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Bujang: The Social Representation of Gen Z Masculinity in Bangka

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ABSTRACT

Traditional images still dominate the representation of masculinity as a product of patriarchal ideology. This research examines the representation of masculinity among Generation Z in Bangka Island, exploring whether shifts occur or traditional

norms persist. Using a social representation approach, the study investigated 178 Gen Z males through open questionnaires and interviews. They are called *Bujang*, which anchors for social representation of masculinity. Thematic analysis found that, in Gen Z's perspective, masculinity focuses on *Jadi Urang* (being true men), and requires three dimensions: prosperity, sociability, and religiosity. Some norms of masculinity have changed, while others still adopt traditional masculinities in certain social configurations. In production relations, representation shows *urang bujang ya begawi* (men must work). In power relations, *urang bujang belajer tanggungjawab* (men have responsibility). In emotional relationships, *kelaki jangen nanges* (men don't cry). These themes indicate both shifting and persistent elements of traditional masculinity norms.

Keywords: *Bujang*, Social Representation, Masculinity, Generation Z, Bangka Island.

A. Introduction

Many people today believe that being a man entails the character of a tough physical figure, macho, gruff, sturdy oak, no sissy stuff, and boys don't cry nor express their emotions (Laskowski, 2020; McAllister et al., 2019; Senkans et al., 2020). The idea of being a man is to be more than a woman and not to imitate feminine values. This is a manifestation of patriarchal thinking (Shahriar, 2018).

Like water streaming, this patriarchal ideology penetrates various layer structures; macro and micro, conscious and unconscious, private and public. Its concrete forms can be investigated in the division of labor and wages (Walby, 1991), domestic violence (Hayati et al., 2014; Srivastava, 2012), household production (Cortés & Pan, 2019) cultural dominance (Wienke, 1998), abusive interpretation of religious texts (Breskaya & Giordan, 2018), male order representation in the media (Chapman & Rutherford, 2014) toxic sexuality (Fukuoka,

2015), fundamentalism (Brown et al., 2020) male biases state policy (Wieringa, 2015).

Gender inequality in patriarchal social structure is then repudiated and reproduced via social representations of hegemonic, dominant, and unique masculinity (Anderson & McGuire, 2010). In today's culture, the social representation of hegemonic masculinity positions a specific masculine image in a dominant position over production relations, power relations, and emotional ties (R. Connell, 2016). Certainly, elevating one image of masculinity over another would subjugate the other image of masculinity. Thus, the social representation of masculinity that operates in everyday life is embedded, long-lasting, and fruitful in the institutions of patriarchal cultures. Patriarchal structures and hegemonic masculinity, in sum, "feed and revive each other."

Considering the toxic impact of the conspiracy between patriarchal structures and the ideology of masculine dominance in the everyday lives of children, women, men, and the elderly, it is necessary to examine how patriarchal structures and traditional masculinities operate in society (Pappas, 2019). In some geopolitical zones, millennial (born 1981–1996) and Generation Z (born 1997–2012) are not immune to the toxicity of masculinity in this partisan framework. Even now, the millennial movement promotes extremely patriarchal gender, equality, and family ideals, although the impact of such ideas varies depending on the social setting (Abdul Syukur & Bagshaw, 2020; Harvey & Newcombe, 2021; Khoiriyah, 2020; Riyani, 2020; Wahdiniwaty & Rustam, 2019; Wayan & Nyoman, 2020).

The question of being a man and a woman is not as simple as the binary opposition that men and women have different sex. There are other, more complex cultural social divisions. A distinction that also defines "who is a man and who is a woman", which is the gender differences that make a cultural contribution

to how to be masculine and feminine in a particular context of society (Fakih, 1996). Therefore, being a man or a woman is a societal quest for gender identity that is constantly constructed, produced, and fostered in the spaces of the individual's everyday life, extending from birth to old age.

Gender identity in social life is one of the vital factors determining how a person thinks and acts in shaping the social structure of their life. Reciprocally, the social structure that is considered legitimate is abolished in the behavior and conduct of the individual. In other words, the individualistic thesis that identity is constructed exclusively by the individual is no longer sufficient. Therefore, gender identity has always been a social identity, and any social Identity is an integral part of social representation (Wagner et al., 1999).

