteering skills like men. Another audience, @uwongJAWA, encouraged the female puppeteer to dare to create and innovate to advance and preserve Indonesian culture.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that female puppeteers in the shadow puppetry field face various obstacles, including sexual harassment and rigid gender stereotypes. Despite the cultural and social barriers they face, female puppeteers in Solo Raya have successfully used digital technology, particularly YouTube, to introduce puppets to a wider audience. Female puppeteers act as cultural diplomats, introducing local cultural heritage and contributing to public diplomacy through the arts. The increasing appreciation of female puppeteers on social media indicates a shift in public perception towards a more inclusive and positive direction.

It should be noted that this research has some limitations. Firstly, given that the research was conducted exclusively in Solo Raya, the results may not be fully representative of conditions in other regions of Indonesia. Secondly, this research uses qualitative methods with a limited number of informants, which may not fully cover the entire population of female puppeteers in Indonesia. In addition, further research on the long-term impact of social media use in cultural diplomacy and the promotion of gender equality through female puppeteers can provide deeper insights, especially in the context of post-pandemic digital technological advances.

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Gendered Power and Bureaucratic Governance Decision-Making Inequality in West Sumatra

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ABSTRACT

This article examines gendered power relations within the bureaucracy of the Provincial Government of West Sumatra, focusing on the gap between women's capacity and their access to decision-making authority. Although women constitute the majority of civil servants and possess substantial educational and career capital, they remain underrepresented in strategic positions. This study aims to explain how institutional structures and practices shape unequal access to authority. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with civil servants across hierarchical levels and analysis of official personnel documents. Thematic analysis identifies patterns of power relations, dependence, and women's autonomy in decision-making. The findings show that authority is concentrated in senior echelons dominated by men, while women are positioned in administrative and implementation roles. Informal practices, including networks and leadership norms, reinforce restricted access to strategic arenas. As a result, women's capacity does not translate into influence over policy direction. The study argues that the limits of gender affirmative policies lie in their emphasis on numerical representation as a measure of success. This approach enables compliance without redistributing power. Advancing gender equality requires shifting the focus from representation to authority within bureaucratic systems.

KEYWORDS: *gendered power relations, feminist institutionalism, bureaucratic inequality, decision-making authority, West Sumatra*

INTRODUCTION

Gender affirmative policies in Indonesia have been institutionalized as part of broader public sector reforms aimed at addressing structural inequalities in women's access to power within the bureaucracy and local politics. These policies emerge not only from normative commitments to equality, but also from international pressures and governance standards that position gender inclusion as an indicator of democratic quality (Krook & Norris, 2014; True & Mintrom, 2001). Within this framework, gender equality is articulated as the provision of equal rights, opportunities, and treatment between women and

men across political, economic, social, and cultural spheres, forming an integral component of human rights fulfillment (UN Women, 2018; Walby, 2005).

In Indonesia, such commitments are reflected in various regulatory frameworks, including gender mainstreaming strategies within public institutions and policies that promote women's participation in decision-making arenas. Over the past two decades, these initiatives have contributed to a gradual increase in women's presence within state institutions, particularly in administrative and mid-level bureaucratic positions. National statistics indicate that women now constitute a significant proportion of civil servants, reaching nearly half of the total workforce in several regions. However, this numerical increase has not translated proportionally into women's access to strategic leadership positions, where authority over policy direction and resource allocation is concentrated.

Within public administration practice, the success of affirmative policies is often measured by quantitative indicators, particularly the increase in women's representation (Childs & Lovenduski, 2013). Such an approach, while useful, risks obscuring deeper structural inequalities embedded in bureaucratic systems. Regional civil service data illustrate this limitation. In one provincial context, all Echelon I positions remain occupied by men. At the Echelon II level, women hold only 12 out of 56 positions, while at Echelon III there are 85 women among 306 officials. Women's representation increases at Echelon IV, with 172 out of 403 positions, and is even more prominent in non-echelon roles that are largely administrative and technical. This pattern reflects a stratified distribution of power, in which women are concentrated at lower and middle levels of the bureaucracy but remain marginal in positions that determine policy agendas (Annesley & Gains, 2010).

This uneven distribution suggests that representation cannot be reduced to numerical presence alone (Pitkin, 2023). Women's growing inclusion in bureaucratic structures does not necessarily correspond with expanded authority, policy discretion, or control over strategic resources (Waylen, 2014). A critical issue emerges: gender affirmative policies appear effective at increasing descriptive representation, yet they fall short of transforming the underlying power relations that govern access to decision-making positions. This raises a fundamental question about whether such policies merely accommodate women within existing institutional frameworks or genuinely challenge the structures that produce inequality.

Scholarly debates in public administration and policy studies indicate that this phenomenon is not unique to Indonesia. Comparative research demonstrates that affirmative action and gender quotas often succeed in increasing women's numerical presence but fail to alter decision-making patterns dominated by masculine norms and informal institutional practices (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2013; Lombardo & Meier, 2016). Feminist institutionalist perspectives argue that institutions operate through both formal rules and informal norms, where the latter frequently reproduce gender hierarchies despite formal commitments to equality (Mackay et al., 2010; Waylen, 2014). Consequently, gender mainstreaming tends to remain

procedural, positioning women as beneficiaries of policy rather than as actors with agenda-setting power (Eveline & Bacchi, 2010).

At the local government level, these structural constraints intersect with hierarchical bureaucratic arrangements and patronage-based political relations that shape career trajectories and access to authority (Estes, 2013; Peters, 2014). Such dynamics limit women's autonomy, particularly in contexts where informal networks and political loyalty play a decisive role in appointments to strategic positions. These conditions suggest that gender inequality within the bureaucracy cannot be fully explained by formal institutional analysis alone but must also account for relational power structures embedded in governance practices.

The case of West Sumatra Province presents a particularly important empirical puzzle. The Minangkabau matrilineal kinship system is widely recognized as a cultural framework that symbolically elevates women's status, particularly in relation to property rights and lineage (Blackwood, 2001; Sanday, 2002). This cultural narrative often leads to the assumption that gender relations in the region are inherently egalitarian and supportive of women's leadership. Such an assumption requires critical scrutiny. Local governance operates within the institutional logic of the modern state, characterized by hierarchical authority, bureaucratic control, and patriarchal norms that may contradict or override cultural principles (Bourdieu, 2001; Chappell & Waylen, 2013).

The coexistence of matrilineal cultural norms and hierarchical state institutions generates an analytically significant tension. Women's symbolic status within society does not automatically translate into substantive power within formal governance structures. Empirical observations indicate that women's presence in local bureaucracy does not necessarily correspond with their capacity to influence policy decisions or control strategic resources (Mansbridge, 2005). Instead, power relations within bureaucracy often produce forms of dependence that constrain women's agency, particularly in decision-making arenas dominated by political and administrative elites (Kenny, 2014).

Despite growing attention to gender and governance, existing research shows important limitations. Studies on affirmative policies tend to emphasize quantitative representation without sufficiently examining how power is distributed and exercised within bureaucratic systems (Krook & Norris, 2014). Cultural analyses, meanwhile, focus on symbolic recognition and social values but often fail to connect these dimensions with institutional practices and political authority (Blackwood, 2000). As a result, there remains a lack of empirical research that systematically analyzes how gender affirmative policies operate within contexts that are simultaneously matrilineal, bureaucratic, and shaped by patronage relations.

This gap is particularly relevant in understanding how women's power is constructed, negotiated, and constrained in local governance. Without such analysis, affirmative policies risk being interpreted as successful solely on the basis of numerical gains, while deeper inequalities in authority and decision-making remain unaddressed.

Addressing this gap, this study integrates feminist institutionalist perspectives with an analysis of local socio-cultural contexts to examine the dynamics of women's power in local bureaucracy and politics. Focusing on West Sumatra Province, the study challenges the assumption that matrilineal systems inherently produce egalitarian governance outcomes (Sanday, 2002; Waylen, 2017). The research aims to analyze how gender affirmative policies are implemented within local bureaucratic and political structures, and to explain how power relations, forms of dependence, and degrees of women's autonomy are shaped in public decision-making processes.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative case study design to analyze the implementation of gender affirmative policies and the dynamics of women's power relations within the bureaucracy and local politics in West Sumatra Province. A qualitative approach is selected because the study aims to explain how policies operate in practice and how institutional arrangements shape women's access to strategic decision-making positions, rather than to measure relationships between variables (Creswell, 2015).

The research is designed as a case study to enable in-depth exploration of policy processes within their real-life institutional and socio-cultural context (Yin, 2018). This design allows the study to capture the interactions among formal policy frameworks, bureaucratic structures, and informal norms that influence women's authority and autonomy in governance.

The unit of analysis in this study is public decision-making practices within local government institutions. The analysis focuses on hierarchical structures, positional authority, and informal mechanisms such as patronage relations and political networks that shape access to power. This focus reflects an institutional perspective that emphasizes the role of both formal rules and informal norms in structuring gendered power relations (Mackay et al., 2010).

West Sumatra Province is selected as the research site due to its distinctive socio-cultural and institutional configuration. The region is characterized by a matrilineal kinship system that symbolically recognizes women's status, while governance practices remain embedded in hierarchical and patriarchal bureaucratic structures. This context provides a critical setting for examining the limits of gender affirmative policies in producing women's substantive power.

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of institutional practices. Primary data were obtained through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with purposively selected informants, including female and male structural officials, policymakers, and local political actors involved in decision-making processes. Informant selection was based on positional relevance, institutional experience, and involvement in policy implementation practices (Patton, 2015).

Interview questions were designed to explore women's experiences in accessing structural positions, exercising authority, and negotiating power

relations within bureaucracy and local politics. Particular attention is given to identifying forms of dependence, levels of policy discretion, and constraints on autonomy in decision-making processes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Secondary data consist of official government documents, including staffing records, regulatory frameworks, and gender mainstreaming policies. These documents were analyzed qualitatively to map formal institutional arrangements and to examine discrepancies between policy design and implementation. Descriptive data on the distribution of bureaucratic positions were used as contextual evidence to support the analysis of structural inequality, rather than as a basis for statistical inference (Bowen, 2009).

Data analysis is conducted using thematic analysis through stages of open coding, theme development, and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis focuses on three key dimensions: power relations, forms of dependence, and levels of women's autonomy in public decision-making. These themes are developed inductively from empirical data while being interpreted through relevant theoretical concepts.

The analysis is guided by a feminist institutionalist framework, which explains how formal rules and informal norms operate simultaneously in shaping gendered power relations within institutions (Chappell & Waylen, 2013). This framework enables the study to move beyond descriptive accounts and provide an explanation of the persistence of inequality despite formal policy commitments.

To ensure credibility, the study employs data triangulation by comparing findings from interviews and document analysis (Denzin, 2012). Interpretive consistency is strengthened through iterative engagement with the data and continuous refinement of analytical categories.

Ethical considerations are observed throughout the research process. Informants' identities are kept confidential, and data are used solely for academic purposes. The study follows established ethical guidelines, including informed consent and responsible data management (Israel & Hay, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Distribution of Positions and Patterns of Women's Representation

Women constitute the majority of the civil service workforce in West Sumatra Province. However, this numerical dominance is not reflected in the distribution of strategic positions. Women are predominantly concentrated in administrative and non-strategic roles, while men dominate leadership positions.

This pattern becomes evident when the distribution of positions is examined by echelon level, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 . Hierarchy of Positions and the Gendered Distribution of Power in the Civil Service Bureaucracy of West Sumatra Province

Level of Position	Men	Women	Total
Echelon I	1	0	1
Echelon II	44	12	56
Echelon III	221	85	306
Echelon IV	231	172	403
Non-Echelon	6226	13618	19844

Source: Sistem Informasi Kepegawaian (SIMPEG) Provinsi Sumatera Barat, 2025

The data show a clear hierarchical pattern: the higher the echelon level, the lower the representation of women. No women occupy Echelon I positions. At Echelon II and III levels, women are present but remain significantly underrepresented compared to men. A more balanced composition appears only at Echelon IV, while women dominate non-echelon positions.

To assess whether this pattern is associated with differences in individual qualifications, the distribution of educational attainment is examined in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Educational Attainment of Civil Servants in West Sumatra Province by Gender

Educational Level	Men	Women	Total
Elementary School	23	0	23
Junior High School	45	20	65
Senior High School	693	372	1065
Diploma II	8	7	15
Diploma III	8	13	21
Applied Bachelor	119	193	312
Bachelor's Degree	4353	10476	14829
Master's Degree	1061	1644	2705
Doctoral Degree	20	11	31
Total	6330	12736	19066

Source: Sistem Informasi Kepegawaian (SIMPEG) Provinsi Sumatera Barat, 2025

The data indicate that women dominate higher levels of formal education. At the bachelor's level, women (10,476) significantly outnumber men (4,353). A similar pattern is observed at the master's level, where women (1,644) exceed men (1,061).

This distribution suggests that women possess substantial educational capital within the bureaucracy. However, this advantage is not reflected in their representation in strategic positions.

Further analysis of the distribution of ranks and grades is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of Civil Service Ranks and Grades in West Sumatra Province

Rank/Grade	Man	Women	Total
I/a	0	0	0
I/b	1	0	1
I/c	6	0	6
I/d	18	2	20
II/a	59	38	97
II/b	46	10	56
II/c	236	572	808
II/d	292	276	568
III/a	1940	4272	6212
III/b	896	1527	2423
III/c	472	730	1202
III/d	1297	3102	4399
IV/a	490	908	1398
IV/b	608	1611	2219
IV/c	315	851	1166
IV/d	39	8	47
IV/e	2	0	2
Total	6717	13907	20624

Source: Sistem Informasi Kepegawaian (SIMPEG) Provinsi Sumatera Barat, 2025

Women also dominate the rank structure, particularly in Grades III and IV, which serve as the primary pool for structural positions. In Grade III/a, women (4,272) significantly outnumber men (1,940), and similar patterns are observed across other sub-levels.

However, representation declines sharply at the highest ranks. In Grade IV/d, only eight women are recorded compared to thirty-nine men, and no women are present at Grade IV/e.

These findings indicate that although women have accumulated educational qualifications and bureaucratic rank, their representation decreases significantly at the highest levels of the hierarchy.

Power Relations in the Decision-Making Process

Decision-making within the civil service bureaucracy in West Sumatra Province is structured hierarchically and closely linked to positional authority. Access to decision-making arenas is not evenly distributed across civil servants but is concentrated in higher-echelon positions. As shown in the previous section, these positions are predominantly occupied by men.

In practice, decision-making authority is centralized at Echelons I and II, which function as the main sites for determining policy direction, setting priorities, and allocating resources. Echelon III and IV positions are primarily

responsible for coordination and implementation, while non-echelon staff are largely involved in administrative and technical tasks.

This hierarchical structure is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows the vertical flow of decision-making from senior to lower levels.

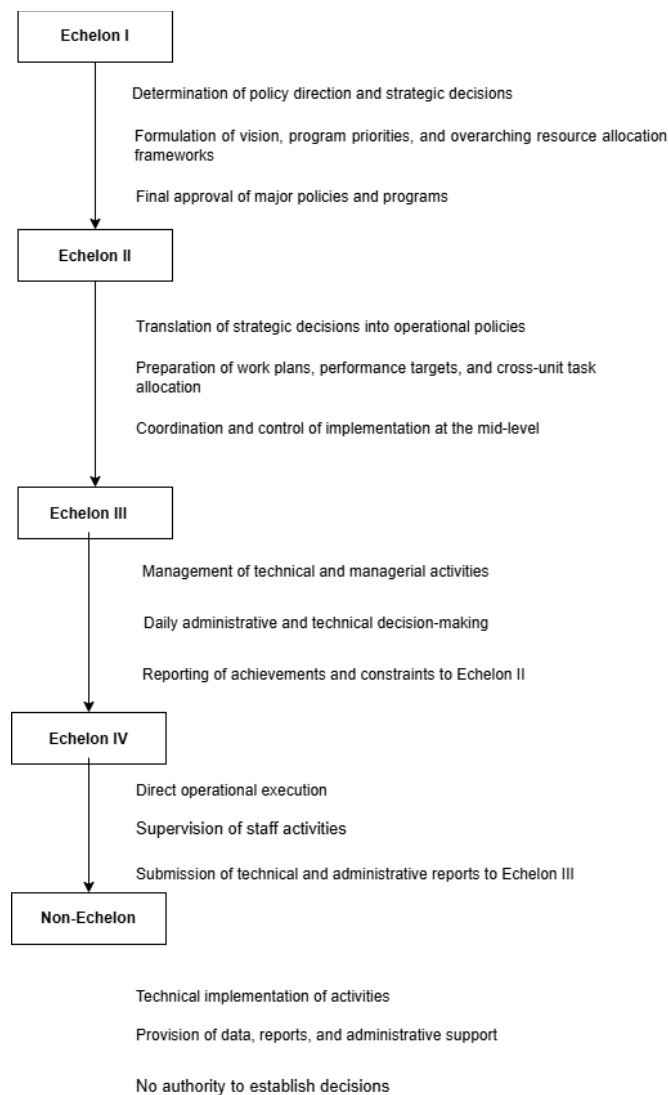


Figure 1. Decision-Making and Task Implementation Flow Across Echelon Levels.
 Author's elaboration based on Indonesian civil service regulations and public administration literature.

