

## Research article

# The Amplification of Hegemonic Masculinity in Kucumbu Tubuh Indahku

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Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta**ORCID**Lynda Susana Widya Ayu Fatmawaty: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0334-8435>**Abstract.**

The history of *Lengger*, one of the traditional dances from Banyumas, reveals how the dancer's body becomes a site in which control over the body is exercised. As revealed in the *Kucumbu Tubuh Indahku* film released in 2018, *Lengger* shows how the body is culturally defined as the manifestation of femininity and masculinity, and how it is dominated by hegemonic masculinities. This article aimed to investigate the hegemonic masculinities practiced by various regimes in Indonesia. The narrative method was used by applying Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. The data were gathered through a close reading technique in watching the film. Further, the data were analysed using elements of narrative which involved aspects of camera technique and camera angle. The interconnectivity of the adopted scene and the wider socio-political context remained essential in understanding the context of this film. The article argues that the practice of hegemonic masculinity has been amplified in the Reformation era. As part of this expansion, the practices not only involve the domination of male over female but also male over another male. As depicted in this film, the exercise of hegemonic masculinity embraces the gay man. In relation to Warok, the gay body is dominated as well as subjugated not only by other male bodies but also by the socio-cultural body. Indeed, culture and societies deliberately have become the agents to reinforce hegemonic masculinities in the Reformation era.

**Keywords:** *Lengger*, hegemonic masculinity, *Kucumbu Tubuh Indahku*

## 1. Introduction

The existence of *Lengger* Banyumas was booming after the appearance of the controversial film directed by Garin Nugroho, entitled *Kucumbu Tubuh Indahku*. The film, which is produced in the reformation Era, articulates how the *Lengger*'s body becomes the arena of various powers to subjugate it. Indeed, the subjugation towards this body involves the intersection of gender and sexuality. After all, *Lengger*'s body was exercised by the community, in which they emerged as a moral guard who manages various issues related to morality.

*Lengger* is a traditional art from Banyumas which is danced by men dressed as women. [1]states that *Lengger* derives from the words *leng* and *ngger*, which means

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that being thought of as a hole (leng) but it is ; a crown of a rooster that symbolizes a male. This means that being thought as a woman in fact th dancer is a man. From its historical trajectory, Lengger has also become a male sexual object in the colonial era. As narrated by Dariah, a Lengger maestro from Banyumas that he let his body to serve the invaders from Japan to protect women. In contrast, what is revealed in the film *Kucumbu Tubuh Indahku* (2018) represents the fluidity of gender and sexual minorities that is problematized when it clashes with morality.

Further, this study uses a narrative method to reveal how hegemonic masculinity is practiced in relation to the body of the Lengger dancer.[2] stated that through camera techniques and camera angles, film narratives can be explored to depict the constructed meaning of the film. The data is taken through screenshots of the film, then the data are analysed using the theory of hegemonic masculinity. Further, the camera technique is used to narrate its relationship with gender and sexuality issues. Those issues become the paradigm in positioning the body as well as dominating the body, which is exercised by masculinity.

Reformation Era revealed a more diverse exercise of masculinity as depicted in *Kucumbu Tubuh Indahku* (2018). The new form of hegemonic masculinity is practiced in relation to Juno, the Lengger dancer. However, Juno's position as subordinate masculinity is a manifestation that binary gender is the fundamental ideology of masculinity. As stated by Connell & Messerschmidt (2019: 75), hegemonic masculinity is a form of masculinity that legitimizes unequal relations in three relationships, in which it involves the relationship between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and between masculinities. Therefore, hegemonic masculinity involves the domination of not only women but also other masculine groups.

Various research dealing with hegemonic masculinity were done in relation to the domination of men over women. In a certain case, there is a non-violent hegemonic masculinity [3] .However, this study aims at a different matter because the hegemonic masculinity is discussed as an amplification of the hegemonic masculinity that involves an axis that dominates other masculinities, the Lengger's body. Further, this research also emphasizes embodied hegemonic masculinity that is closely associated with violence and blood.

## 2. Findings and Discussion

Garin's *Kucumbu Tubuh Indahku* (2018) reveals how genders alternatives are represented in the problematic relationship with hegemonic masculinity. This masculinity

positions the effeminate body of the Lengger dancer as subordinate masculinity. Therefore, it also lets the body experience gender oppression as well as sexual oppression. Further, the amplification of hegemonic masculinity can be identified through the relationship of the main character as the Lengger (Juno) with the Boxer and Juno with the Warok.