Actually, gender differences are not a problem. But as a form of social representation that is consistent with socio-cultural realities, gender differences de facto often generate gender inequalities (Kodir, 2019, p. 29). Culturally-produced gender-based disparities are therefore a negative opposition to the manners of men and women who ideally live in a world of gender equality. Modifying Heidegger's term, the ideal condition is called being-in-the-gendered-world (Heidegger, 1996). Unfortunately, any form of gender inequality is often regarded as a normality that is taken for granted. It seems that gender inequality is given as a consequence of sexual-biological differences. In fact, such gender disparities are not natural but constantly produced and denied by the dominant ideology; the patriarchal ideology in the form of the domination of masculinity (Bourdieu, 2001; R. Connell, 2016; Heywood, 2017).

The patriarchal social structure carries many victims for both men and women, the rich and the poor, the elderly, certain social classes, individuals, and groups, embodied in such forms as stigmatization and stereotyping, marginalization, subordination,

hegemony, symbolic violence, and other pathological acts (Hasyim, 2021; Honneth, 2007). This patchwork structure can persist because patriarchal ideology operates on almost all social classes and structures, such as modes of production, relations in employment, relations within the country, all gender-based violence, relationships in sexuality, and relationships within cultural institutions (Walby, 1991).

Men's studies in Indonesia's context for Gen Z and millennial, per se, are still few. Some of them: Millennial masculinity in the context of film media representation, which has been popular and a reference for millennial. The masculine representation, according to the research, still undermines the traditional masculinity, where the "Give 'em Hell" dimension is still very strong (Kusuma & Sari, 2019). In the context of idolatry, the "Give 'em Hell" masculinity character is one of the characteristics of traditional masculinity. Some others are: 1) No sissy stuff, avoiding things that associate with femininity; 2) The Big Wheel, becoming an eager livelihood seeker so admired and respected; 3) The Sturdy Oak, tough, and robust character (Leone & Parrott, 2018, p. 33).

The millennial generation's reception of masculinity is also evident in popular K-Pop culture's fashion, which indicates a shift in the norms of masculinization towards soft masculinities (S. Jung, 2011; Wahyuningtyas & Agustiana, 2020). In the newer generations, masculinity no longer prevails in physical matters but rather in character and behavior. Although the behavior recognized and accepted by the subjects of the study is not far from the character of traditional masculinity, the fashion artist is still "considered male".

The soft masculinity adopted by Generation Z is characterized by tender charisma, politeness, and purity. Interestingly, the internalization of soft masculinity in Gen Z is precisely the strongest constructed through the media (Fauzi,

2021). It makes sense considering that Gen Z was born as a digital native. They draw on their wider network's cultural reference through the media (Hinduan et al., 2020).

Then, why is the standard of traditional masculinity in Gen Z still high? It happens because of the lack of promotion of positive masculinity in the cultural structure in the Indonesian context. In fact, on campus, intra-campus organizations are still dominated by men in strategic positions (Antasari et al., 2022). Another example, early childhood education is still frequently used by the *kodrat* (fate) discourse to establish the essential differences between men and women. Paradoxically, the way men show concern is considered civilized behavior, *halus* (polite) in Javanese terminology (Hellman, 2021).

When accompanied by an extreme interpretation of religion, the internalization of this traditional masculinity at a more mature stage of development will have a harmful consequence. Masculinity, for example, is produced through a network of Indonesian Muslim foreign warriors. Socialization and the promotion of an extreme understanding of masculinity, particularly the notion that being a *mujahid* (warriors) is the highest social status for Muslim men, are more important than other factors such as globalized religious ideology, state ideological impact, securitization, and guarantees of a conducive environment (Ismail, 2019).

There are various reasons of why this study focuses on millennial and Generation Z, among them: first, the demographic structure of Indonesia nowadays is dominated by Generation Z (27.94%) and millennial (25.87%) of the overall population (Direktorat Statistik Kependudukan dan Ketenagakerjaan, 2020). This demographic surplus is an asset for Indonesia's future human resources. With this large population and with Generation Z and millennial continuing to assimilate patriarchal thinking, gender justice will be more difficult to achieve for decades to come. On the contrary, if this generation can rebuild patriarchal

social structures that adhere to the heart of social life, it will be a powerful force in Indonesia. In the coming years, Generation Z and millennial will be the dominant actors in economic, political, social, and cultural capital.

Second, the facts demonstrate that the number of men exceeds that of women, as indicated by the gender ratio. The gender split was 50.58% male and 49.42% female. If the idea of conventional and toxic masculinity becomes hegemonic, all sorts of subordination, marginalization, neglect, and denigration of lazy and non-hegemonic groups could persist. On the contrary, if the male population can take a critical distance from traditional masculinity, a more positive, inclusive, and humanistic new masculinity will emerge. As a result, new masculinity has the potential to be a gender justice mode in Indonesia.