Figure 1 indicates that authority flows from higher to lower levels, with limited upward influence. Lower-level officials contribute through reports, technical inputs, and implementation feedback, but final decisions are determined at the top of the hierarchy.

Findings from interviews indicate that participation in decision-making forums is strongly influenced by positional status. Informants at Echelon III and IV levels reported that their involvement is generally limited to providing data

and executing instructions, while strategic decisions are formulated at higher levels.

One informant noted:

"We are involved in preparing documents and technical inputs, but the final decision is made at the leadership level."

Another informant emphasized:

"Even when we have ideas, it depends on whether they are accepted by superiors. We cannot directly influence the final policy."

These accounts indicate that decision-making is not only structured formally through hierarchy, but also mediated by authority relations embedded in organizational practice.

The concentration of authority at senior levels creates a gap between those who generate information and those who define policy direction. Women, who are more represented at middle and lower levels, are more frequently positioned as providers of technical input rather than as decision-makers.

In addition, the hierarchical chain of command shapes how opinions are expressed. Informants indicated that lower-level officials tend to align their views with those of superiors, particularly in formal decision-making settings. This pattern reflects the importance of positional authority in determining which perspectives are considered in the decision-making process.

Overall, these findings show that decision-making authority in the bureaucracy is vertically structured and concentrated at higher levels, limiting broader participation in determining policy direction.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that gender inequality within the bureaucracy of the Provincial Government of West Sumatra cannot be attributed to a lack of capacity or qualifications among women. Empirical evidence shows that women dominate the civil service workforce and possess substantial educational and career capital, particularly at higher education levels and mid-level ranks. This condition challenges explanations that attribute underrepresentation to individual deficits.

Instead, inequality is produced through the distribution of positions and authority within the bureaucratic hierarchy. Strategic positions at Echelons I and II, which function as the primary sites of policy direction and resource allocation, remain dominated by men. Women, despite their numerical and professional advantages, are concentrated in Echelons III and IV, as well as at non-echelon levels, where roles are largely administrative and implementation-oriented. This structural configuration limits women's access to arenas where policy agendas are defined and constrains their substantive influence in decision-making processes.

From a feminist institutionalist perspective, this pattern reflects the interaction between formal rules and informal norms in shaping gendered

power relations. Formal frameworks promote equality through gender mainstreaming policies, yet informal institutional practices such as trust-based networks, leadership expectations, and perceptions of authority continue to structure access to strategic positions. These practices function as gatekeeping mechanisms that determine who is included in decision-making spaces, particularly at early stages where policy priorities are set.

The findings also reveal a disconnection between knowledge production and decision-making authority. Women, who are more present at implementation levels, play a central role in generating data, technical inputs, and field-based knowledge. This knowledge does not automatically translate into influence over policy direction. Interpretation and agenda setting remain concentrated at higher levels with limited female representation. This condition indicates that knowledge within bureaucratic systems is embedded within power relations that shape whose contributions are recognized and acted upon.

In addition, hierarchical career structures generate forms of dependency that constrain women's agency. Advancement depends not only on formal qualifications, but also on alignment with superiors and access to informal networks. Under these conditions, the articulation of alternative perspectives becomes contingent on positional authority and perceived loyalty. This dynamic limits the extent to which women can influence institutional outcomes.

These findings indicate that the limitations of gender affirmative policies are not only related to implementation but also to how policy success is defined. Existing policy frameworks tend to rely on numerical indicators, particularly representation, as the primary measure of progress. While such indicators are administratively convenient and aligned with governance standards, they fail to capture the distribution of authority within decision-making structures.

This reflects an institutional logic that prioritizes measurable and non-disruptive forms of compliance over substantive transformation. By focusing on what can be easily counted, such as the number of women in the bureaucracy, policy evaluation frameworks overlook more critical dimensions, including access to strategic decision-making, control over resources, and agenda-setting power. As a result, institutions are able to demonstrate formal progress without altering the underlying structures that regulate power.

From this perspective, gender affirmative policies risk being absorbed into existing institutional arrangements and function as instruments of legitimacy rather than transformation. The persistence of male dominance at senior levels, despite women's strong educational and career profiles, illustrates the limits of policies that do not engage directly with power structures.

The case of West Sumatra further challenges the assumption that a matrilineal socio-cultural context inherently produces inclusive governance. While matrilineal norms symbolically recognize women's status, bureaucratic institutions operate within a modern state framework characterized by hierarchy, formal authority, and gendered organizational practices. This tension demonstrates that cultural recognition does not automatically translate into institutional equality.

Advancing gender equality in bureaucracy requires a shift beyond representation-based approaches toward reforms that address the distribution of authority. This includes revising promotion systems, redefining leadership criteria, and expanding access to strategic decision-making forums. It also requires rethinking policy indicators to incorporate dimensions of power and influence, rather than relying solely on numerical representation.

Without such changes, gender affirmative policies will continue to produce a form of inclusion that is visible but not transformative, where women are present within bureaucratic structures but remain structurally distanced from the centers of power.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the implementation of gender affirmative policies and the dynamics of women's power within the bureaucracy and local politics of West Sumatra Province. The findings show that the persistence of gender inequality cannot be explained by differences in individual capacity, qualifications, or career experience. Women have accumulated significant educational and professional capital and constitute the majority within the civil service. However, this advantage does not translate into proportional access to strategic positions or decision-making authority.

The analysis demonstrates that inequality is embedded in the hierarchical distribution of power within bureaucratic structures. Strategic decision-making authority remains concentrated at senior echelons, where male dominance persists, while women are largely positioned within implementation and administrative roles. This configuration limits women's capacity to influence policy agendas and reinforces a separation between knowledge production and authority.

Beyond formal structures, the study highlights the role of informal institutional practices in shaping access to power. Decision-making processes are mediated by networks, perceptions of leadership, and relational dynamics that are not captured in formal regulations. These mechanisms operate as gatekeeping processes that regulate inclusion in strategic arenas, thereby sustaining gendered patterns of authority within the bureaucracy.

At a conceptual level, this study argues that the limitations of gender affirmative policies are not solely a matter of implementation failure but are rooted in how equality is defined and measured within bureaucratic systems. The reliance on numerical representation as the primary indicator of success reflects an institutional logic that prioritizes administrative compliance over substantive transformation. As a result, policies are able to demonstrate progress without altering the underlying distribution of power.

This finding challenges the assumption that increasing women's representation will automatically lead to more inclusive governance. It also questions the expectation that a matrilineal socio-cultural context necessarily produces gender-equitable institutional outcomes. Cultural recognition of

women's status does not, by itself, transform the hierarchical and gendered nature of bureaucratic authority.

The contribution of this study lies in shifting the analytical focus from representation to power. Gender equality in bureaucracy cannot be reduced to the presence of women within institutional structures, but must be understood in terms of access to authority, control over decision-making, and the ability to shape policy direction. This perspective calls for a reorientation of both policy design and evaluation frameworks.

Future efforts to advance gender equality require moving beyond representation-based approaches toward reforms that directly address the distribution of power. This includes revising promotion systems, redefining leadership criteria, and expanding access to strategic decision-making forums. Equally important is the need to develop policy indicators that capture dimensions of authority and influence, rather than relying solely on numerical measures.

In conclusion, the persistence of gender inequality in bureaucracy is not a reflection of women's absence, but of institutional arrangements that regulate who is recognized as legitimate to exercise power. Without confronting these arrangements, gender affirmative policies will continue to produce inclusion without authority and presence without power.

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Regulatory Reconstruction of Femicide Phenomena and Gender-Based Violence against Women Viewed from a Victimology Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia currently does not have legislation that specifically recognizes femicide, the murder of women based on gender, as a separate crime. Femicide cases are still considered ordinary murder (Article 338 of the Criminal Code), which results in gender-based motives being often overlooked and legal protection being provided less than optimally. The murder of women is often equated with general crimes, without considering aspects of misogyny or injustice in power relations related to gender. This study uses a normative juridical method, namely legal research that establishes law as a system of norms studied through principles, norms, rules from laws and regulations, agreements, and doctrines. The discussion results suggest that the current regulations do not differentiate between femicide and murder in general. This is due to a legal vacuum in which there are no specific regulations regarding femicide. Thus, cases of femicide, which have become the tip of the iceberg, ultimately reach the legal realm only as cases of general murder. In fact, femicide is the extreme murder of women because of gender identity, rooted in patriarchal domination.

Keywords: *regulatory reconstruction, femicide, gender violence, victimology, misogyny*

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a humanitarian issue that has attracted global attention for decades. Femicide, defined as the killing of women related to gender-based factors, is one of the most extreme forms of violence. It reflects patterns of violence rooted in entrenched gender inequality in society, which not only threatens women's lives but also violates their human rights (Sitanggang et al., 2024). This practice is not limited to Indonesia but occurs worldwide, underscoring its universal and systemic nature. In Indonesia, despite the existence of various legal instruments designed to protect women's rights, femicide remains a significant problem (Oktadiana et al., 2025).

Indonesia as one of the countries that is thick with its patriarchal culture, which is dominated by the power of men, is certainly not separated from the discussion about women. For centuries, women have been considered to have a lower degree than men, giving birth to discrimination and violence, which is then produced, reproduced, and socialized from generation to generation and takes place systematically so that it is considered to be something ordinary or true (Sabrina, 2024).

Although positive law in Indonesia adheres to the principle of equality before the law, which means that everyone is considered equal before the law these days, it seems to be just an old story that is rarely heard and retold to the next generations. This creates social inequality both in terms of norms and laws that have double standards when faced with gender inequality problems, guided by the granting of more rights to men than to women. As a result of Indonesia's long history of adopting and internalizing patriarchal culture to the extreme, a new problem of violence against women, femicide, occurs. Femicide as a form of gender-based violence is a problem that until now has not been completely discussed and handled by the government.

Komnas Perempuan (National Commission on Violence Against Women) noted that Indonesian law for prosecuting femicide perpetrators utilizes the law on loss of life, which is regulated and disseminated in the Criminal Code (KUHP- Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana Indonesia) (Komnas Perempuan, 2025a), including femicide motivated by sexual violence. Therefore, the Criminal Code is used to regulate cases of sexual violence that result in forced marriage, disguised prostitution, including violence in dating and domestic violence. However, the Criminal Code does not directly mention the murder of women or femicide that begins with sexual violence. In 2022, there were 184 cases of femicide in Indonesia. Of these cases, 194 victims and 289 perpetrators were identified, the majority of whom were men. The perpetrators and victims were generally between 26 and 40 years old and had intimate or personal relationships, family relationships, or non-intimate relationships (coworkers, neighbors, and commercial sex workers). The data obtained relies solely on online news and does not rule out the possibility that many cases have not been identified or reported. The absence of law and the lack of reporting and data collection on femicide cases make the issue of femicide very important to get the attention of the government and the public (Martini et al., 2026).

Almost every day on social media, print, and electronics, there are news reports about persecution and harassment that lead to murder with women as victims. Women who should get comfort and security when they are at home instead get violence that leads to death. It begins with a man who hates a woman and ends with an act of murder by a man against the woman. Femicide triggers are dominance, satisfaction, belonging, jealousy, depression, superiority, and mental disorders. Femicide perpetrators can be a husband, child, girlfriend, or friend (Akbar, 2025). Indonesia today is not only a sexual violence emergency, but also a femicide emergency. Based on data released by Komnas Perempuan (National Commission on Violence Against Women), there were 95 cases of femicide in 2020, 237 cases in 2021, 307 cases in 2022, and 159 cases in 2023 (YAPHI, 2024). Komnas Perempuan noted that in 2024, in mass media

reporting, the most femicide cases occurred in the private sphere (185 cases) and 105 cases in the public domain. Until now, femicide is minimally recognized due to the absence of state-disaggregated data in case documentation of violence against women that leads to death (Komnas Perempuan, 2025a).

Femicide cases are still categorized as common murder (Article 338 of the Criminal Code), so gender-based motives are often ignored and legal protection is not optimal. The murder of women is often equated with ordinary murder or general crimes, without considering the factors of misogyny or gender-based power relations inequality. There is a need for legal reforms (such as revisions to the Criminal Code or special laws) that regulate femicide as a gender-based crime, not just the loss of life. Until now, the regulation of femicide in various article formulations has not been explicitly described in each of the laws and regulations or gender-specific crimes. Therefore, the researchers are interested in conducting this study, investigating how the regulatory reconstruction of femicide and gender-based violence against women is reviewed from a victimology perspective.

Law enforcement against femicide in Indonesia faces several challenges. Constitutionally, Indonesia guarantees its citizens the right to live free from violence. However, in practice, law implementation is often ineffective, particularly in addressing femicide cases. This is due to various factors, including low legal awareness among the public and law enforcement officials and the inability of the legal system to provide adequate protection for women (Chandra, 2023). Furthermore, the persistent patriarchal culture in Indonesian society exacerbates this problem, as misperceptions about women's roles in the family and society contribute to the normalization of violence against women, which is often viewed as a personal or domestic issue rather than a human rights violation.

Ideally, the Indonesian legal system should provide equal and fair protection to all individuals, especially women, in accordance with constitutional rights and the international legal framework. As a participant in several international conventions, including CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), Indonesia is committed to eradicating gender-based violence and femicide. However, in reality, law enforcement against femicide cases is often hampered by internal factors within the legal system and external factors related to cultural and social norms (Nainggolan et al., 2022).

The limited competence of law enforcers in handling femicide cases also poses a significant problem. Many police officers, prosecutors, and judges are not properly trained to handle cases of gender-based violence. This not only slows the legal process but also risks femicide cases being dismissed in court. Legal processes are often hampered by a lack of evidence, slow investigations, and a lack of firm sanctions against perpetrators, further exacerbating gender inequality in society (Asnawi & Ismail, 2020).

Many cases of femicide receive little attention from law enforcers, and perpetrators of violence against women often escape appropriate punishment. Therefore, improving training and education for law enforcers is crucial to handle femicide cases more sensitively and understandingly. Femicide cases

require serious attention because they represent the culmination of an increase in gender-based violence motivated by hatred, unequal power relations, and discrimination against women. This phenomenon is not simply a murder. Its specific characteristics require different legal and social treatment than general crimes. Special regulations are needed. Special regulations provide a legal basis for judges to integrate indicators of femicide (such as sadism or a history of chronic domestic violence) as a basis for increasing penalties for perpetrators. Special regulations guarantee the rights of children, parents, or surviving family members to restitution, compensation, and psychosocial rehabilitation. Without specific violations, femicide cases will continue to be mixed up in ordinary murder statistics. Special regulations encourage national data standardization, which is crucial for formulating prevention policies.

METHODS

Research methods serve as a means of developing scientific knowledge because they aim to systematically, methodologically, and consistently seek facts or truths (Suratman & Dillah, 2015). Implementing research methods is a necessity, grounded in the underlying scientific knowledge (Soekanto & Mamudji, 2010). Therefore, this research employs a legal methodology study (Soekanto, 2014).

Type of Research

This study employs normative legal research, the study of a legal rule or regulation as a system related to legal events. Normative legal research emphasizes library research to obtain secondary data in the form of documents. Normative legal research examines law conceptualized as norms or rules applicable in society and serving as a guideline for individual behavior (Muhaimin, 2020). This research seeks to explain the concept of gender-based violence against women, outlining the data and impacts resulting from such acts of violence. This research uses a conceptual approach and a case study approach. The conceptual approach begins with legal perspectives on the issue under study, while the case study approach examines cases related to the issue at hand (Marzuki, 2017).

Research Approach

The research approach used in this study consists of two approaches, as follows.

a. Statute Approach

This approach is used to understand the laws and regulations related to the legal issues being examined in this study (Fajar & Ahmad Y., 2010).

b. Conceptual Approach

This approach departs from the perspectives and doctrines that have developed specifically in legal science, allowing researchers to discover

ideas that give rise to understandings, concepts, principles, and the law itself that are relevant to the problem faced in this study. The perspectives and doctrines in this study serve as references for solving the research problems (Syamsudin, 2021).

Research Object

The objects of this study are the normative object, the reconstruction of regulations, and the victimology perspective. Meanwhile, the empirical object is the phenomenon of femicide in news portals regarding femicide cases and in district court decisions regarding the murder of women correlated with femicide.

