

## Research Article

# Marginalization of Women's Identity in a Matrilineal Community: A Study of Semende Community in South Sumatra, Indonesia

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## Abstract.

This paper explored the marginalization of women in the Semende community, which is claimed to be matrilineal. According to Semende custom, the eldest daughter is given the power to inherit, manage, and utilize the family's assets of housing and agricultural land. Those women are known as the *tunggu tubang*. However, according to custom, Semende males are also given the authority to influence the inheritance management carried out by the appointed women. The Semende custom allows the men to "judge" and test the appointed women to see if they are unable to carry out the management of the inheritance and even gain legitimacy if they want to manage the inherited property. This custom suggests that the Semende woman's claim to have power over the inheritance must be questioned. The customary legitimacy of men being allowed to take over the inheritance if needed also confirms that the Semende females have been lulled away from their position as inheriterse. They appear to have the power over the inheritance, but in reality, they have been marginalized in the social structure of their society. For this reason, this article tries to describe the basis for the justification for taking over authority and power from women and the implications for the inherited customs of property and the social structure of the Semende community.

**Keywords:** inheritere; male domination; marginalization; matrilineal community; Indonesia

## 1. Introduction

Semende is one of Indonesia's communities that scholars view as a matrilineal community. This vie is demonstrated by the inheritance custom of property to the eldest daughter, called *tunggu tubang*. For the Semende community, the *tunggu tubang* (inherited women) is an important identity, as it distinguishes itself from the surrounding community. The Semende's claim of matrilineality can no longer be justified, as in reality, the male siblings of the inherited women, called the *lautan*, are also given by custom the legitimacy to take over the management and the use of the inherited property. This indicates that the women's power over the inheritance seems false and deceptive. By tradition, the Semende women are marginalized by their social structure.

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This shows that Semende customs have rationalized the legitimacy of taking over women's authority and power over men. This taking over resulted in limited space for women to move within customary law, making the Semende women unwittingly marginalized in the social structure. This means that the social structure increasingly positions Semende women as part of the actualization of inequality constructed by men. This taking over of women's authority and power by men, makes the Semende women co-opted and marginalized by the new patriarchal structure so that the Semende's claim of matrilineality can no longer be justified. This article tries to provide an understanding of the process of the authority switch and the diminishing power of women executed by the males in the Semende community, which results in the increased marginalization of the position of the Semende women. The Semende men, who previously did not have a strategic position regarding inherited assets, gained religious (Islam) and customary legitimacy to control these resources. The Semende community has attracted the interest of scholars in studying patterns of family inheritance to daughters, as we can find in several previous researchers' writings. (David S Moyer, "South Sumatra in the Indonesia field of anthropological study" in PE de Josselin de Jong, ed, *Unity Divers* (Dordrecht-Holland: Foris Publication, 1984) 88; David S Moyer, "Cultural constraints on marriage: anti-exchange behaviour in nineteenth century South Sumatra" (1983) 139:2–3 *Bijdr tot taal-, land-en volkenkunde/Journal Humanit Soc Sci Southeast Asia* 247–259; Elita Guspitawaty, *Penyimpangan sistem pewarisan yang terjadi pada masyarakat hukum adat Semendo di Pulau Beringin Kabupaten OKU, Propinsi Sumatera Selatan* [The inheritance system deviation that occurred in the Semendo customary law community on Beringin Island, OKU Regency (Semarang: [Master's thesis. Program Pascasarjana Universitas Diponegoro], 2002); Iskandar, *Kedudukan anak tunggu tubang dalam pewarisan masyarakat adat Suku Semendo di Kota Palembang* [The position of children tunggu tubang in the heritage of the Semendo indigenous community in Palembang City] (Semarang: [Master's thesis. Program Pascasarjana Universitas Diponegoro], 2003); Robbi Setiawan, "Status Dan Peranan Tunggu tubang Serta Perubahannya Pada Masyarakat Semende Desa Muara Tenang Kecamatan Semende Darat Tengah Kabupaten Muara Enim [Status and Role of A Tunggu Tubang and Its Changes in the Semende Community, Muara Tenang Village, Semende D" (2013) Univ Sriwijaya, Palembang; Hatta Setiawan & Cecep Darmawan, "Upaya pelestarian adat Semende di Desa Ulu Danau, Provinsi Sumatera Selatan [Preservation of Semende customs in Ulu Danau Village, South Sumatra Province]" (2016) 3:2 *J Urban Soc Arts* 57–63; Eni Murdiati & Ridhah Taqwa, *The Local Wisdom of Tunggu Tubang Culture in the Challenges of the Times (Study on Ethnical Semende District Muara Enim South Sumatera)* (EDP Sciences,

2018).) The *tunggu tubang* cultural setting that the Semende community legitimizes as custom – the basis for the continuation of community life – is fascinating to understand as the takeover of authority and power by the males over the inherited property tends to have implications for change in the social structure of the community. In the Semende community, the strength of Islam teachings and the implementation of the traditional government system of the Palembang Sultanate since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century is suspected to have contributed to the takeover of women's authority and power as inheritee.( According to the Guidebook on the Declaration of the Paguyuban Jurai Semende Nusantara and the Granting of the Honorary Title of Semende Customs (2008), it is estimated that Islam teachings began to enter the Semende community at the end of the 17th century through a figure known as Puyang Awak. Meanwhile, the influence of the marge government system is estimated to have occurred in the early 19th century through a figure known as Puyang Rene.)