Third, Indonesia boasts the world's largest Muslim population. in fact, by 2050, Indonesia is expected to remain one of the countries with the highest Muslim population (Diamat, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2015). The proportion of Muslims in Indonesia is 87.2% of the overall population, with Java and Sumatra having the largest Muslim majority populations. Through more positive masculinity, Indonesian Muslim representation as a majority can generate cultural and social capital to achieve gender justice.

Fourth, millennial and Generation Z are distancing themselves from traditional masculinity norms. Forbes mentions in his article that there are several reasons why millennial men can create masculinity that is entirely different from the traditional norms of masculinity, among them: 1) self-awareness; 2) non-conformism to hegemonic masculinities; 3) collaboration higher than competition; 4) appreciation of authenticity; 5) not shy to share their vulnerabilities, not to appear as strong men; 6) acting according to the values they believe; and 7) motivated to engage and grow (Schroeder, 2017).

This study employed a qualitative approach with social representation theory as its analytical framework. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires (n=178) and in-depth interviews with Gen Z males aged 16–22, Muslims, native speakers of the Bangka language, and residing in Bangka Island (purposive sampling). Open-ended questionnaire data were analyzed using preliminary coding, categorization, and cross-tabulation (Popping, 2015). Interview data were analyzed thematically using Braun & Clarke's six-phase procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Language use was central to accessing common knowledge about masculinity (Banchs, 2014).

We assumed that research into the social representation of masculinity in Gen Z, let alone having a Muslim identity, had not been so well explored. We considered this research to promote gender justice from a masculinity perspective.

B. Discussion

1. The Social Construction of Generation Z Masculinity in Bangka: *Bujang*

In Bangka's everyday language, an unmarried young man is called *bujang* – a term paired with *gadis* (unmarried woman). Historically, official customary documents from the Palembang Sultanate era used this pair (Annisa et al., 2021; Wijaya et al., 2017). Today, *bujang* remains a shared social category referring to unmarried males. Within this category, social stratification is recognized: *urang kecit* (working-class) and *urang ade* (upper-class). Most participants in this study identified as middle- or working-class.

2. Social Representation: Seeing Masculinity "from within"

Approaching the issue of masculinity as a configuration of action in the structure of social relations requires research that is rooted in everyday life. Therefore, the approach of social representation is considered exactly the core of this research (Permanadeli, 2015, p. 21; Sammut et al., 2015, p. 4). Social representation holds that society is an important locus and provides the basis for the construction of all behaviors, attitudes, opinions, and representations held by its members (Rogers, 2011, pp. 64–65). Social representation—as the socio-evolutionary development of the concept of collective consciousness or of Durkheim's collective representation—reinserts psychological constructions into its approach. A construction that excludes Durkheim from his sociological project (Sammut et al., 2015, p. 29).

Social representation, as defined by Moscovici, is a system of values, ideas, and practices that enable a community to classify, describe, and explain its social world (Moscovici, 1973). It is a collective elaboration of a social object for the purpose of behaving and communicating (Moscovici, 1963). Unlike collective representations, social representations are dynamic, fluid networks of images, metaphors, and beliefs anchored in common knowledge and stored in collective memory (Flick & Foster, 2017). This approach allows researchers to 'see from within' how masculinity is produced, shared, and practiced in everyday life. In Bangka, language provides access to this common knowledge—particularly the term *bujang*, which anchors the social representation of young unmarried men.

Thus, when it is possible to dig into the social character that becomes the anchor—in the form of common sense—of the individual, it may be the objectification of shared knowledge or social thinking that constitutes

it. On the contrary, if it can uncover what constitutes a society's collective memory, then the shared knowledge is built on the outcomes of social communication among its members.

A precise definition of *Jadi Urang* is difficult to come by. We couldn't identify a single piece of research that discussed a true thought that is widely known and lived in the Bangka community's social essence. Both anchoring and objectification should be found in the context of social representation. The language begins with a broad portrayal of masculinity and common sense, representing *Jadi Urang* as a Bangka people.

The concept of *Jadi Urang* (being true men) is passed down from generation to generation and has become the basis of Bangka society's collective unconsciousness. The collective unconscious of this ancestral legacy parallels the Jung Psychology archetype (C. G. Jung, 1970). The concept of *Jadi Urang* does not exactly symbolize masculinity in the Bangka community. Defining masculinity, on the other hand, extends beyond the concept of a local community to comprehending what a human being is, what the purpose of life is, and how to be a good human being. In other words, attempting to unearth social representations of masculinity requires an understanding of the local community's view of human philosophy.