Legal Research Materials

Two legal sources are used in this study.

- a. *Primary Legal Materials*. The data sources used as primary legal materials in this research come from data collected by the National Commission on Violence Against Women in its annual reports and other reading materials related to this research. Thus, the primary legal materials in this study include the Criminal Code (KUHP) and Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the New Criminal Code. Furthermore, they consist of laws and regulations, official records such as academic papers and minutes of meetings on the formation of laws and regulations, and decisions of judges at both the District Court and the Supreme Court levels related to this research. Marzuki (2017) argues that primary legal materials have authority.
- b. *Secondary Legal Materials*. Secondary legal materials consist of data that provide information on primary legal materials and secondary legal materials sourced from magazines, mass media, and the internet.

Data Collection Techniques

The legal material collection methods used are literature study and document study. Document study for legal research includes the study of legal materials, consisting of primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials. These legal materials serve as benchmarks or norms in assessing legal facts to be resolved as legal problems (Marzuki, 2017).

This study reviewed the results of legal research in the form of dissertations, theses, books, legal journals, articles, and issues. Legal materials in the form of existing reference literature were then read and reviewed in depth to obtain an analysis.

Legal Material Analysis

The analysis used is descriptive qualitative, describing the presentation of the analysis results and drawing conclusions. Qualitative analysis techniques involve

processing and analyzing collected data into a systematic, orderly, structured, and meaningful form (Abubakar, 2021). According to Solikin (2021), the stages of legal material analysis consist of:

- a. selecting articles containing legal principles that regulate specific issues according to the research subject;
- b. systematizing these articles to enable classification;
- c. analyzing the articles using existing legal principles; and
- d. compiling a construction based on provisions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Law enforcement officials lack of good partisanship even though femicide is the peak of violence against women. This is because Indonesia has not regulated femicide specifically. Indonesia actually has several rules on the protection of women and girls that are scattered, including the Human Rights Law, the Child Protection Law, the PKDRT Law, and the TPKS Law, but none have explicitly regulated femicide.

Currently, cases of female murder tend to be processed with a general approach without paying attention to the context of gender-based violence that underlies it, resulting in its settlement as murder in general. This indifference to context results in narrow verdicts, without accommodating the social and psychological complexities of female victims. Meanwhile, substantive justice requires recognition of the structural background of gender inequality and the unequal power relations between perpetrators and female victims. Without explicit rules, judges rely on subjective individual sensitivity, so there is a risk of inconsistencies in the verdict (Razaqa et al., 2025).

Table 1. Verdict on Femicide, 2024-2025

No	Decision Number	Judge's Considerations Regarding Femicide	Weighted Reasons in the Decision
1	Decision Number 2182 K/Pid/2025	In considering the verdict, the Panel of Cassation Judges highlighted the defendant's actions of carrying sharp weapons, attacking his wife and in-laws until the wife died and the in-laws suffered permanent disabilities, including a skull fracture that impaired their ability to speak normally.	The defendant's mistake was classified as a femicidal crime because between the defendant and the victim there was a power relationship. The victim was the defendant's wife and in-laws, and the crime was carried out in such a heinous way at the defendant's in-laws' house. The defendant had carefully considered the act. Considering aspects of justice, legal certainty, and benefits for the community to have a deterrent effect on others not to do so, the judge imposed the death penalty.
2	Decision Number 1466 K/Pid/2024	Intimate femicide, murder of the victim by the defendant, who was the defendant's lover. The panel of Supreme Court	The defendant tried to avoid responsibility, even though the victim was the defendant's girlfriend who was supposed to

		Justices in the a quo case believed that no valid evidence was found to establish credibility. Therefore, in this case, there was no belief that a criminal act existed and that the defendant was the perpetrator. The defendant did not have the mens rea to commit a criminal act.	be protected by the defendant. The defendant did not admit his actions and complicated the trial.
3	Decision Number 107/Pid.B/2024/PN.Bgr	The judge considered the existence of a "context of gender relations" between the defendant and the victim, which resulted in a hierarchical, unequal, and dependent relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. Therefore, the judge concluded that the relationship was a factor in the element of the defendant's premeditated murder.	No explicit grounds for balking regarding gender status were found in the verdict, but it was considered that the defendant committed murder blindly against the victim.
4	Decision Number 871/Pid.B/2024/PN SRG	Intimate femicide, the murder of the victim by the defendant, who was his wife, due to being offended because after finishing having sex, while still on the victim's body, the victim told the defendant "Yes, sir, this is the last one, let's just flock". Hearing this, the defendant was emotional and strangled the victim's face and neck until the victim died.	The defendant, as the victim's, husband was supposed to protect the victim as his wife. However, the defendant's actions actually hurt and resulted in the death of the victim, Desti Maria Rahmawati. The defendant's actions disturbed the community.

Source: Direktori Putusan Mahkamah Agung (Supreme Court Decision Directory)

The four cases above show a consistent pattern that women are victims in intimate relationships. Psychologically, this can be explained by several factors. First, women are more often victims of femicide because of the imbalance of power relations dynamics in personal relationships. In many cases, male perpetrators use violence as a means to control their partner, especially when they feel their self-esteem or authority is threatened. This is known as coercive control, which is a pattern of manipulative behavior that isolates, dominates, and curbs the victim's freedom. Second, it shows that jealousy, a sense of belonging, and the fear of losing one's partner often trigger acts of violence and even murder.

Third, many women survive in dangerous relationships due to emotional dependence, social pressure, or fear. The cycle of violence pattern explains that violence usually occurs repeatedly: starting from the "tense" phase, then the "explosion of violence", then the "honeymoon" when the perpetrator regrets and promises to change. This cycle makes it difficult for victims to get out of the relationship even though it is high risk. Thus, it can be understood that femicide is not just an individual crime, but a structural and psychological phenomenon rooted in patriarchy, unequal power relations, and emotional control in intimate

relationships. Without specific legal recognition, this psychological vulnerability further worsens the position of women as a vulnerable group of victims.

These four decisions show that the absence of femicide regulations makes judges rely only on the Criminal Code (Articles 338, 340, or 351 paragraph (3)). As a result, the judge's consideration focuses more on the formal aspects (evidence, details, and the defendant's attitude) rather than the dimensions of gender-based discrimination. In reality, the characteristics of femicides are very real: female victims, perpetrators who are intimate partners, and the existence of unequal power relations. The four decisions mentioned above are very different: the death penalty in Decision Number 2182 K/Pid/2025 is different from the case of Ronald Tannur in Decision Number 1466 K/Pid/2024. In the Ronald Tannur case, the victim Dini Sera Afrianti died after being abused by the defendant who was her lover. At the first level, the Surabaya District Court actually acquitted the defendant. However, the Supreme Court annulled the decision and sentenced him to 5 years in prison based on Article 351 paragraph (3) of the Criminal Code. The judge considered the defendant guilty of committing persecution resulting in death, but still did not mention the element of femicide. The consideration is more directed to the facts of the incident, without acknowledging that the victim died in an unequal gender relationship.

The urgency of formulating feminist legal norms is also strengthened by the progressive legal paradigm developed by Rahardjo (2009), which states that the law must play a role as a social tool to correct existing conditions and realize true justice, not just as a collection of inflexible rules. Without the regulation of femicide, Indonesian law fails to perform this function. Therefore, the regulation of femicide as a separate offense is urgently needed to be immediately presented in Indonesian law. This rule will ensure the consistency of decisions, provide substantive protection for women, while shifting the law towards a progressive and responsive direction that is more in line with the social and psychological realities of women victims of violence (Natalia & Permatasari, 2026).

Indonesia is in an emergency for femicide cases. Therefore, there is a need for a regulatory reconstruction of the femicide phenomenon and gender-based violence against women based on a victimization perspective. Femicide from a victimological perspective places women as victims due to gender inequality and vulnerable patriarchal structures. The victimology study analyzes the victim's position, victim involvement, and legal protection for women who are subjected to gender-based violence resulting in murder. Femicide is often rooted in unequal power relations, placing women as targets of crime due to positions that are considered weaker or inferior in society.

Victimology is a field of study that focuses on learning about crime victims. Terminologically, victimology is a study of the victim, the causes of victimization, and the consequences of victimization as a social reality (Yulia, 2010). Femicide is often triggered by a patriarchal culture that considers women as property or inferior, resulting in victim-precipitation or vulnerable victims in general.

Victim Precipitation is the attitude and state of a person who will be a potential victim or attitudes and circumstances that can trigger a person to

commit a crime. The role of crime victims is related to what the victim does, when something is done, and where it is done. The discussion of crime victims, paradigms, and existing constructions of thinking is certainly inseparable from the science of victimology (Mahaliya & Munandar, 2023).

According to the researchers, apart from victim precipitation where the victim triggers the perpetrator to commit a criminal act in the form of femicide, there is a need for regulatory reconstruction of femicide phenomena that occur as a result of the inequality of power relations and patriarchal culture still rooted in Indonesia, making the case of femicide in Indonesia an iceberg phenomenon. Femicide in Indonesia is an iceberg phenomenon because the cases reported to the authorities are much fewer than the actual number. Many cases are hidden due to negative stigma, victim or family fear, the view of violence as a private problem, and a patriarchal culture that normalizes gender violence.

Below are several cases of femicide in Indonesia classified using a qualitative research method based on data collection techniques used in the research. This documentation study was carried out based on data from online news portals. In the end, femicide cases are classified based on the chronology of cases and the factors that cause femicide, as shown in the table below.

Table 2. Femicide Cases in Indonesia, 2025-2026

No	Case Chronology	News Source	Causal Factors
1	Satria Juhanda, alias Wanda (25 years old), was found guilty of murdering and mutilating a woman, Septia Adinda (25 years old). Furthermore, the perpetrator also killed two other women, Siska Oktavia Rusdi alias Cika (23 years old) and Adek Gustiana (24 years old). This case came to light after the discovery of a headless, handless, and footless body in the Batang Anai River, Padang Pariaman, West Sumatra, on Tuesday (June 17). (Pariaman, 2025)	Kumparan.com	Situational Factors. The causative factor for the murder of Septia was based on debts and receivables. The perpetrator was hurt because the victim did not pay the debt, and the two were involved in a fight until finally Septia died at the hands of Wanda. Meanwhile, the murders of Cika and Adek occurred due to personal factors. This was because there was an indication of romantic motives. Wanda was hurt because Cika was taught to cheat with Adek while undergoing <i>Kuliah Kerja Nyata</i> (KKN) [Community Service Program].
2	The murder and mutilation incident took place at a hotel in Kediri on Sunday (19/1). At that time, the suspect, Rohmad Tri Hartanto alias Antok (32), asked the victim, UK (30), a resident of Bence, Garum, Blitar, to meet. (Kediri, 2025)	CNN Indonesia	Situational Factors. The perpetrator and the victim initially made an appointment at Adisurya Hotel, Kediri. However, at that time, the two were involved in a fight, until finally the perpetrator was upset and committed violence. When he found out that the victim was dead, the perpetrator

			mutilated the victim and dumped her body in several other cities: Trenggalek, Ngawi, and Ponorogo.
3	The police succeeded in uncovering the motive for the murder of a young woman with the initials RS whose body was found in a box and wrapped in a burlap sack on the banks of the Denai River, Jalan Menteng Tujuh, Medan Denai, Medan, North Sumatra. (Medan, 2026)	Beritasatu.com	Situational Factors. The murder was strongly suspected to have been triggered by the suspect's annoyance and heartache after the victim refused an invitation to have unnatural sexual intercourse. This desire was triggered by the suspect's habit of watching pornographic films through social media applications.
4	A woman with the initials BL was found dead in a boarding house in Block 6, Lubuk Baja, Batam, Riau Islands. The police arrested the victim's boyfriend. Bareleng <i>Kombes Pol</i> (Police Chief Commissioner) Zaenal Arifin said the victim was found on Thursday (18/12/2025). The police secured the suspected perpetrator of the murder. The perpetrator was known to be the victim's boyfriend. (Batam, 2025)	detik.com	Situational Factors. The motive for the murder was allegedly triggered by the victim's words that offended the perpetrator. The perpetrator then strangled the victim by wrapping a cloth around the victim's neck until she died.
5	The Mojokerto Police succeeded in uncovering a murder case accompanied by mutilation that shocked the residents of Surabaya and Mojokerto. A young man named Alvi Maulana (24) had the heart to kill his girlfriend, TAS (25), then mutilated the victim's body into hundreds of pieces. Some of the victim's body pieces were disposed of in Mojokerto, while the rest were stored at the victim's boarding house in Surabaya. (Surabaya, 2025)	humas.polri.go.id	Situational Factors. The perpetrator returned home late at night, but the boarding house door was locked from the inside by the victim. An argument ensued until the perpetrator stabbed the victim's neck with a kitchen knife. One stab left the victim bleeding. After confirming that the victim was dead, the perpetrator mutilated his girlfriend's body in the bathroom.
6	A husband with the initials ND (67) recklessly killed and mutilated his wife, HH (60), in Bintan Permata Indah Housing, East Tanjungpinang, Riau	detik.com	Situational Factors. There was a verbal altercation between the suspect and the victim in the dining room. The suspect then got emotional and went out of

	Islands. After killing the victim, the perpetrator mutilated his wife's body and threw some of the body pieces into an empty house. (Tanjungpinang, 2026)		the house to take a piece of wood from the flower pot in front of the house.
7	Police have named Ahmad Ronny Hasiholan (44) as a suspect in the murder case of a woman whose body was found in the bedroom of a house on Jalan Damai Raya Number 51 RT 05/RW 11 Meruyung, Limo, Depok, on Saturday (7/3/2026). Ronny was known to be the husband of the victim with the initials DH (55). (Depok, 2026)	WartaKotalive.com	Situational Factors. In mid-October 2025, the two were involved in an argument at the house. In the argument, the suspect covered the victim's mouth with his right hand. The victim resisted by scratching the suspect. After that, the suspect immediately strangled the victim using the perpetrator's left hand until the victim was weak or helpless. The perpetrator then tied the victim's neck using raffia rope to ensure that the victim died.
8	A woman in Baubau was found dead in a charred and naked condition in a river stream in Baubau on Sunday (21/12/2025) at around 12.30 Central Indonesian Time. (Baubau, 2025)	Liputan6.com	Situational Factors. The victim was pregnant and asked for accountability from the perpetrator.
9	The murder case of a beautiful lecturer named Erni alias EY (37) in Bungo, Jambi, reveals a dark story that began with an illicit romantic relationship. The police confirmed that the perpetrator of the murder was not a stranger to the victim, but her own lover — a member of the Tebo Police with the initials W (22). (Jambi, 2025)	GoRiau.com	Situational Factors. The perpetrator was angry because the victim wanted to end the relationship. At the scene of the incident, they fought, and the perpetrator's emotions escalated to killing the victim.
10	Lukas Budi (54), the man who killed his lover with the initials RI (38) in a rented house on Jalan Mejing Wetan, Ambarketawang, Kapanewon Gamping, Sleman. (Sleman, 2025)	Kumparan.com	The perpetrator was angry because the victim wanted to end the romantic relationship with the perpetrator. The two quarreled. The victim hit the perpetrator, which resulted in his dentures coming off. The perpetrator was angry and slammed the victim to the floor. The victim was lying helpless. Then, the

			perpetrator slit her neck with a kitchen knife in the rented kitchen.
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From the table above, it can be seen that of the 10 cases described, 5 occurred in Sumatra, 4 on the island of Java, and 1 on the island of Sulawesi. Most of them occurred on the island of Sumatra. Based on complaint data submitted to *Komnas Perempuan* (National Commission on Violence Against Women) in 2025, there are at least 10 cases of femicide, consisting of 7 intimate femicides and 3 non-intimate femicides (Komnas Perempuan, 2025b). One of them is in the form of indirect intimate femicide, when years of neglect and psychological violence cause the victim to die.

Meanwhile, based on media monitoring, from November 1, 2024 to October 31, 2025, there were 453 reports of female murders, and 239 cases were identified as femicide. Komnas Perempuan (2025b) highlights 15 cases of femicide experienced by prostituted women, 11 cases of femicide in the context of online gender-based violence, 5 cases of femicide in the context of armed conflict, 2 cases related to gender and sexual identity diversity (KIGS), and 1 case of femicide against persons with disabilities. In addition, femicide against girls reached 24 cases (Komnas Perempuan, 2025b).

The reconstruction of femicide regulation from a victimization perspective urges a shift from the focus on the perpetrator to the protection of the victim, adopting a gender-based approach to address multiple victimization. Special arrangements are needed to recognize femicide as a gender-based hate crime, not just an ordinary murder, to provide comprehensive justice, restitution, and rehabilitation for victims and their families. Regulations must distinguish femicide from general murder (Articles 338-340 of the Criminal Code) by highlighting the motive of hatred against women (gender-based motive).