It can be highlighted that the Boxer remains the representation of hegemonic masculinity, which fundamentally reveals the arrogance of masculinity. Messner [4] states that the boxing ring constructs a masculine identity position. It means that the boxing ring is an arena to represent masculinity by combining an athletic body with violence. In addition, it can also be seen that the appearance of the nameless Boxer character shows that masculinity only needs body representation instead of name. The trajectories of masculinity reveal that the male body began to be admired with an aesthetic standard as well as idealized since the 15th century in Athens. It was started in sculptures and body paintings of athletic youth [5]. Further, [6] mentioned that the idea of a modern erotic body in the perfect male body were two Renaissance models of Donatello and Michelangelo's statues. In its development, Donatello's body fails to meet the expectations of society because it represents a male figure who is too mature, thus it is considered imperfect masculinity. On the other hand, Michelangelo has succeeded in becoming the main figure who represents the subject and the heroic body. With an ideal, athletic, and muscular body, this ideal male body figure signified a complete representation of male masculinity through a hard, muscular, and athletic body shape.

Therefore, the existence of Boxer in this film represents masculine figure in the Reformation era that glorify masculinity through bodies to reveal strength and violence. In the below scene, the high camera angle is aimed at showing the power of those bodies. The power of hegemonic masculinity is depicted through the Boxer's character which is related to an athletic and violent body.

Hegemonic masculinity in the second element involves an unequal relation between masculinity and femininity. Femininity in this case refers not to the female body but the qualifications attached to womanhood. The next subordination of Juno is the categorization of Juno as male femininity by Warok. In Schippers' terminology [7] it is explained that male femininity defines the characters and practices that are culturally attached to women, the placement of cultural activities that position femininity as a complement, hierarchical relations with masculine, and bodily in men. The effeminate body of Lengger was intended practiced by Warok. Warok constructs their relationships by positioning Juno as feminine who must obey him. However, the existence of male femininities is considered to threaten the hegemonic relationship between masculinity



**Figure 1:** The Boxer's body as the representation of hegemonic masculinity.

and femininity. Therefore, the existence of this group is stigmatized and effeminate by masculinity.

The effeminate body of Juno also was designed to take the feminine role. Feminine categories are attached to Juno by cooking, sewing, and being full of tenderness. The scene below narrates the intimacy and engagement that is built through the dialogue and medium shot technique between Juno and Boxer.



**Figure 2:** the effeminate body of Juno in taking the feminine role.

Hegemonic masculinity is also interpreted to be closely related to violence, fight, and blood. In the below scene, it can be seen how masculinity is affirmed through fight and blood. Through a low angle, the camera focused on the sickle pressing the neck and the bloodied body of the Warok. This is indeed related to the stigma attached to Warok as the mighty, strong, and fighters. In addition, the people of Ponorogo also

associated Warok with having magical powers. Therefore, they can dance by lifting heavy weights and biting a Reyog mask; in the form of a lion's head decorated with peacock feathers along 2 meters in diameter. In fact, Gemblak also dances while sitting on it. [8] states that Reyog is often associated with dangerous, a subversive art form that is even associated with trouble makers (Warok). Reyog was then regarded as a dance that has a political agenda because, in Soekarno's era, Reyog was often claimed to be fostered by certain parties. They were presumed with their hidden agenda by going around carrying missions from these parties.



**Figure 3:** The bloody body of Warok as the symbol of masculinity.

On the contrary, the relationship between Juno and Warok positioned Juno as Gemblak; a couple of Warok who is mythically believed to give him strength. Warok consciously places Juno as a partner who must obey his authority. Through intradiegetic sound, he questioned Juno for being act like a man while stabling needles to control himself. Definitely, it affirmed the notion of masculinity symbol in relation to blood and violence. Further, Juno is placed as the dominant in his relationship with Warok or embodied subordinate masculinities. In line with Connell's opinion [7], in hegemonic masculinity, it can be highlighted that femininity centered on male domination over women is not the only mechanism of this domination, but another form of hegemonic masculinity against subordinated and marginalized masculinity. Consequently, it clarified the subordination by positioning the gay group as embodied subordinate masculinities.

From the various relationships between the Lengger body and other bodies that dominate it, Juno's body has been subjugated by them. Juno, who become Gemblak manifested the existence of gay body. Thus, he becomes a moral threat to the nation. The community demanded that the group of artists should be banished from the village.

Indeed, it legitimizes the image of the subordinate masculinity who experienced sexual slander as articulated in this film.

### 3. CONCLUSION

This film shows that the aim of hegemonic masculinity is affirming the practice of the dominance of masculinity. The amplification of the domination object positioned the body to be subjugated. Even though Reformation Era open more spaces for the sexual minority, indeed it still trapped on the dichotomy of binary gender ideology. Therefore, it also implied the threat is not only practiced by effeminising the body but also othering the body. At last, the othering of the body positioned it as the moral threat to the nation.

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