Based on data extraction through interviews, some of the evolving representations of the concept of *Jadi Urang* have been condensed down to three primary dimensions: 1) A prosperous man (prosperity); 2) A sociable man (sociability); and 3) A religious man (religiosity). These three dimensions are not distinct in the Bangka civilization. This three-dimensional rendering depicts *Jadi Urang* as an entire image.

3. Gen Z Imagination of Ideal Masculinity

In certain ways, the social construction of masculinity in Bangka still adheres to traditional or hegemonic masculinity in Connell's terminology (R. W. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). It can be shown in the emphasis on physical qualities such as machismo, a single source of wealth, and sexual superiority, for example. Generation Z in Bangka transformed the societal construction of masculinity. There are numerous religious allusions (*sholeh* (faithful) and *akhlak* (well-mannered)) in their minds; the image of a gentleman completes the ideal male social construction.

a. Being a Prosperous Man (Prosperity)

The initial implication of the image of *Jadi Urang* is that a man must be successful. Participants in Bangka's further exploration of Gen Z's perspective said that a person's success is defined by economic independence. Success, according to Gen Z Bangka, is defined by economic independence or skills rather than egoistic mastery of economic resources. An economically self-sufficient person has a decent job and is responsible for their basic needs. Men are now seen as breadwinners rather than single-life seekers, as in traditional masculinity.

So, regardless of the outcome, the folks we're talking about have a hard-working mindset. The ultimate goal is to be an autonomous figure rather than just a narrow *homo economicus* (economic creature). As a result, humans succeed in broadening the human image in the *homo economicus* as a continuously rational and narrowly selfish agent who ideally pursues a subjectively decided goal (Ailon, 2020).

Homo economicus is a theoretical construct of the selfish man aimed at satisfying his own personal interests and desires. He's more individualistic, focused on rational calculations, and sometimes ignores emotional factors, with a motivation based on transactions (Urbina & Ruiz-Villaverde, 2019). The concept of a one-dimensional human product of *homo economicus* is just transcended by the construction of *Jadi Urang* (Fine, 2017; Marcuse, 2006). *Jadi Urang* emphasizes social responsibility with the economic independence they have. *Jadi Urang* means having an economic responsibility for himself, his family, and everyone else. In other words, a man is a multi-dimensional human being.

b. Being a Sociable Man (Sociability)

Being a social man is the next dimension of the concept of *Jadi Urang*. So, *Jadi Urang* must be able to strike an equilibrium between the significance of his actualization and the values of his social group. As a result, he transcends limiting individualist values. When it is a social being, it is not separated from itself (Charmaz et al., 2019). As a result, the ideal sociable of *Jadi Urang* is a *homo socius* (social being). The social attribute of *Jadi Urang* is a humanistic preservation. Being a sociable man does not imply losing one's identity.

On the contrary, in *Jadi Urang* terms, a social person is a human being capable of actualizing himself by connecting with himself, others, nature, and culture (Fromm & Marx, 2013). It concerns becoming a prosperous individual. Work in the collective memory of the Bangka people is not only for economic advantage. It has intrinsic work significance (Martela

& Pessi, 2018). Furthermore, work is a type of self-actualization for the individual, his family, others, and his social environment. So, sociable people are a preserver of social harmony because they serve as a point of balance their own understanding and others'.

c. Being a Religious Man (Religiosity)

One attribute of masculinity that may not be found in Western discourse is the masculine figure's religious allusions (*sholeh* (faithful) and *akhlak* (well-mannered)). As a result, *Jadi Urang* are analogous to religious figures. A religious man is a kind of human being who lives in a holy nature, full of religious ideals, and can enjoy the sanctity that exists and is apparent in the universe, in matter, plants, animals, and humans (Armstrong, 2022). The sacred experience and sacrifice will further shape the pattern and manner of life. In other words, a religious figure is someone who believes in the principles of his virtue and then lives them out in daily life.

The ideal figure in the context of Gen Z in Bangka is a man who promotes this powerful religious trait. According to field evidence, Gen Z in Bangka also employs religious references to define the masculine standard. This is understandable, given that Bangka's cultural structure today is one of a community upholds religious values and incorporates local traditions into daily life.