According to the researchers, the reconstruction of regulations on the crime of femicide is indispensable to avoid secondary or multiple victimization, where the victim or the victim's family is blamed, stigmatized, or re-traumatized during the legal process. Preventing re-trauma (revitalization) in the legal process can be done by being accompanied by legal counsel or psychological companions, submitting a request for a special examination (victim- or child-friendly room), asking the judge to reprimand intimidating questions, and using the TPKS Law to ensure the protection of victims' rights during trials.

A reconstruction of victimology regulations in femicide cases is needed to address the absence of specific legal norms that recognize gender-based killings. This approach is crucial to prevent re-victimization, protect victims' rights, and ensure that criminal justice not only punishes perpetrators, but also provides justice and comprehensive recovery for victims' families. In other words, victimology helps enrich the perspective of criminal law by emphasizing the importance of restorative justice, in which the restoration of social relationships damaged by crime and the recovery of victim trauma are primary concerns (Rohmat, 2024).

The current regulations do not distinguish between femicide and murder in general. This is due to a legal vacuum where there is no specific regulation

regarding femicide. Thus, femicide cases that reach the legal realm and have become an iceberg phenomenon in the end are only considered murder cases in general. In fact, femicide is an extreme murder of women due to gender identity, which is rooted in patriarchal domination. Often in legal proceedings, the victim or the family is blamed, which adds to the trauma. Regulatory reconstruction ensures a more sensitive and protective legal process. Through special regulations, the state is required to investigate the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, as well as the context of the violence behind the crime.

CONCLUSION

Reconstructing the law on femicide and gender-based violence (GBV) from a victimological perspective is urgent because the current criminal justice system treats these crimes as standard murders or isolated incidents, effectively ignoring the systemic vulnerabilities, persistent trauma, and structural inequalities experienced by victims. Standard criminal law focuses overwhelmingly on the perpetrator's intent to kill, obscuring the misogyny, power dominance, and gender-biased control that drive these crimes. A victimological perspective forces the law to evaluate the entire chronology of victimization, including chronic domestic violence, stalking, and threats that precede the final fatal act.

Adequate training should empower police and prosecutors to avoid simplifying the motives for femicide as “jealousy” or “hurt,” but rather to uncover the roots of patriarchal culture and control over victims. Femicide cases are often preceded by repeated threats or violence. Well-trained law enforcement officers can recognize indicators of increased danger from the first report of violence and thereby save victims' lives. Through capacity building, officers can effectively implement the *Sistem Peradilan Pidana Terpadu Penanganan Kasus Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan* (SPPT-PKKTP) [Integrated Criminal Justice System for the Handling of Cases of Violence Against Women] perspective in the field.

Legal reconstruction holds state institutions to strict due diligence standards. If a woman reports domestic violence and the state fails to provide protection, resulting in her death, the rule of law must recognize this as institutional negligence. Regulatory reconstruction of the phenomenon of femicide is needed to make the law victim-centered, codifying direct rights to restitution, mental health support for bereaved families, and state legal protections in the form of guardianship for children and dependents. Without a victim-oriented regulatory definition, femicide is buried under statistics of “ordinary homicide” or simply “assault resulting in death.”

Although Indonesia has an *Undang-Undang Penghapusan Kekerasan Dalam Rumah Tangga* (Domestic Violence Law) and *undang-undang tentang korban dan penyintas Kekerasan Dalam Rumah Tangga* (Law on Victims and Survivors of Domestic Violence), neither explicitly criminalizes or considers gender-motivated killings. When cases of domestic violence or sexual assault escalate to death, prosecutors revert to the general homicide law. Victimological

reconstruction bridges this gap, treating murder as the predictable final climax of a continuing cycle of violence. From a victimological perspective, Indonesian women often occupy a structurally vulnerable position due to economic dependency, age, and strict gender roles. Patriarchal culture often labels domestic violence as a private family matter (a shame) rather than a human rights violation. Reconstructing the law through victimology forces the legal system to acknowledge how societal pressures force victims to live in deadly and high-risk environments.

In Indonesia, women who report domestic violence often face apathy, neglect, or even outright victim-blaming by law enforcement. Legal reconstruction from a victimological perspective formally establishes the state's direct responsibility to the victim. Therefore, rather than simply treating cases as murder or assault resulting in death, there should be specific regulations criminalizing femicide.

Femicide is distinct from murder and therefore should be regulated separately and explicitly. The motive for a murder is not based on the victim's gender identity (e.g., robbery or a spontaneous argument). Femicide, on the other hand, is fueled by hatred of women (misogyny), attempts to control or dominate in a masculine manner, and is often preceded by domestic violence or sexual assault.

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Gender Reform in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates: A comparative study

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ABSTRACT

The Middle East is a region rife with conflict and war, with no shortage of its own problems. A region that is strategic yet hotly contested by various powers, from which it derives its rather unique socio-political and cultural landscape. A common consensus is that due to its relatively outdated values and constant power struggle, the Middle East region as a whole is one where vulnerable groups, such as refugees, children, and most notably women, suffer from mistreatment and lack of adequate rights. Despite that, the region still shows large gaps in treatment and rights to these groups, even between neighbors. One of the most striking cases is Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Despite being direct neighbors, both nations have vastly different approaches to matters such as gender issues. Where Saudi Arabia still struggles with basic democratization and emancipation -such as during the Arab Spring wave of protests- the UAE instead has embraced a more forward way of thinking, allowing opportunities for women to serve in official government representative offices. Our study will examine the case between these two countries, and what factors created this diverging path, using qualitative observations of the two nations' stance on gender-related matters.

KEYWORDS: *gender-rights development, Middle East, women's emancipation, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, gender-disparity, gender-rights transformation.*

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East has been a historically diverse region and a strategically positioned one. It sits at the confluence of the Asian, African, and European continents, and thus becomes an important link in the flow of trade, goods, and even people through the ages. Cultures also intersect in this geographic junction, cross-introducing arts and customs between the people on this ancient trade route.

Inevitably, civilizations and empires emerge. A region dubbed the "fertile crescent" stretches between the Mesopotamian river delta towards Aleppo in Syria, and Alexandria in Egypt. It did not take long for hegemonies, such as the Persian Sassanids and the Greco-Roman Empire, to expand into the region, dividing the various tribes and cultures into their own realms. Finally, Islam

rose. A religion endemic to the Middle Eastern Arabs, and now almost inseparable from their cultural and national identity. Since its rise in 610 A.D., it expanded and grew alongside Arabian culture and norms, forming a large backbone over the Middle Eastern empire and civilization, and most importantly, its identity. The seat of Middle Eastern power would often change hands in the years to come: the Umayyads in the immediate post-Rashidun era, followed by the Abbasids and Fatimids, until eventually they were all succeeded by the rise of the Ottoman Empire.

A noticeable pattern is visible, and it has been prevalent in Middle Eastern and Arabic society since the dawn of civilization. The region is rife with conflict, and with it, countless wars and conquest. Even before the rise of major empires, the tribal culture of the Middle East revolved around martial prowess, strength, and conquest, notions that play heavily to masculine traits. These would be ingrained into later traditions and civilization, and survive until even the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, by the end of World War I, most of the Middle East would fall under the colonial rule of Western powers. The Levant split between French and British holdings, Egypt under British rule, along with the territories around the Persian Gulf. Some territories, such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia, maintained nominal independence; however, the latter would emerge more as a collection of tribal polities rather than a proper modern state.

The cultural and societal values of Middle Eastern society, as a result, advanced little from its heyday under the wing of the Islamic caliphates, and were not helped by being far from the center of Islamic power in Istanbul during the time of the Ottoman Empire. Arab society, by and large, still revolves around tribal and traditionalist customs, and its people are still dominated by either farmers, herders, caravan-traders, or the like. As a result, more modern notions such as “democracy” as viewed through Western lenses or emancipation are not prevalent, at least not in a clearly manifested form.

It is not to say that the rise of Islam does little to benefit traditional Arabic customs. In fact, Islamic law played a significant role in shaping gender dynamics, particularly in areas such as family, property, and public space. Women had certain rights under Islamic law, such as access to property and economic activities, and were included in and able to use the legal system to enhance their social and economic positions (Tucker, 2020). This by itself is a massive shift from pre-Islamic Arabia, where rights for women and children are more grey, or even unprotected (Bimawan et al., 2025). However, the interpretation of Islamic law often reinforced a patriarchal structure, privileging men in family and societal roles, and interpretations of laws that benefit power-holders at the time could limit their practical application (Tucker, 2020).

As a result, despite Islamic family law codifying distinct roles for men and women, it often emphasizes male authority within the family as a “Leader” in the household. While women had legal rights in marriage and divorce, the aforementioned role of males led to patriarchal interpretations and practices, frequently constraining women’s rights (Louden-Cooke, 2024). Moreover, reforms in family law during the 19th century remained limited, as Islamic law remained deeply embedded in socio-cultural practices and the enduring backbone of Arab and Middle Eastern society and identity. This continuity

therefore reinforced traditional gender roles, with men retaining significant control over family and marital decisions (Dahlgren & Lindbekk, 2020).

Colonialism, however, introduced Western-based perspectives on societal issues. One of them was the notion of gender emancipation, which became the seed of the Islamic feminist movement. The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the rise of feminist movements in the Middle East, partly influenced by global women's movements. These movements sought to challenge both colonial narratives and patriarchal interpretations of Islam, advocating for reforms in areas like education, marriage, and legal rights (Zachs & Halevi, 2015). However, they took a different approach compared to the mainstream feminist movement, by reinterpreting religious texts to counter "textual misogyny" and reclaim the egalitarian principles of the Qur'an. This approach sought to reconcile feminist ideals with Islamic traditions, offering an alternative to secular feminist models (Haniffa, 2016).

In places under colonial rule, or those that had peaceful transitions from their colonial overlords, these ideas easily took root and grew. One of the earliest was Egypt, where plenty of modern Islamic thinkers emerged, along with other secular and religious movements seeking to reform both Islamic and Arab society. However, in this case, I have taken the case of the United Arab Emirates especially, due to its large and central role in the image of an advanced Arabic society, and one of the pre-eminent Islamic states in the modern world. Since its founding in 1971, the UAE has actively promoted women's empowerment, particularly in politics. Notably, the UAE appointed the first female minister in 2004 and achieved gender parity in parliament by 2019 (Alzaabi & Yaiche, 2025). These efforts are clearly visible not just in the regional scope, but through international lenses. In contrast, the Middle East is often noted for its "backward" connotation towards rights and safety; leadership and public policies have played a pivotal role in advancing women's political participation in the UAE, positioning it as a regional model for gender inclusivity.

Meanwhile, therein also lie old, major regional powers such as Iraq, Iran, or even Saudi Arabia. All of which have been long independent from any form of colonialism, and which traditional institutions burrow deep roots in, be it in statecraft, culture, or even social life and status. Iraq had a long and complicated history of power struggles, with the then-known Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq's leader deposed in 1958 by the 14th of July coup, leading to continuous political violence which culminated in the demise of the Iraqi Ba'athist party government of Saddam Hussein. However, to this day, Iraq's history of violence continues to hamper progressive initiatives from taking hold, as it becomes sidelined amidst other more important (or even necessary) efforts like rebuilding and counter-insurgency, a problem still prevalent in many war-torn Arab states nowadays.

Iran, meanwhile, to its north, stands as one of the oldest independent states of the region. The Persianate dynasties may change, but it is overall almost impervious to any attempt at external invasion or colonization efforts. The Pahlavi regime saw plenty of progress not only in economic build-up, but also in societal transformation, mirroring Western societal evolution. This, however,

would be put to a stop by the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Since then, societal and even personal freedom has been curtailed in the name of “Religion”, with the now “Islamic Republic of Iran” becoming a proto-theocratic authoritarian state, where nearly every facet of its statehood and society is now under control by the Khomeini regime. This has caused a degradation in personal freedom and societal progressivism in the nation, of which even the role that women play has been slowly curtailed since the 90s and 2000s.

However, for our comparison against the UAE, I have taken the nation of Saudi Arabia as the second subject in this case. An independent state since its separation from the Ottoman Empire, Saudi Arabia continued to exist as a collection of tribal polities under a “de jure” rule by House Saud of Nejd. As a sovereign nation existing on the sidelines of preexisting global superpowers, they see very little development, both societal and economic. As for gender discourse, their ideology has historically been rooted in Islamic principles and tribal traditions, emphasizing the role of women as caregivers confined to the private sphere. This idealized model of the “Muslim woman” has been central to Saudi national identity, with men acting as guardians. However, the male guardianship system and notions of family honor have reinforced gender segregation and limited women's public roles (Giladi, 2023). Though the discovery of oil in the 20th century brought economic modernization, it did not immediately challenge restrictive gender norms, not helped by the secluded, authoritarian rule of the Saudi dynasty.

My research therefore wishes to delve deeper into the divide between these two neighboring, yet vastly different states, both in their policies and their societal culture. Through a qualitative lens on the respective nation's history and upbringing, I will provide an overview of how tradition and religion shape the two countries, and how they affect their present-day policies and outlook.

METHODS

Firstly, I would like to start with the socio-historical aspects, highlighting the difference between Saudi Arabia (as an independent Tribal Monarchy) and the United Arab Emirates (as a polity of tribal powers), the latter of which was an ex-subject of colonial Britain, and also adopts a more democratic-leaning constitution compared to its Saudi peers. A deeper look at these factors in context, I believe, can better explain the divergence between the two nations' different gender outlooks, by not detaching the ideals of feminism from the reality of Arab society itself. Cross-referencing these with factors such as social class and tribal values, local cultural and family values, the role of religion as a backbone that shapes Arab culture and society, whilst taking a specific interest in the Arab Spring period, one which became the culmination and defined gender struggle in the Middle East and the Arab world.

The research would lean heavily into the Constructivist theory's lens, coupled with a deeper look into the role of Feminism in not just civilian lives, but also state politics. For example, on the UAE side, their gender policies are not just functional but also symbolic, projecting an image of progressiveness while maintaining cultural authenticity. This duality is evident in how Emirati

women are portrayed as mediators between tradition and modernity, reinforcing national identity while appealing to global audiences (Goby, 2026), itself leaning into a constructivist understanding of how policies can shape and be shaped by collective beliefs about gender roles.

The historical aspect would be done through the lens of Postcolonial theory, as it can explain an alternative perspective on the issues faced by the UAE as a post-colonial country, Saudi Arabia as a largely independent country, and how it often differs from the primarily “Western Ideal” of things. In the UAE, for example, colonial legacies influence contemporary policies, particularly in areas like labor and migration. Historical narratives around trafficking and the regulation of women’s movement during British colonial rule continue to shape gendered policies, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups such as working-class and Muslim women (Wright, 2025). Postcolonialism theory highlights how these policies perpetuate uneven power dynamics rooted in colonial histories, challenging Western feminist frameworks that often overlook the unique lived experiences and agency of women in the Middle East.

The method I would therefore take would lean more into an institutional-interpretative approach. By looking with a qualitative lens at the various factors mentioned before through a qualitative lens, cross-referencing them with each other as well as present-day factors such as Saudi Arabian or United Arab Emirates policies. By reading deeper into the various socio-cultural, traditional, or even religious contexts of the people in the region, and pairing it with present-day realities and policies, I hope to piece together a more concrete, contextually sensitive picture of the present-day situation regarding gender equality in both Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Thus, the research would combine all these factors and analyze them through a qualitative lens, bridging the differing factors to create a hypothesis that may explain the gulf in gender development and policies between these two neighboring countries.

DISCUSSION

Despite the Islamic world being notable for its advances in many fields, even in social sciences and rights compared to its European peers in the past, for modern standards -especially in the Middle-East- the reputation of rights and equality in the Arabic sphere of influence is not one that is viewed in a good light. It is not helped by the non-religious, antiquated values held by traditional Arab societies, which are often enshrined by countries, especially like Saudi Arabia, which places an emphasis on a single, strong ruler who possesses martial prowess or other forms of power.

Of course, these social classes and tribal identities play a critical role in shaping women’s opportunities. Women from tribal backgrounds often face additional barriers due to traditional norms and expectations tied to their tribal identity. For instance, tribal women engaging in entrepreneurship must navigate identity conflicts and societal expectations, which influence their ability to develop entrepreneurial identities (Alzahrani et al., 2026). Additionally, Riansyah (Riansyah & Juned, 2024) stated that tribal norms, such as the concept

of *ayb* (shame), reinforce gender segregation and restrict women's professional opportunities.

Notably, traditional family values also play a role in limiting opportunities. Almalki (Almalki, 2020) elaborates that Arabic family values emphasize obedience (*Al-Birr*) and male protection (*Al-Wali*), which perpetuate traditional gender roles. These values are deeply rooted in an interpretation of Islamic traditions and are reinforced through parenting practices. Whilst on the religion-front itself, Syed (Syed et al., 2018) highlights the role of religious ideologies, especially with how they deeply intersect with cultural norms to sustain gender disparities, and certain interpretations of religious texts create a bigger gulf between both genders. That is on top of basic Islamic concepts such as *hudud* (invisible boundaries) and the male guardianship system, which restrict women's autonomy and reinforce traditional gender roles.

In this research, they have managed to show the individual problems and challenges hampering advancements in gender equality in both Saudi Arabia and the UAE. However, there is still a lack of research on how the intersection between those multiple factors (e.g., class, tribal identity, and religion) uniquely shapes gender inequality in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, nor does it show how socio-historical contexts shape the societies that define the current gender norms, nor how it affects the formation of such norms. While limited research exists on sector-specific gender disparities, such as healthcare, education, and leadership, in both countries, there is a scarcity of longitudinal and quantitative studies comparing gender equality metrics between Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Omair et al., 2020; Wirayuda et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, across both countries, women's experiences are shaped by the intersection of multiple identities, including class, ethnicity, and religion. For example, women from lower social classes or minority ethnic groups face compounded disadvantages in patriarchal systems that stratify women based on wealth, ethnicity, and chastity (Aldeeb, 2021). These factors combined create complex barriers to gender equality in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and introduce the main metrics which I would like to research.

Historical Aspect

Firstly, the upbringing of both states is an important consideration, as historical factors play a major role in explaining why Saudi Arabia and the UAE developed different approaches to gender reform itself. Saudi Arabia's identity was formed through independent tribal-monarchical unification, and was formally unified as a kingdom in 1932 under Ibn Saud, and its political structure preserved strong links between monarchy, tribal authority, and conservative religious legitimacy; this more traditional-leaning background leads to the preservation of older, tribal codices and customs, and becomes a historical foundation which helps maintain patriarchal institutions such as gender segregation and male guardianship for much of the twentieth century (al-Rasheed, 2010). While the UAE, in contrast, emerged from the British-protected Trucial States and was only officially formed in 1971 after Britain withdrew from treaty relations with the Trucial States, meaning its post-independence state-

building was shaped by federation, external diplomatic engagement, and rapid modernization (Zahlan, 1978), despite the fact that the UAE's gender policies are deeply intertwined with its cultural and societal evolution. Its colonial past and subsequent independence resulted in a framework that emphasizes more Western values than the likes of Saudi Arabia, and the end product resulted in balancing modernization with the preservation of Islamic and tribal traditions, which continue to influence gender roles and expectations.

This difference is visible in contemporary gender-policy outcomes: the UAE mandated 50% female representation in its Federal National Council in 2019, whilst female-run businesses and enterprises have existed since the 90s in the UAE. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's "rude awakening" on the issue only came about after the Arab Spring, followed by promises of gender reforms that are set to accelerate more recently under Vision 2030 (Al et al., 2025). Therefore, historical context in one scope or another matters, as visible through the case of Saudi Arabia's independent formation reinforcing traditional religious-tribal legitimacy, whereas the UAE's former British-protected status and later federal modernization of the postcolonial era encouraged the former Trucial States to adopt a more "modern" ideological basis of statecraft and policies.

Social Class and Traditional Values

Our second study parameter would revolve around social class and traditional/ethnic values, and how they influence gender equality and policy in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Both nations descended from similar Arabic tribes and cultures, and were held together by large Islamic empires of the past. The values inherited from these continue to shape the modern Middle Eastern social landscape, as gender equality is not merely a lack of equal access and opportunities, but also how powerful families and clans shape which people, even women, benefit most from reform and how far reforms can challenge patriarchal social expectations.

In Saudi Arabia, gender inequality has historically been reinforced by family authority, tribal norms, and male guardianship, where parents and male authority figures strongly influence whether women work outside the home (HRW, 2016). However, heeding lessons from the Arab Spring and their push for reforms, Vision 2030 has pushed policy reform, with women's labor-force participation rising from around 20% in 2017 to a target of roughly 30% in 2020, and World Bank data later recording Saudi female labor-force participation at about 34% in 2025 (STUDYLIB, n.d.) (Worldbank, 2024). Meanwhile in the UAE, state policy presents women's empowerment as part of national modernization, with constitutional equality, equal-pay measures, domestic-violence protection, and 50% female representation in the Federal National Council; despite this however, class and ethnic hierarchy remain visible because Emirati women are more directly included in empowerment policies, while many migrant and domestic women workers remain vulnerable under labor-migration systems (pchr, n.d.).

One can infer from this that policy reform can improve women's public participation; however, social class and family backgrounds in both countries still heavily affect access to education, work, mobility, and professional networks. Moreover, especially in the case of the UAE, the representation can sometimes be inferred as mere "quota-filling" rather than a case of properly bridging the gender gap, as evident by the lack of extended access to migrant women in their empowerment policies. Therefore, in both countries, gender policies and women's empowerment are still heavily affected, or even hampered by traditional values and social hierarchy, and they do not simply disappear through legal reform; instead, they shape how gender-equality policies are implemented, who gains access to empowerment, and which groups of women remain structurally disadvantaged. It signifies a carry-over of the older tribal culture and the systems it brought with it, something endemic to not just the two nations, but to every Middle Eastern country, and is a link to how these values are affected by historical upbringing.

Cultural and Family Values

Our third study revolves around the cultural & family values aspect in the Middle East, and how they—I would argue—most directly affect how gender equality is realized in the region. For example, in Saudi Arabia, cultural and family values strongly influence gender equality by positioning the family as a hierarchical institution in which male authority remains central to women's social and legal autonomy, in line with traditional Arabic customs and upheld by interpretation of Islamic teachings. This can be seen in the 2022 Personal Status Law, which, in spite of pushes for reforms driven by protests such as the Arab Spring, still requires women to obtain male guardian involvement in marriage and preserves unequal rights in areas such as divorce, custody, and marital authority, showing that family-based patriarchy continues to shape gender policy even after recent modernization reforms (amnesty.org, 2022). In addition, research on women's employment in Saudi Arabia shows that family approval, especially from parents and male authority figures, remains one of the most important factors affecting whether women participate in work outside the home; although women's labor-force participation increased from around 20% in 2017 to roughly 30% in 2020, cultural expectations about women's family roles still influence how reforms are experienced in daily life (Agboola, 2021) (Alotaibi et al., 2021). Therefore, Saudi gender policy is not only shaped by law or economic reform, but also by deeply rooted family norms that continue to regulate women's mobility, marriage, employment, and public participation (amnesty.org, 2022).

Similarly in the UAE, traditional Arabic cultural and family values also influence gender equality. However, the state views -and thus, frames- family stability and women's empowerment as complementary rather than contradictory. The UAE's National Policy for Empowerment of Emirati Women 2023–2031 explicitly includes the goal of building "strong, cohesive, and supportive families" while also integrating women into the labor market, leadership, entrepreneurship, and future economic sectors, with heavy emphasis on cross-integration between fields (uaelegislation, 2023). Such

policies show that the UAE does not reject traditional family values outright, instead incorporating them into a modernization agenda where women are encouraged to contribute to national development while maintaining socially accepted family roles, itself a different perspective on gender empowerment from the traditional (Western) perspective of feminism. The UAE's policy direction is also reflected in legal and institutional measures such as equal-pay legislation, protection against domestic violence, women's access to education and employment, and the requirement that women hold 50% of Federal National Council seats UAEL (uaelegislation, 2023; pchr, n.d.). Thus, while cultural expectations remain important in Emirati society, they are increasingly used by the state to legitimize women's public participation rather than restrict it, which is part of the UAE's agenda to showcase its relative "modernity" in comparison to its neighbors.

The comparison highlighted above shows that both Saudi Arabia and the UAE are nonetheless still shaped by conservative cultural and family values. However, they differ in how those values are translated into gender policy, either as a result of differing ideologies on the national level, or by subtle cultural differences between Arab tribes. In Saudi Arabia, for example, family authority has historically operated as a mechanism of control, especially through male guardianship and legal rules governing marriage and family relations. However, in the UAE, family values are presented as part of a national empowerment model, where women's participation in politics, work, and leadership is viewed as beneficial to both the family and the nation. Therefore, in these aspects, cultural and family values do not automatically prevent gender reform; rather, I would argue that their impact depends on how the state interprets and institutionalizes them within national policy.

State-Led Reform and the Politics of Gender Modernization

The comparison between Saudi Arabia and the UAE becomes more significant when gender reform is understood not simply as a response to social pressure, but as a form of state-building. In both countries, gender equality has increasingly become connected to national development, international reputation, economic diversification, and the construction of a modern national identity. This suggests that gender reform cannot be understood only through the traditional opposition between "conservative" and "progressive" societies. Rather, the two cases demonstrate different ways in which authoritarian or highly centralized states can selectively reinterpret existing cultural norms in order to accommodate new economic and political objectives.

The UAE provides a particularly clear example of state-led gender modernization. Women's participation in politics, government, entrepreneurship, and professional life has increasingly been incorporated into the official narrative of national development. The National Policy for Empowerment of Emirati Women 2023–2031, for instance, does not frame women's empowerment as a rejection of family or cultural values. Instead, it presents women's participation as compatible with strong families, national cohesion, economic development, and social stability (uaelegislation, 2023). This is important because it demonstrates that gender reform does not necessarily

require the state to abandon traditional cultural legitimacy. The UAE instead reconstructs the meaning of tradition so that women's public participation becomes compatible with national identity.

From a constructivist perspective, this represents an important transformation in the social meaning of gender. Gender roles are not simply fixed cultural structures; they are continuously reproduced through institutions, discourse, and political practice. When the state begins to describe women as political representatives, entrepreneurs, professionals, and contributors to national development, it gradually changes the socially legitimate meaning of womanhood. Goby (2026), for example, demonstrates how Emirati womanhood can be framed through the simultaneous language of heritage and modernity. Women become symbols of a nation that is able to modernize without abandoning its cultural identity. Consequently, the image of the “modern Emirati woman” is not necessarily constructed as a rejection of Arab or Islamic traditions. Instead, she becomes evidence that the UAE can selectively combine tradition with modernization.

This is different from a model in which feminism is necessarily understood as opposition to patriarchal institutions. In the UAE case, women's empowerment can be incorporated into the existing political order. The state does not necessarily need to dismantle the traditional family structure in order to promote women's participation in public life. Instead, it can redefine women's public participation as beneficial to the family and the nation. This explains why policies concerning women's leadership, education, employment, and political representation can coexist with a political system that remains highly centralized.

Saudi Arabia demonstrates a somewhat different trajectory. Historically, the Saudi political order developed through the close relationship between monarchy, tribal authority, and religious legitimacy. Al-Rasheed (2010) shows how the formation of the Saudi state cannot be separated from these political and religious foundations. Gender arrangements therefore became embedded not merely in individual social attitudes but in broader structures of authority. Male guardianship and gender segregation were consequently connected to a wider political and social order in which male authority was normalized through family, religion, and state institutions.

Recent reforms nevertheless demonstrate that these structures are not completely immutable. Vision 2030 has increasingly connected women's economic participation with national development. The rise in female labor-force participation is particularly important because it demonstrates that changes in economic policy can generate changes in gender relations. However, the persistence of family expectations and patriarchal interpretations means that formal reform does not automatically eliminate older social structures. Agboola (2021) and Syed et al. (2018) both demonstrate that women's employment decisions continue to be influenced by family relations and broader social expectations.

Therefore, the key distinction between the UAE and Saudi Arabia is not simply that one country is “modern” while the other is “traditional.” Both remain deeply connected to traditional cultural and familial structures. Rather,

the difference concerns the **political interpretation and institutionalization of those structures**. The UAE has more consistently incorporated women's public participation into its national modernization narrative, whereas Saudi Arabia has historically treated women's public autonomy as more closely connected to questions of family authority, religious legitimacy, and social order. Recent Saudi reforms indicate movement away from this older model, but the transition remains incomplete.

The Arab Spring and the Acceleration of Gender Reform

The Arab Spring is another important factor in understanding the divergence between the two countries. Although the political consequences of the Arab Spring varied considerably across the Middle East, the uprisings fundamentally challenged existing assumptions about political authority, citizenship, and social participation. Gender was part of this broader transformation because women were not simply passive observers of political change. Women's participation in protest movements also challenged the assumption that political activity belonged primarily to men.

For Saudi Arabia, the Arab Spring created an important political context in which questions of citizenship, participation, and women's rights became increasingly difficult to separate from broader discussions of political legitimacy. Although Saudi Arabia did not experience a regime change comparable to other Arab countries, the regional upheaval demonstrated the potential risks associated with social dissatisfaction. Gender reform subsequently became increasingly visible within a broader strategy of controlled modernization.

This helps explain why Saudi reforms have often occurred through state initiatives rather than through a fundamental transformation of the political system. The lifting of restrictions on women's driving, the expansion of women's employment, and changes in women's participation in public life represent significant transformations. Yet these reforms have been carefully incorporated into the existing political order. In other words, the Saudi state has attempted to modernize gender relations without surrendering its broader political authority.

The 2022 Personal Status Law illustrates the complexity of this process. Amnesty International (2022) and Human Rights Watch (2023) argue that although Saudi Arabia has introduced significant reforms, legal structures continue to institutionalize aspects of male guardianship and gender discrimination. This creates a contradiction between economic and social modernization on the one hand and the persistence of patriarchal legal structures on the other. Women can therefore experience greater opportunities in employment and public life while simultaneously encountering restrictions within family law.

This contradiction is analytically important because it challenges the assumption that gender equality progresses uniformly across different domains. A country may perform strongly in women's employment while continuing to produce inequality in marriage, divorce, custody, or family authority. Similarly,

political representation can increase without necessarily producing a redistribution of political power. Gender reform therefore needs to be examined as a multidimensional process rather than reduced to a single indicator.

The UAE demonstrates a more institutionally coordinated approach. Women's empowerment has become integrated into national policy, political representation, economic development, and international image-making. The 50 percent representation requirement for women in the Federal National Council is especially significant because it demonstrates the state's willingness to use institutional mechanisms to accelerate women's political presence. Alzaabi and Yaiche (2025) identify the UAE as a distinctive model of women's political participation in the region.

However, this achievement should not automatically be equated with complete political equality. Representation and empowerment are not synonymous. A quota can alter the demographic composition of a political institution while leaving broader structures of political authority unchanged. This is particularly important in the UAE because political participation operates within a highly centralized political system. The existence of women in formal representative positions therefore demonstrates state recognition of women's political legitimacy, but it does not necessarily demonstrate the existence of unrestricted democratic participation.

The comparison consequently reveals two different models of state-led gender reform. Saudi Arabia has increasingly pursued **reform through controlled liberalization**, in which selected restrictions are removed while the wider political structure remains intact. The UAE has more consistently pursued **institutionalized empowerment**, in which women's participation is incorporated into the state's modernization and nation-branding strategies. Both approaches are state-centered, but their historical trajectories and institutional mechanisms differ.

Intersectionality: Which Women Benefit from Reform?

Another important dimension of the comparison concerns the question of which women actually benefit from gender reform. The concept of "women" should not be treated as a homogeneous category. Gender intersects with class, nationality, ethnicity, migration status, family background, and social position. Consequently, improvements in the legal or political status of elite or citizen women may coexist with significant vulnerabilities among migrant, working-class, or domestic workers.

This issue is particularly important in the UAE. The country's international image of women's empowerment primarily concerns Emirati citizens and their participation in political and economic institutions. Yet the UAE also contains a very large migrant population, including women employed in domestic and other low-wage sectors. The existence of gender-equality policies does not necessarily mean that these women experience the same benefits. This creates a distinction between **citizen-centered gender empowerment** and **universal gender equality**.

The same issue appears in Saudi Arabia, although in different institutional forms. Alzahrani et al. (2026) demonstrate that tribal origin can influence women's entrepreneurial identity and the ways in which women negotiate expectations surrounding gender and social belonging. This finding is significant because it shows that women's empowerment cannot be measured simply through labor-force participation or the number of women entering entrepreneurship. Women must also negotiate the social meanings attached to family, tribe, reputation, and appropriate femininity.

The concept of *ayb*, discussed by Riansyah and Juned (2024), further illustrates how social expectations can operate outside formal law. Even when legislation permits women to work or participate in professional life, social sanctions and expectations may influence what kinds of work are considered acceptable. This means that legal reform can create formal opportunities without necessarily eliminating informal barriers.