4. Gen Z Imagination of Masculinity Practices and Social Relations

As a configuration of action, masculinity is embedded in a range of relationship structures that

may follow different historical trajectories. Therefore, masculinity, as well as femininity, is always susceptible to internal contradictions and historical distortions (R. Connell, 2005, p. 73). Therefore, Connell offers a three-layer model of gender structures that can be used as a guide in investigating the practices and social relations of masculinity through: a) power relations; 2) production relations; and 3) cathexis, relations of desire and emotion (R. Connell, 2005, pp. 73–75).

a. Production Relations: *Urang Bujang ya Begawi*

The relations of production were the gendered division of labor, which turns capital into a gendered form. This is because the accumulation of capital is related to the field of reproduction (R. W. Connell, 2020). In this form of partnership, Gen Z's imagination is *urang bujang ya begawi* (men must work). The ownership of a worthy job is in every man's vision. It is about independence and responsibility to oneself, one's family, and one's social relationships.

However, a fascinating finding is that Gen Z is less rigid about the division of labor than traditional masculinity, which distinguishes males in public spaces and women in home settings. These *bujang* don't think in binary terms. They recognize that today's life allows for exchange and cooperation in both public and private settings. Both men and women can work in public and private settings. Men, according to Generation Z, should not be ashamed to do things that have traditionally been considered the private realm of the household, such as cleaning or foster care.

b. Power Relations: *Urang Bujang Belajer Tanggungjawab*

The prime axis of power in contemporary Western culture is the subordination of women to the rule of men, which the women's liberation movement referred to as patriarchy (R. W. Connell, 2020). It also applies to Indonesian culture (Nilan, 2009). Male voices determine decision-making in both public and private places in traditional masculine culture. Men, for example, make decisions in Javanese society because they are seen as leaders. Leadership quality is governed by biological variables rather than competency issues (Drianus & Hayati, 2021; Hayati et al., 2014). The belief that "men are leaders" persists among Bangka's Gen Z. However, participants corrected their assumptions by adding that major family-related decisions should be made through discussion. In other words, there is already an awareness that decision-making cannot be made solely on its own.

They believe that *urang bujang belajer tanggungjawab* (a man should accept responsibility). This type of accountability manifests in decision-making. However, they believe that the ideal decision has already been discussed in a group setting. Recognition of cognitive deficits in decision-making and acceptance of others' perspectives or ideas may suggest a potential for power-sharing in Gen Z brains. However, Gen Z understands that responsibility does not rest only on its own shoulders but rather on cooperation and collaboration with both partners and others. Both in domestic matters and in bigger areas.

c. Emotional Relations: *Kelaki Jangen Nanges*

Following Freud, emotional relations perceive passion as emotional energy invested in subjects, and the practices that shape passion are gendered (R. W. Connell, 2020). Traditional masculinity holds that males should not display their emotions in public, for example, by crying. Stigmatic emotional expressions are considered "female stuff" and are culturally forbidden for men to engage in. Of course, this makes men emotionally robust on the outside but vulnerable on the inside.

In this type of relationship, Bangka's Gen Z is still very much embracing traditional masculinity. The image that appears is *Kelaki Jangen Nangis* (Men don't cry). Crying, they believe, is a weak, "not male" attitude. Furthermore, men are supposed to be tough, not awkward. Crying, in reality, is not an indication of weakness. Crying is an expression of emotion. Stress relief might be hampered by limited emotional expressiveness (River & Flood, 2021). Then it is natural for men to be more vulnerable to emotional stress at this point.

C. Conclusion

This study contributes a novel conceptualization of masculinity from the perspective of Gen Z in Bangka, articulated through the local category of *bujang* and the ideal of *Jadi Urang*. Unlike hegemonic masculinity models that emphasize dominance and physical prowess, *Jadi Urang* integrates economic autonomy (prosperity), social harmony (sociability), and religious piety (religiosity) as co-constitutive dimensions. This finding challenges the universality of Western-centric masculinity theories. It offers an alternative framework rooted

in local Indonesian wisdom, particularly relevant for Muslim-majority societies from a non-weird perspective. The persistence of emotional restraint (*kelaki jangen nanges*), however, shows that patriarchal ideology remains most resilient in the affective domain, implying that gender interventions must address deep-seated emotional norms, not only economic or legal reforms.

Practically, gender equality initiatives in Bangka and similar contexts should leverage local terms like *bujang* and *Jadi Urang* as entry points for positive masculinity – for instance, religious leaders can promote that a *sholeh* (faithful) man is also emotionally balanced. Future research should extend this inquiry to other ethnic and religious groups in Indonesia (e.g., Papua, Toraja, Dayak) and design intervention-based programs that integrate local ideals with gender justice goals. While geographically limited to Bangka Island and a specific Muslim Gen Z population, this study provides a replicable model for investigating masculinity as social representation in other communities.

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