The intersectional dimension therefore modifies the comparison between Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The UAE may perform better in institutional indicators of women's political participation, while Saudi Arabia may demonstrate rapid improvement in labor-force participation. Yet neither development should automatically be interpreted as universal emancipation. The crucial question is whether reforms reach women across different social classes and legal statuses.

A more complete analysis should therefore distinguish between **formal equality, substantive equality, and symbolic equality**. Formal equality concerns legal rights and institutional access. Substantive equality concerns whether women are actually able to exercise those rights in everyday life. Symbolic equality concerns the extent to which women are represented as legitimate participants in national identity and public discourse. The UAE appears particularly strong in symbolic and institutional dimensions, while Saudi Arabia has demonstrated rapid movement in substantive economic participation but continues to face legal and familial constraints. Neither country can therefore be described adequately through a simple ranking of “more” or “less” progressive.

Religion, Tradition, and the Limits of the “Backward Middle East” Narrative

The analysis also needs to avoid reproducing a simplistic Western binary in which Islam and Arab culture are automatically positioned as obstacles to women's emancipation. Such a framework would undermine the postcolonial dimension of this study. The historical record demonstrates that Islamic law itself provided women with certain property, marital, and economic rights that differed from some pre-Islamic practices (Tucker, 2020). The problem is therefore not Islam as an undifferentiated category, but the ways in which religious texts, legal traditions, political institutions, and social customs are interpreted and institutionalized.

Islamic feminism is important in this regard because it demonstrates that Muslim women can challenge patriarchal practices through engagement with Islamic traditions rather than through rejection of religion. Haniffa (2016) explains how gender debates within Islam can involve reinterpretation of

religious texts and attempts to recover egalitarian principles. Zachs and Halevi (2015) similarly demonstrate the historical development of feminist movements that challenged both colonial representations and patriarchal interpretations of Middle Eastern societies.

This perspective changes the interpretation of Saudi and UAE reforms. Gender reform does not necessarily represent the replacement of Islamic culture by Western values. Instead, it can involve competing interpretations of what Islamic, Arab, or national identity should mean in contemporary society. The UAE's approach illustrates this particularly clearly: women are presented as capable of participating in modern political and economic institutions without ceasing to be Emirati or Muslim.

Saudi Arabia also demonstrates that religious legitimacy can be reinterpreted rather than simply abandoned. The country's recent reforms suggest that the relationship between religion, state authority, and gender is dynamic. What was previously presented as culturally or religiously necessary can become subject to reinterpretation when political and economic priorities change. This reinforces the constructivist argument that norms are not static structures but are continually reproduced and contested.

The comparison therefore suggests that gender reform in the Middle East should not be evaluated according to how closely a country approaches a predetermined Western model. Instead, analysis should examine how states, families, religious institutions, and women themselves negotiate the meanings of equality within particular historical contexts. This is also where postcolonial theory becomes especially useful. It allows the researcher to recognize that modernization does not have a single universal pathway and that women's agency cannot be measured solely according to Western liberal assumptions.

Comparative Synthesis: Two Models of Gender Reform

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the divergence between Saudi Arabia and the UAE is best explained through the interaction of four major factors: historical state formation, the relationship between political authority and religion, the institutional interpretation of family and tribal values, and the strategic use of women's empowerment in national development.

Saudi Arabia inherited a particularly strong connection between monarchy, tribal legitimacy, and religious authority. These institutions historically reinforced a model of gender relations centered on male guardianship and family authority. The country's recent economic transformation has disrupted some of these arrangements, particularly through women's employment and public participation. Nevertheless, the persistence of patriarchal family-law structures demonstrates that economic modernization does not necessarily produce comprehensive gender equality.

The UAE, by contrast, emerged from a federation of former Trucial States and subsequently developed a political identity strongly associated with rapid modernization, international engagement, and economic diversification. The state has therefore had greater incentive to incorporate women's participation

into its image of national advancement. Women's empowerment becomes not only a gender policy but also a component of state legitimacy, international reputation, and national soft power.

This does not mean that the UAE has completely overcome patriarchy. Rather, it demonstrates a different strategy for managing it. Instead of presenting women's public participation as a challenge to tradition, the state incorporates women's participation into a revised understanding of tradition. Women can become representatives of both cultural continuity and modernity. This is precisely why the UAE case is theoretically valuable: it demonstrates that conservative cultural values and women's empowerment can coexist when political institutions redefine their relationship.

The principal difference between the two countries, therefore, is not the complete presence or absence of tradition. Both societies continue to be shaped by family, religion, tribal identity, and hierarchical social structures. The difference lies in **how state institutions transform those structures into political narratives and policy mechanisms**. Saudi Arabia has historically used tradition to constrain women's autonomy but is increasingly redefining gender relations through economic modernization. The UAE has more successfully incorporated women's empowerment into the existing national narrative, turning women's public participation into evidence of modernization itself.

Consequently, the study proposes that gender reform in Saudi Arabia and the UAE should be understood as a process of **negotiated modernization**. Reform does not necessarily replace tradition; rather, it selectively reorganizes tradition. Some elements are weakened, others are retained, and still others are given new meanings. Women's empowerment is therefore neither simply a Western import nor a complete product of indigenous tradition. It emerges through interaction between global norms, national development strategies, religious interpretation, family structures, economic interests, and women's own demands for participation.

This comparative perspective also explains why progress remains uneven. If reform is primarily state-led, governments can accelerate change in selected areas while leaving other patriarchal structures untouched. Political representation may increase while migrant women remain vulnerable. Women's employment may rise while family-law inequalities remain. Public discourse may celebrate women's leadership while informal expectations continue to regulate women's behavior. These contradictions are not anomalies; they are central characteristics of state-managed gender reform.

The broader implication is that gender equality in Saudi Arabia and the UAE should therefore be evaluated not simply by asking which country is "more progressive," but by asking **what kind of reform is occurring, who benefits from it, which institutions remain unchanged, and how women themselves negotiate the new opportunities and constraints created by reform**. Such an approach provides a more nuanced explanation of the divergence between the two neighboring states and avoids reproducing the simplistic assumption that modernization automatically equals emancipation.

CONCLUSION

The Middle East is still a place fraught with conflict, and tensions both between states and even sectarian tensions still dominate the space of the people who live in it. However, still, changes are happening at a rapid pace. Conflicts between Iran and Israel (along with its allies) continue to heat up, whilst regions like Syria, previously devastated by war, are slowly rebuilding. Places like Iraq, Egypt and Oman are continuously building up their economies, whilst regional powerhouses such as Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia seek to consolidate their place as emerging powers not just in the region, but also on the world stage.

The Arab revolution, otherwise known as the Arab Spring of the 2010s, remains a work in progress, as the ramifications of the events continue to help shape how modern Middle Eastern and Arabic states would become, economically, ideologically, and, in our topic, in the realm of gender empowerment. Whereas the United Arab Emirates seemed comparatively well-progressed in the role that women play in their society, Saudi Arabia is comparatively lagging behind in terms of concrete policies and initiatives. Although restrictions on women, notably regarding driving, have been lifted, critics still lodge complaints at the regional powerhouse over the pace of its progress in gender emancipation. However, both countries are still notably affected by restrictive, monolithic “traditions” that shape law and policymaking in the region, most of which are designed to maintain the stake of power-holders (in this case, the patriarchal society of Arab tribes-then-nations) in equilibrium. Thus, although the UAE symbolically triumphs over Saudi Arabia due to its more “liberal” views, it is nonetheless constrained by the same traditions and antiquated values.

Despite all this, however, the increased voicing of concerns from young Arabs, both men and women, remains key to the development of newer policies in the region, be it Saudi Arabia or the UAE. However, most importantly, such changes would not come as a complete overhaul of the current underlying system (at least, at first), but instead come as a slow and steady progress that incorporates many of the preexisting cultural and societal customs, just as how Islamic laws and values helped shape the form that is modern Arabic culture.

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Women Actors' Co-Creation in Developing an Ecoikat Mini Collection Based on East Sumba Ikat Textile

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ABSTRACT

Co-creation in heritage-based fashion product development has received increasing scholarly attention, yet the differing positions of women actors in transforming woven textiles remain underexplored. This study examines the co-creation process among women actors in transforming an East Sumba ikat textile into the Ecoikat mini collection. A qualitative case study was conducted at Parahita Craft, Salatiga. Data were collected from December 2025 to July 2026 through participant observation, interviews with five purposively selected informants, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis and interpreted through Bourdieu's theory of practice. The findings show that different forms of capital were unevenly distributed among the actors, while second-stage evaluation strengthened coordination and the circulation of cultural knowledge. Consumer appreciation, however, did not automatically translate into purchase, indicating that co-creation did not occur on an equal footing because women actors occupied different positions and possessed different forms of capital. These findings suggest that successful heritage-based fashion product development depends on the transmission of cultural knowledge and effective coordination among actors. The study highlights the need for more structured collaboration and transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms.

Keywords: *co-creation; cultural capital; East Sumba ikat; EcoIkat; women actors*

INTRODUCTION

East Sumba ikat weaving is a cultural heritage that embodies the intergenerational knowledge of the East Sumba community. A single textile may combine several motifs that together convey a unified cultural meaning. The textile examined in this study features three motifs: Horse (Njara), Attendants (Pahapanggang), and Chicken (Manu). The Horse motif symbolizes authority, leadership, grandeur, and prosperity; the Attendants motif represents respect for ancestors; and the Chicken motif signifies leadership in East Sumba community life (Anggriady et al., 2023; Tim Penyusun Permohonan Indikasi Geografis Tenun Ikat, 2025). Because motif meanings are contextual and may vary across communities and weaving clusters, this study follows the

interpretations provided in the cited documentary sources and applies them consistently throughout the Results and Discussion sections.

The production of East Sumba ikat textiles involves skills acquired through repeated learning and intergenerational transmission. Each textile is therefore not only a cultural product but also a record of social experience and knowledge continuously reproduced through weaving practices (Hunga et al., 2021). Protecting and developing this cultural knowledge is consistent with Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 5 of 2017 on the Advancement of Culture (Republik Indonesia, 2017), which recognizes cultural heritage, including ikat weaving, as an integral part of national identity.

Despite its cultural significance, East Sumba ikat weaving faces challenges from a changing fashion market. Many consumers, particularly younger generations, consider design, accessibility, functionality, and price when choosing fashion products (Maulidiah & Nuzil, 2025). At the same time, growing concern over the environmental impact of the fast fashion industry (Berg et al., 2020) creates opportunities to develop more sustainable fashion products through adaptive design while preserving the cultural meanings of woven motifs.

One response to these challenges is EcoIkat, a product development initiative that integrates the cultural knowledge of ikat weaving, design, and material waste reduction. The initiative originated from research by the Batik Tenun Creative Innovation Hub (BaTeCH), Satya Wacana Christian University, on the downstream development of East Sumba ikat weaving and sustainable fashion, and was later implemented in collaboration with Parahita Craft, Salatiga. According to internal documents, Parahita Craft is a social enterprise that has integrated women's empowerment, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability into its business model since its establishment (Parahita Craft, 2026b). Circular design practices include redesign and the reuse of fabric remnants, reflecting the strategies of slowing and closing resource loops within the circular economy framework (Bocken et al., 2016). These practices involve multiple actors with different forms of knowledge and roles throughout the product development process.

The authors' interest in the development of East Sumba ikat textiles emerged from observations at the INACRAFT 2026 exhibition (4-8 February 2026). Initial observations indicated that some visitors appreciated the product designs because they appealed to younger consumers while incorporating Sumba woven motifs rarely found in contemporary fashion. This appreciation focused primarily on the finished products, whereas visitors appeared to have limited awareness of the extensive process involving weavers in East Sumba, designers, tailors, the coordination team, and content creators. This gap between product appreciation and understanding of the co-creation process became the starting point for this study.

Relevant scholarship can be grouped into two strands. The first examines East Sumba ikat weaving in relation to creative-economy development and marketing strategies (Babang & Rinata, 2019; Nugraha et al., 2022), design revitalization to meet market needs (Ningsih, 2019), the role of designers in sustainable fashion (Nidia & Suhartini, 2020), and the influence of cultural

values, gender relations, and policy on its transformation (Hunga, 2022). The second conceptualizes co-creation as a collaborative process involving knowledge exchange, negotiation, evaluation, and joint value creation among multiple actors (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Sanders & Stappers, 2008). In Indonesia, co-creation is further understood as a mechanism through which diverse actors integrate knowledge and resources to foster innovation (Widjojo et al., 2019). However, these strands have rarely been integrated to explain how differences in women's positions and forms of capital shape co-creation in heritage-based fashion, including the transmission, negotiation, and materialization of cultural knowledge.

Building on this gap, this study examines the co-creation process among women actors in transforming a single East Sumba ikat textile featuring the Horse (Njara), Attendants (Pahapanggang), and Chicken (Manu) motifs into the EcoIkat mini collection. The textile was selected because its motifs represent authority, leadership, grandeur, prosperity, and respect for ancestors, values that are central to East Sumba society. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, the analysis examines how habitus, capital, and field shape the co-creation process, with particular attention to differences in the positions of the women actors involved (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990, 1993).

The central research question is how differences in habitus, capital, and positions within the field shape the co-creation process in developing the EcoIkat mini collection. It is explored through two supporting questions: how cultural knowledge is transmitted and negotiated across the two stages of design development, and how differences in access, participation, recognition, decision-making, and benefits shape the positions of women actors. Accordingly, this study examines the relationships among habitus, capital, and field in the transformation of East Sumba ikat weaving into the EcoIkat mini collection, while explaining how women actors occupy different positions in relation to access to knowledge, decision-making, participation, recognition, and benefits.

In this study, co-creation is understood as a collaborative process involving knowledge exchange, negotiation, evaluation, and shared decision-making among actors, rather than merely a division of labor or the co-presence of actors within the same production chain (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice provides the main theoretical framework for explaining how habitus, capital, and field interact to shape this process (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990, 1993).

Gender analysis is used not as a standalone theoretical framework but as an analytical lens that complements Bourdieu's theory of practice in understanding co-creation among women actors (McNay, 1999). In this study, it is operationalized through questions addressing women's access, control, participation, and benefits throughout the co-creation process (Kabeer, 1999). Recognition is treated differently because it is more closely tied to Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital and is therefore discussed as the point at which the gender lens and the practice-theory framework intersect, rather than as an independent analytical dimension. This perspective is important because all actors directly involved in the co-creation ecosystem are women, yet shared

gender does not necessarily imply equal positions, authority, access, or benefits (Kabeer, 1999; McNay, 1999).

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study to examine the co-creation process through which a single East Sumba ikat textile featuring the Horse (Njara), Attendants (Pahapanggang), and Chicken (Manu) motifs was transformed into the EcoIkat mini collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). A case study was selected because it enables an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon within its real-life context using clearly defined case boundaries (Yin, 2018). The case was bounded to a single development cycle, from the textile's selection and delivery to the first-stage designer to the product launch at the INACRAFT 2026 exhibition. The unit of analysis was the co-creation process involving interactions among weavers, Parahita Craft management, designers, tailors, content creators, and consumers.

The study was conducted at Parahita Craft, Salatiga, Central Java. Data were collected from December 2025 to July 2026 during the researcher's internship through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. During the internship, the researcher participated in Parahita Craft's activities and observed the presentation and reception of the EcoIkat mini collection at the INACRAFT 2026 exhibition (4-8 February 2026).

Primary data were collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews with informants purposively selected for their knowledge, experience, and involvement in EcoIkat (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The informants included IH, founder of Parahita Craft and researcher at BaTeCH, Satya Wacana Christian University; LL, textile coordinator and content creator; PA, who participated in the mini collection's development and evaluation; and two consumers, YS and JS, interviewed during the INACRAFT 2026 exhibition. Interviews with LL and PA were conducted on 5 March 2026, with IH on 7 April 2026, and a validation interview with PA on 8 May 2026, all in Salatiga. YS and JS were interviewed in Jakarta on 4 February 2026 during the exhibition. The study did not include direct interviews with the weavers or design and production actors; their perspectives were therefore drawn from other informants and available documents.

Secondary data were obtained from Parahita Craft's internal documents (2025), EcoIkat activity documentation, research documentation from the Batik Tenun Creative Innovation Hub (BaTeCH), Satya Wacana Christian University, and the official EcoIkat Instagram account (@Luritanea.id). Six posts were purposively selected for analysis, comprising five product photographs and one video documenting the natural dyeing process. The digital data included post content and engagement metrics, such as likes, comments, and other user interactions, to complement the analysis of the co-creation process rather than represent the account statistically. The Instagram data reflect the account's status at the time of collection on 6 July 2026.

The data were analyzed iteratively through data organization, comprehensive reading, coding, theme development, interpretation, and

presentation of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Coding followed reflexive thematic analysis through data familiarisation, inductive code development, theme review, and preparation of the analytical report (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The themes were interpreted using Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990, 1993). A gender perspective further informed the analysis by examining women's positions, experiences, and power relations through five dimensions: access, control, participation, recognition, and benefits (McNay, 1999). Triangulation compared evidence from interviews, participant observation, documents, and research artifacts to assess the consistency and variation of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The study's trustworthiness was strengthened through source and method triangulation by comparing evidence from participant observation, interviews, and documents (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researcher positionality was explicitly acknowledged as part of the study's reflexivity, recognizing the researcher's position, experiences, and potential influence on the research process (Berger, 2015). One author, Arianti Ina Restiani Hunga, was the founder and manager of Parahita Craft, a researcher at the Batik Tenun Creative Innovation Hub (BaTeCH), Satya Wacana Christian University, and an informant in this study. To minimize potential bias, Mustikad Zai independently conducted data collection, transcription, and initial interpretation, while Arianti Ina Restiani Hunga verified the factual accuracy of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Distribution of Actors and Capital within the EcoIkat Mini Collection Ecosystem

The EcoIkat mini collection was developed from a single East Sumba ikat textile featuring three motifs: Horse (Njara), Attendants (Pahapanggang), and Chicken (Manu), as described in the Introduction (Anggriady et al., 2023; Tim Penyusun Permohonan Indikasi Geografis Tenun Ikat, 2025). IH, founder of Parahita Craft and a researcher on weaving culture at BaTeCH, Satya Wacana Christian University, explained that these motifs are not merely decorative but embody the textile's cultural identity (interview with IH, 7 April 2026). PA similarly noted that preserving their meanings was a key consideration in seeking Geographical Indication protection to safeguard this knowledge for future generations (interview with PA, 5 March 2026). Together, these accounts indicate that the motifs' cultural meanings are recognized as significant within Parahita Craft rather than reflecting a single informant's perspective. From a Bourdieusian perspective, this cultural capital may be converted into symbolic capital through recognition by fashion actors and consumers (Bourdieu, 1986, 1993).

Knowledge of material selection, natural dyeing techniques, and the meanings and rules governing motif placement is transmitted across generations by women weavers in East Sumba through their involvement in weaving from an early age (Hunga et al., 2021; interview with IH, 7 April 2026). From a Bourdieusian perspective, this knowledge constitutes cultural

capital that shapes the weavers' habitus through weaving practices (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990). A gender analytical lens further highlights women's central role in transmitting this cultural capital and their authority over motif selection, color composition, and the cultural dimensions of weaving. However, this authority does not automatically translate into equal recognition or benefits within the fashion field and market (McNay, 1999).

The actors involved in developing the EcoIkat mini collection are analytically grouped into three interconnected layers: upstream, middle, and downstream. The upstream layer comprises women weavers as holders of cultural capital. The middle layer includes Parahita Craft, designers, and tailors, who translate cultural knowledge into fashion products. The downstream layer comprises content creators and consumers, who shape and receive product value narratives in the public sphere. In this study, co-creation is identified through knowledge exchange, shared decision-making, evaluation, redesign, and value narrative construction (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Knowledge exchange and shared decision making are examined during design development, whereas evaluation, redesign, and value narrative construction are examined during product refinement and marketing.

Women weavers occupy the upstream layer in the EcoIkat mini collection's development. The textile used for the collection originated from the Hammu Ndabba Weaving Cluster, one of ten East Sumba ikat weaving clusters partnering with Parahita Craft (2026b). The weavers possess cultural capital, including knowledge of cotton selection, spinning, motif tying, and natural dyeing (Hunga et al., 2021). This capital also encompasses authority over motif selection, color composition, and the cultural dimensions of weaving, based on practices transmitted across generations. Accordingly, the weavers serve as the primary source of cultural knowledge and materials for the EcoIkat mini collection.

Some stages of ikat weaving remain governed by customary regulations. For example, the indigo dyeing process, known as *nggiling*, may only be performed by women and is accompanied by cultural prohibitions (Hunga et al., 2021). Knowledge of these practices constitutes cultural capital transmitted across generations and gives women authority over specific aspects of the weaving process (Bourdieu, 1986, 1993). This highlights women's central role in sustaining the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. However, such authority does not automatically translate into control over design decisions, recognition, or benefits in developing the EcoIkat mini collection (McNay, 1999).

Parahita Craft occupies the midstream layer, linking the weavers' cultural knowledge with design and production. This layer includes IH, founder of Parahita Craft and a researcher at BaTeCH, Satya Wacana Christian University; LL, textile management coordinator and content creator; and PA, who participated in product development (interviews with IH, 7 April 2026; LL and PA, 5 March 2026). Beyond contributing social capital through academic networks, IH connected actors involved in developing the EcoIkat mini collection. PA explained that Parahita Craft's collaboration with NV as

production coordinator, established through the Indonesian Fashion Camper (IFC) in 2021, subsequently led to EG's involvement in the project (interview with PA, 5 March 2026).

These relationships indicate that social capital within the EcoIkat ecosystem emerged through overlapping academic and craft industry networks rather than a single network. From a Bourdieusian perspective, these networks facilitated co-creation within the field of heritage-based fashion production (Bourdieu, 1986, 1993). The positions of women actors are examined through five analytical dimensions: access, control, participation, recognition, and benefits (McNay, 1999).

Parahita Craft operates as an organization within the field of heritage-based fashion production rather than constituting the field itself (Bourdieu, 1993). It coordinates actors with different roles and forms of authority throughout the co-creation process. Interview accounts indicate that IH guided the development of the EcoIkat mini collection while maintaining its cultural meanings during design transformation; LL managed textile flows and communication among actors; and PA participated in product discussions and evaluation (interviews with IH, 7 April 2026; LL and PA, 5 March 2026). This division of roles reflects the different forms of capital, positions, and authority held by women actors in the co-creation process (Bourdieu, 1993).

The textile was transformed into the EcoIkat mini collection through two stages of design development, as described in Subsection 2. The first involved EG as designer, NV as production coordinator, and SS as tailor, whereas the second involved RD and a student team from the Fashion Design Study Program at Bina Nusantara University through the 2025 SINERGI Kemdiktisaintek Program. The redesign drew on design expertise, sustainable fashion knowledge, zero-waste pattern cutting techniques, PA's evaluation, and program documentation (interviews with IH, 7 April 2026; PA, 5 March 2026; Parahita Craft, 2025). From a Bourdieusian perspective, these forms of expertise, together with RD's academic legitimacy, constitute cultural capital mobilized in heritage-based fashion production (Bourdieu, 1986).

Content creators documented the development of the EcoIkat mini collection and communicated the textile's cultural knowledge through digital media. LL, who served as both textile management coordinator and content creator, explained that this strategy included rebranding, website development, and expanding digital marketing through social media and e-commerce platforms, which were still under development during the study (interview with LL, 5 March 2026). The official Instagram account, @Luritanea.id, presented information on the products, production processes, and the involvement of women weavers. Digital media therefore provided an additional space for communicating cultural knowledge beyond the production setting.

Table 1. Analysis of Instagram Posts on @Luritanea.id

Theme	Upload Date	Likes	Comments	Shares	Views	Reposts
Natural Dyes and Collaboration	1 November 2024	13	1	1	556	1
INACRAFT Promotion and Cultural Storytelling	1 February 2026	9	0	4	-	1
The Heritage Thread	4 June 2026	13	0	1	-	1
Modern Heritage	16 June 2026	105	0	18	-	3
Elegance and Contemporary Design	20 June 2026	14	0	1	-	3
Earth Bound	6 July 2026	11	1	0	-	1

Note: A dash (-) indicates that view count data were unavailable because the post was a photo.; Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from Parahita Craft's official Instagram account, @Luritanea.id, accessed on 6 July 2026.

Data from the @Luritanea.id account were collected on 6 July 2026 from six purposively selected posts comparing product- and process-oriented content (Table 1). The dataset indicates that engagement was dominated by passive forms of interaction, particularly likes and shares, whereas comments, which reflect more dialogic engagement, remained limited. The natural-dyeing video also received more views than the product photographs (Parahita Craft, 2026a). Because video views and photo-post engagement metrics are not directly comparable, this difference is treated only as an initial indication for future digital content strategies and research rather than as evidence of the relative effectiveness of content types or broader user engagement patterns.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, digital communication through the @Luritanea.id account represents an effort to build recognition of the cultural value embodied in the textile, the weavers, and the production process (Bourdieu, 1986). The predominance of likes and shares, alongside relatively few comments, suggests a degree of visibility and audience appreciation. However, the available evidence is insufficient to conclude that strong symbolic capital had been established within the digital field.

The distribution of actors and capital at this stage indicates differences in access, control, participation, recognition, and benefits among the women involved. The weavers contributed cultural knowledge and woven textiles, while IH connected this knowledge to product development with attention to preserving its cultural meanings. EG, NV, SS, and RD contributed to design, production, and product refinement; LL managed textile flows and consumer communication; and PA participated in product development and evaluation (interviews with LL and PA, 5 March 2026). Available accounts and documentation suggest that the weavers' authority over motif selection, colour composition, and the nggiling process had not been fully translated

into recognition within the fashion field or equitable economic benefits. These findings indicate that women occupied different positions within the co-creation process, with access, control, recognition, and benefits remaining unevenly distributed (McNay, 1999).

2. Tensions in Habitus, Evaluation, and Redesign

The first stage of the EcoIkat mini collection's development involved EG as designer, NV as production coordinator, SS as tailor, and LL as Parahita Craft coordinator (interview with LL, 5 March 2026). The collection was originally developed for Fashion Art Toronto Fall/Winter 2025-2026 with a target of twelve looks, but only ten were completed because of funding constraints (interview with LL, 5 March 2026). The project was later redirected to the Indonesian market through collaboration with RD and a student team from the Fashion Design Study Program at Bina Nusantara University under the 2025 SINERGI Kemdiktisaintek Program (interview with LL, 5 March 2026).

The first-stage evaluation involved actors responsible for production and textile coordination. LL considered the design concept appropriate but identified weaknesses in production execution, particularly stitching quality and the choice of combination fabrics, which she regarded as unsuitable for the international market. As LL explained, "...desainnya itu sudah bagus... cuman dalam proses yang menjahit ini kurang maksimal... pemilihan bahan... sebagai kombinasi untuk tenun itu menurutku kurang bagus" ("...the design was already good... it was just that the sewing process was not executed optimally... and, in my opinion, the choice of fabric used to complement the woven textile was not suitable") (interview with LL, 5 March 2026). PA similarly noted that the production quality did not fully reflect the original design and that these issues informed subsequent discussions with RD and the Fashion Design Study Program team at Bina Nusantara University (interview with PA, 5 March 2026). Together, these accounts indicate that the first-stage evaluation focused primarily on production execution rather than the design concept.

PA attributed part of these production issues to the fabric-cutting process, which, in her view, did not sufficiently consider the cultural meanings embedded in the Sumba motifs. According to PA, motif placement and fabric cutting should preserve the original arrangement of motifs because each motif carries its own cultural meaning. As PA explained, "...motif Sumba itu kan punya makna ya masing-masing... dia potong... ga mempertimbangkan motif, jadi rusak motifnya" ("...each Sumba motif has its own meaning... the fabric was cut... without considering the motif, so the motif arrangement was disrupted") (interview with PA, 5 March 2026). PA further suggested that the fabric had been cut by NV's assistant before review, despite prior instructions regarding motif placement. As PA noted, "...kayaknya yang motong itu bukan [NV] tapi asistennya... [IH] kesana tau-tau udah dipotong begitu" ("...it seems that the fabric was not cut by [NV] but by the assistant... when [IH] arrived, it had already been cut that way") (interview with PA, 5 March 2026). These interview accounts suggest that the

first-stage evaluation addressed not only technical production issues but also the preservation of motif meanings during the design transformation process.

LL's account suggests that coordination among the actors during the first stage remained fragmented. LL identified IH as the actor with the strongest understanding of the cultural meanings embedded in the textile but considered her involvement in production insufficient, resulting in largely separate coordination among the actors. As LL explained, "...yang lebih tahu tentang tenun itu kan Ibu [IH] sebenarnya, tapi ketika pas pengerjaan itu mungkin kurang melibatkan jadi pengerjaannya itu masing-masing" ("...the person who actually knew the most about the woven textile was [IH], but during the production process she may not have been sufficiently involved, so everyone ended up working separately.") (interview with LL, 5 March 2026). LL also noted that communication about motif placement before fabric cutting was insufficient, leading to inconsistent understanding of how motifs should be handled during production (interview with LL, 5 March 2026). PA similarly suggested that these coordination challenges reflected still-evolving working relationships, with communication occurring mainly through bilateral interactions and only one meeting involving IH, EG, and NV together (validation interview with PA, 8 May 2026).

The evaluations by LL and PA indicate that the first-stage challenges involved not only technical production issues but also coordination among the actors. IH interpreted these challenges through Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital. According to IH, limited familiarity with the habitus and cultural capital associated with ikat weaving meant that production did not fully consider the cultural meanings of the motifs or the conventions governing their placement (interview with IH, 7 April 2026). IH further argued that design expertise could not be directly transferred to ikat weaving production because each field has its own habitus and forms of cultural capital. As IH explained, "...dia memang designer terkenal... tapi arenanya beda, modalnya beda... habitusnya kurang... karena beda field-nya" ("...she is indeed a well-known designer, but this is a different field with different forms of capital. The habitus is different because it is a different field.") (interview with IH, 7 April 2026).

PA's explanation of the limited experience with East Sumba motifs complements IH's interpretation, although each emphasized a different aspect. PA focused on production coordination, whereas IH explained the challenges through habitus and cultural capital. From Bourdieu's perspective (1986, 1990), these coordination challenges reflect the interaction of different forms of habitus and cultural capital within the field of ikat weaving production rather than individual shortcomings. This interpretation also supports Sanders and Stappers' (2008) view of co-creation as a process of knowledge exchange among actors. Accordingly, the first-stage evaluation is better understood as part of knowledge transmission within co-creation than as the failure of any individual actor.

Despite these challenges, the first stage demonstrated potential for further design development. LL identified the mini dress with a detachable belt as

the most promising design but recognized production execution as the primary challenge (interview with LL, 5 March 2026). This finding indicates that the main challenge was translating cultural knowledge into production practice through dialogue, knowledge exchange, and coordination among the actors. This interpretation is consistent with Bourdieu's (1986, 1990) concepts of habitus, capital, and field and with Sanders and Stappers' (2008) conception of co-creation, which emphasized dialogue and knowledge exchange as the basis of collaborative development.

The first-stage evaluation assessed the alignment between the designs and the cultural meanings of the motifs, as well as production quality. It involved IH, PA, and LL as internal actors at Parahita Craft and informed subsequent discussions with RD, a BaTeCH member at Satya Wacana Christian University and design academic, during the second stage. The designs and evaluation outcomes were documented in Parahita Craft's internal archives (2025) and later informed collaboration with RD and a student team from the Fashion Design Study Program at Bina Nusantara University, strengthening coordination and cultural knowledge management in the subsequent development stage.

IH described coordination through the metaphor of a choir: "...supaya harmoni ini terbangun suara satu, suara dua, suara tiga, suara empat, ...harus ada yang disebut dengan manajemen pengetahuan..." ("...for this harmony to emerge among the first voice, second voice, third voice, and fourth voice, there has to be what is called knowledge management.") (interview with IH, 7 April 2026). This metaphor illustrates IH's view of coordination in developing the EcoIkat mini collection and is consistent with LL's and PA's accounts of the second-stage changes, including documenting motif meanings and placement conventions, conducting pre-production briefings and design reviews, and approving designs before cutting the textile. From Bourdieu's perspective (1990), these changes represent adjustments in practice and the development of shared working practices within the production field rather than the formation of a new habitus over a short period.

Parahita Craft continued developing the EcoIkat mini collection with RD through the 2025 SINERGI Kemdiktisaintek Program. Unlike the first stage, the second-stage design process followed a more structured coordination pattern based on experience gained earlier. LL explained that each design proposal was communicated and approved before implementation (interview with LL, 5 March 2026). This account is consistent with PA's explanation that design alternatives were documented, shared with Parahita Craft through Google Drive, discussed online, and approved before production (validation interview with PA, 8 May 2026).

PA further explained that RD assumed a greater role in design development, while Parahita Craft remained involved through online presentations. As PA noted, "Diserahkan ke [RD]. [RD] cerita sih, waktu zoom, mau dibuat ini, ini, ini, terus kita oke gitu. Karena lebih paham [RD]" ("...it was handed over to [RD]. During the Zoom meeting, [RD] explained what would be developed, and we agreed because [RD] had a better

understanding of it.") (validation interview with PA, 8 May 2026). This account indicates a revised distribution of roles in the second stage, with RD leading design development through design expertise while Parahita Craft reviewed and approved the proposed designs.

RD's involvement, together with a student team from the Fashion Design Study Program at Bina Nusantara University through the 2025 SINERGI Kemdiktisaintek Program, introduced additional actors into the co-creation process. Their expertise in design, sustainable fashion, and zero-waste pattern cutting provided cultural capital that supported the EcoIkat mini collection. From Bourdieu's perspective (1986, 1993), this collaboration illustrates the interaction of cultural capital from different fields in heritage-based fashion production.

The second stage marked a shift in practice as Parahita Craft and RD redesigned the first-stage mini dress into a two-piece outfit consisting of a top and a skirt. LL explained that the remaining materials from the previous development stage were returned to Parahita Craft for reuse (interview with LL, 5 March 2026). From Bourdieu's perspective (1986), this redesign reactivated the cultural capital embedded in the woven textile through a different product form, while material reuse aligned with the circular economy strategies of slowing and closing resource loops (Bocken et al., 2016).

The findings indicate that the first stage was constrained by coordination, production supervision, and the translation of cultural knowledge into design. PA emphasized production coordination, whereas IH interpreted these challenges through habitus and cultural capital. According to LL and PA, the second stage adopted a more structured coordination process. Consistent with Bourdieu (1986, 1990) and Sanders and Stappers (2008), these findings suggest that co-creation involves both the interaction of different forms of capital and the exchange of knowledge through adaptive practices within a shared field.

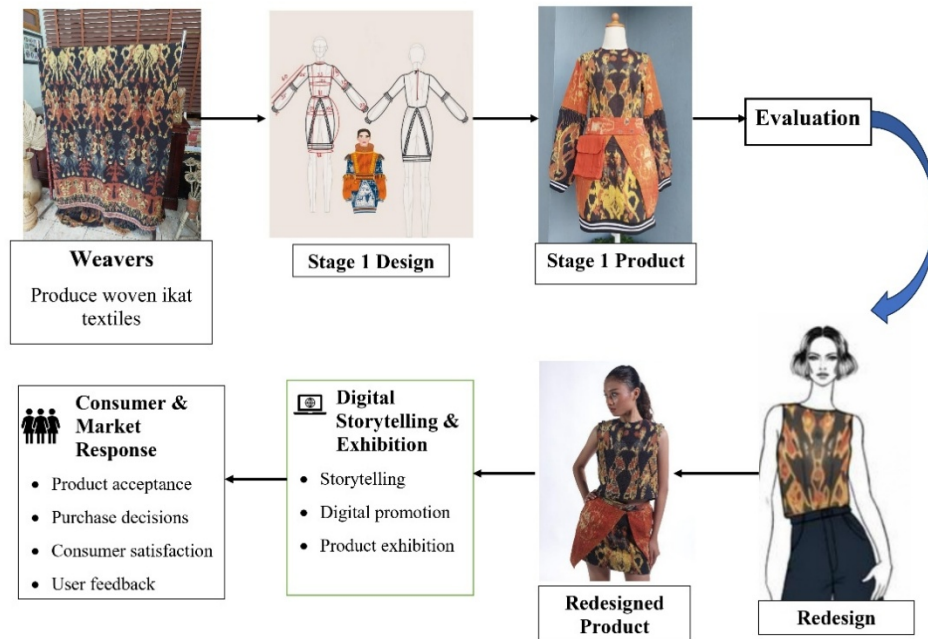
Comparison of the two stages reveals changes in women's access, control, participation, recognition, and benefits during the development of the EcoIkat mini collection. The second stage's more structured coordination improved the translation of cultural knowledge into design and production through collaborative practice. Although the redesigned products gained recognition during development, the distribution of recognition and benefits among the women actors could not be fully assessed. From McNay's (1999) perspective, these findings suggest that women's agency is shaped by their positions, access to resources, and opportunities for participation within the field of heritage-based fashion production.

3. Consumer Recognition and the Conversion of Capital from the Digital Field to the Exhibition Field

Following the second-stage redesign, the EcoIkat mini collection was introduced in the digital field through the official Instagram account @Luritanea.id and in the exhibition field at INACRAFT 2026 (4-8 February

2026). The co-creation process linking woven-textile transformation, design development, evaluation, redesign, and consumer reception is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Co-Creation Process and Transformation of the EcoIkat Mini Collection



Note: Permission to use the documentation presented in this figure was obtained from the relevant parties.; *Source:* Authors, based on documentation from Parahita Craft and the Batik-Tenun Creative Innovation Hub (BaTeCH), Satya Wacana Christian University (2025).

Figure 1 illustrates the main stages of the EcoIkat mini collection's co-creation process through Bourdieu's framework of capital. The woven textile and knowledge of motif meanings represent cultural capital underpinning product development. Collaboration among Parahita Craft, the Batik-Tenun Creative Innovation Hub (BaTeCH) at Satya Wacana Christian University, and Bina Nusantara University constituted social capital, while funding and production facilities from the 2025 SINERGI Kemdiktisaintek Program provided economic capital. Recognition gained through digital platforms and exhibitions constituted symbolic capital. From Bourdieu's perspective (1986, 1993), evaluation and redesign reflect the interaction of habitus, capital, and field, with symbolic capital emerging through recognition within the field.

Participant observation at INACRAFT 2026 (4-8 February 2026) identified three categories of visitors to the Parahita Craft booth: those who browsed or sought inspiration, those interested but not purchasing, and those who purchased the products. The first category was the largest, with visitors frequently commenting on the product designs and natural dyes, as reflected

in remarks such as "Desainnya unik dan lucu" ("The design is unique and appealing") and "Wah menggunakan pewarna alami" ("Wow, it uses natural dyes"). Some also viewed the products as sources of design inspiration or training, while feedback on sizing informed future product development.

Visitors in the second category expressed interest but did not purchase because of price considerations. Some postponed their decisions to compare other products, whereas others cancelled purchases despite price negotiations. In the third category, fashion products were typically purchased after negotiation, whereas lower-priced items, such as yarn, accessories, and batik textiles, were often bought without negotiation. These observations indicate that price remained a key determinant of purchasing decisions, despite visitors being introduced to the production process, the role of the weavers, and the use of natural dyes.

LL's experience as textile coordinator across multiple exhibitions suggests that young consumers' interest in Parahita Craft's slow-fashion products did not necessarily result in purchases because of price considerations (interview with LL, 5 March 2026). LL explained that visitors who understood the production process were generally reluctant to bargain, although this awareness did not always lead to a purchase: "...mereka tertarik tapi mereka juga enggan... karena tau prosesnya seperti apa" ("...they were interested, but they were reluctant to bargain... because they understood what the production process involved.") (interview with LL, 5 March 2026). LL further emphasized that educating consumers about sustainability was a primary objective regardless of sales: "...yang paling penting itu bagaimana cara kita mengedukasi dengan produk yang dibuat, jadi lebih ke nilainya" ("...the most important thing is how we educate people through the products we create; it's the values that matter most.") (interview with LL, 5 March 2026). These findings suggest that appreciation of the cultural narrative and production process did not necessarily translate into purchases.

The development and consumer reception of the EcoIkat mini collection occurred across three interconnected fields: cultural production and weaving, fashion design and production, and digital circulation and the market (Bourdieu, 1993). The first encompassed women weavers' technical expertise, material knowledge, and understanding of motif meanings. The second brought together multiple actors to translate this knowledge into garments through different forms of capital, while the third enabled product narratives to circulate and gain recognition. From Bourdieu's perspective (1986, 1993), the conversion of cultural capital into symbolic and economic capital was shaped by interactions among actors occupying different positions within these fields.

Consumer responses at INACRAFT 2026 reflected appreciation for both the contemporary design and the cultural value of East Sumba woven textiles. YS, who browsed the collection without purchasing, considered it appealing to Generation Z because it combined contemporary fashion with East Sumba motifs rarely seen in modern clothing: "...pakai tenun Sumba yang kayak jarang ditemui di pakaian-pakaian sekarang" ("...it uses East Sumba woven textiles, which are rarely used in contemporary clothing.")

(interview with YS, 4 February 2026). YS also referred to the production narrative on the product label, explaining that the lengthy production process justified the price: "...untuk prosesnya yang panjang menurut aku untuk harga segitu udah worth it" ("...considering the lengthy production process, I think the price is worth it.") (interview with YS, 4 February 2026).

Unlike YS, JS purchased the EcoIkat mini collection. Initially attracted by its motifs and colour combinations, JS also valued its use of natural dyes, handmade production, and the involvement of women: "...ini kan semua pakai pewarna alami, jadi menurut aku itu keren banget... ini homemade... terus ini memberdayakan perempuan-perempuan juga..." ("...everything uses natural dyes, so I think that's really great... it's handmade... and it also empowers women...") (interview with JS, 4 February 2026). These cultural and sustainability values influenced JS's purchasing decision.

The contrasting responses of YS and JS show that consumers engaged differently with the EcoIkat mini collection's cultural narrative. YS emphasized the production information provided on the product label, whereas JS associated the product with sustainability, craftsmanship, and women's involvement in production. For JS, this narrative contributed to the product's symbolic value. However, such recognition does not necessarily reflect changes in the position or conditions of women weavers. As Kabeer (1999) argues, women's empowerment requires improvements in access to resources, decision-making capacity, and the benefits they receive. The product's empowerment narrative should therefore be distinguished from the actual empowerment experienced by women actors within the production ecosystem.

Consumer responses reflected appreciation for the EcoIkat mini collection's visual appeal, cultural narrative, and product values, which encouraged purchases for some visitors. From Bourdieu's perspective (1986), this recognition represents symbolic capital, whereby cultural knowledge and production practices acquire value within the consumer field. However, symbolic recognition did not consistently translate into purchases. This finding should also be understood in the context of INACRAFT 2026, which LL, based on experience from previous exhibitions, considered to have attracted fewer visitors than those typically held in October.

Recognition within the consumer field was closely linked to the distribution of capital throughout the EcoIkat mini collection's development. However, the interaction of different forms of capital did not produce equal recognition or benefits for all actors. As discussed in Subsection 2, actors occupied different positions with unequal access and authority. These findings suggest that co-creation involves not only integrating diverse forms of capital but also negotiating relationships and constructing recognition across different fields (Bourdieu, 1986, 1993; Sanders & Stappers, 2008).

A gender perspective reveals differences in access, participation, recognition, and benefits among the women actors involved in the consumer circulation stage (Kabeer, 1999; McNay, 1999). Access to exhibitions and product communication was primarily managed by IH and LL, while the women weavers contributed indirectly through the cultural knowledge and

materials embodied in the woven textiles. Knowledge of East Sumba ikat weaving, including motif meanings, production techniques, and materials, was communicated through the products and their accompanying narratives.

Consumers' responses, including JS's appreciation of the collection's cultural values and women's involvement in production, indicate the emergence of symbolic recognition for the EcoIkat mini collection. However, this recognition was attached to the product and its narrative rather than reflecting changes in the position, access, control, or benefits of the women actors involved. As argued by Kabeer (1999) and McNay (1999), representations of women in product narratives should be distinguished from actual changes in women's access to resources, decision-making capacity, and benefits within the production field.

The findings indicate that appreciation of the EcoIkat mini collection's cultural value did not always lead to purchases, while the benefits of co-creation were unevenly distributed among the actors. These findings extend previous studies of East Sumba ikat weaving (Babang & Rinata, 2019; Nugraha et al., 2022) by showing that heritage-based product development depends not only on design innovation and marketing but also on the continuity of cultural knowledge transmission and the management of relationships among actors. This interpretation aligns with Sanders and Stappers' (2008) view of knowledge exchange as central to co-creation and with Hunga's (2022) argument that the transformation of ikat weaving is shaped by social relationships rather than market outcomes alone.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that co-creation in transforming East Sumba ikat weaving into the EcoIkat mini collection is a negotiated process shaped by the interaction of different forms of capital, actors' positions, and field dynamics. The weavers' cultural knowledge underpins product value, but its translation into the design and consumer fields is influenced by unequal access, control, participation, recognition, and benefits among the women involved. Although improved coordination during the second stage strengthened knowledge exchange, it did not eliminate these inequalities, indicating that heritage-based co-creation should be understood as negotiated rather than inherently egalitarian.

Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice, this study demonstrates that transforming cultural heritage into fashion products depends not only on cultural capital but also on how it is translated, recognized, and converted across different fields. Symbolic recognition of the EcoIkat mini collection through digital platforms and exhibitions reflects cultural acceptance but does not automatically generate economic value. These findings extend heritage-based co-creation scholarship by showing that collaboration among women actors is shaped by unequal positions and unequal opportunities to mobilize and convert different forms of capital.

This study is limited by the restricted range of informants and the absence of direct interviews with weavers and several design and production actors.

Future research should incorporate these perspectives to deepen understanding of co-creation in heritage-based fashion ecosystems. Practically, the findings highlight the need to strengthen communication between weavers and designers, document weavers' cultural knowledge, and develop more transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms to support more inclusive and sustainable heritage-based fashion.

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Author Contributions

Mustikad Zai conducted data collection through an internship at Parahita Craft and continued data collection throughout the study. She was responsible for data management, analysis, interpretation, and drafting and revising the manuscript. Dr. Ir. Arianti Ina Restiani Hunga, M.Si. conceived and designed the study, supervised data collection and analysis, guided the theoretical framework and its application, and critically reviewed the manuscript through to the final version. Dr. Antik Tri Susanti, M.Si. provided methodological supervision, reviewed the research proposal and data analysis, and critically reviewed the manuscript. All authors read, approved, and accepted responsibility for the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest and Reflexivity Statement

One of the authors, Dr. Ir. Arianti Ina Restiani Hunga, M.Si., was the principal investigator of the Downstreaming EcoIkat: Commercializing Ikat Weaving for Intellectual-Property- and Circular-Economy-Based Micro and Small Enterprises in East Sumba project under the SINERGI Kemdiktisaintek Program, which provided the context for this study. This role is disclosed in the interest of transparency and forms part of the study's reflexive approach. The credibility of the findings was strengthened through triangulation across

multiple data sources and collection methods, together with critical discussion and review among the authors.

Informant Consent and Identity Protection

All informants provided informed consent to participate in this study. To protect confidentiality and privacy, their identities were anonymized using initials or coded identifiers, except for individuals who explicitly consented to be identified according to their roles in the research.

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ABOUT

SALASIKA etymologically derived from Javanese language meaning 'brave woman'. SALASIKA JOURNAL (SJ) is founded in July 2019 as an international open access, scholarly, peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary journal publishing theoretically innovative and methodologically diverse research in the fields of gender studies, sexualities and feminism. Our conception of both theory and method is broad and encompassing, and we welcome contributions from scholars around the world.

SJ is inspired by the need to put into visibility the Indonesian and South East Asian women to ensure a dissemination of knowledge to a wider general audience.

SJ selects at least several outstanding articles by scholars in the early stages of a career in academic research for each issue, thereby providing support for new voices and emerging scholarship.

AUDIENCE

SJ aims to provide academic literature which is accessible across disciplines, but also to a wider 'non-academic' audience interested and engaged with social justice, ecofeminism, human rights, policy/advocacy, gender, sexualities, concepts of equality, social change, migration and social mobilisation, inter-religious and international relations and development.

There are other journals which address those topics, but SJ approaches the broad areas of gender, sexuality and feminism in an integrated fashion. It further addresses the issue of international collaboration and inclusion as existing gaps in the area of academic publishing by (a) crossing language boundaries and creating a space for publishing and (b) providing an opportunity for innovative emerging scholars to engage in the academic dialogue with established researchers.

STRUCTURE OF THE JOURNAL

All articles will be preceded by an abstract (150-200 words), keywords, main text introduction, materials and methods, results, discussion; acknowledgments; declaration of interest statement; references; appendices (as appropriate); table(s) with caption(s) (on individual pages); figures; figure captions (as a list); and a contributor biography (150 words). Word length is 4,000-10,000 words, including all previous elements.

TIMELINE AND SCHEDULE

Twice a year: December and June.

PUBLISHING AND COPYRIGHT APPROACH

All articles must not have been published or be under consideration elsewhere. We are unable to pay for permissions to publish pieces whose copyright is not held by the author. Contributors will be responsible for clearing all copyright permissions before submitting translations, illustrations or long quotes. The views expressed in papers are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the journal or its editors.

CONTENT ASSESSMENT

All articles will be peer-reviewed double-blind and will be submitted electronically to the journal (journal@salasika.org). The editors ensure that all submissions are refereed anonymously by two readers in the relevant field. In the event of widely divergent opinion during this process a third referee will be asked to comment, and the decision to publish taken on that recommendation. We expect that the editorial process will take up to four months. We will allow up to four weeks for contributors to send in revised manuscripts with corrections.



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