Apart from that, the factor of increased awareness by education,( Murdiati & Taqwa, supra note 1.) and the occurrence of internal conflicts within the family,( Guspitawaty, supra note 1.) are assumed to have contributed to the marginalization of *tunggu tubang* women. The takeover of women's authority and power over inherited property by men in Semende has resulted in the redefinition of *tunggu tubang* inheritance. Inherited assets, in the form of agricultural land, were slowly taken over by the *tunggu tubang*'s male sibling(s). At the same time, the women's power diminished and shifted. It remained only in the form of the inherited house where they lived. Even though there was a shift of power, the existence of women as *tunggu tubang* was maintained. The women were still required to carry out their role as industriousness *tunggu tubang* care, as determined by custom.

This article tries to provide an understanding of the process of the authority switch and the diminishing power of women executed by the males in the Semende community, which results in the increased marginalization of the position of the Semende women. In line with this, the three questions that are attempted to be formulated in this paper are: First, why and how the process of taking over women's authority and power by males can occur? Second, what is the basis for the justification for taking over authority and power, as to the Semende women are further marginalized? Third, what are the implications of this switch of authority and power for the *tunggu tubang* custom as well as the social structure of the Semende community itself?

This study is based on the assumptions that: Firstly, the *tunggu tubang* is an important identity for the Semende community, as it distinguishes itself from the surrounding communities. Therefore, eliminating the tradition of the *tunggu tubang* position means

the elimination of one's Semende identity. Second, the authority and power of women and men in inheritance is structured by custom, so that the taking over of women's authority and power by men can be recognized as a form of customary abuse of women. Third, the taking over of women's authority and power can be seen as a form of marginalization of women that is not based on the Semende cultural elements of the community.

## 2. Research Method

This paper is based on the results of ethnographic research conducted from 2015 to 2017 in 3 different locations. In the first location, researchers conducted in the area of origin of the Semende community in which they are known as the *Semende Darat*, namely in Muara Enim Regency (South Sumatra province). Meanwhile, the other 2 locations are in the migration area of the Semende community, in which they are known as the *Semende Lembak*, namely in Muara Sahung (Kaur Regency, Bengkulu province), and in Tanjung Raje (North Lampung Regency, Lampung province). The *Semende Darat*, the area of origin of the Semende community in Muara Enim (South Sumatra), was taken as the location, to collect data related to the idealism of the *tunggu tubang* custom. It became the area where the basis for taking over women's authority and power was investigated. Meanwhile, two migration locations for the Semende community, called the *Semende Lembak*, were chosen. To read how the process of taking over women's authority and power occurred.

TABLE 1: Characteristics of the Semende community in the three study locations.

Characteristics	South Sumatera	Bengkulu	Lampung
Area	Area of origin	migration area	migration area
Distance from the area of origin	—	287 km	355 km
Geographical	hills	hills	Hills
Source of income	farms and rice fields	farms	Farms
Customary rules	customs remain strong	customs began to change	customs began to change
Domination of other ethnicities nearby	Besemah (patrilineal)	Rejang (patrilineal)	Lampung (patrilineal)
Village pattern	groups	groups	Elongated

Data collection was carried out through interviews with several cultural actors at the research locations. They were conducted with traditional leaders such as the male *meraje*, the *tunggu tubang* women, and the *lautan* or the *tunggu tubang*'s brother. They



**Figure 1:** Distribution map of the Semende community in South Sumatra, Bengkulu, and Lampung. Source: modified from <http://loketpeta.pu.go.id>.

resided in the vicinity of the research sites. The selection of these informants was based on the idea that the relations between these three groups influenced the taking over, or switch, of the women's authority and power in the Semende communities. To deepen the information from the three types of informants above, several community members who were in the study location were also selected to explore how the inheritance system was applied in their community. Apart from interviews, field observations were also conducted to observe how the process of taking over women's authority and power in the Semende community was carried out. Information from this field exposure was analyzed using an ethnographic approach. In which the obtained data provides clarity, and can be understood and interpreted for a social pattern to be distinguished. It results in a clarity of social relations between the actors involved, their customary rules, and the resources they own. The network of social and physical assets can be assessed and comprehended as a unified whole.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Inheritance System, Inheritee, and Semende Community

The struggle for authority and power between women and men is a topic that always attracts attention in gender studies. This is because gender, as introduced by social scientists, is a concept to explain differences between women and men that are innate

or a creation by God and the result of cultural formation, learned and socialized since childhood.( Herien Puspitawati, *Gender dan keluarga: Konsep dan realita Indonesia* [Gender and family: Indonesian concepts and realities] (Pt Penerbit IPB Press, 2012),) According to Boe et al,( Ole Boe et al, “Gender and research publishing in India: Uniformly high inequality?” (2019) 13:1 *J Informetr* 118–131.) gender is a social construction consisting of a series of behaviors and expectations, which has implications for the separation of roles between men and women in their life activities. This division of roles is often referred to as the division of gender roles,( Ole Boe, “A possible explanation of the achievement of gender and gender identity” (2015) 190 *Procedia-Social Behav Sci* 17–23,) which in the Semende community is emphasized in the *tunggu tubang* custom.

As a cultural construction, the division of gender roles tends to be continued socially in the community. Boe( *Ibid.*) refers to this process as “gender socialization”, as he encountered in the learning process of children in the traditional community of Sharanahua, India. In the Semende community, this gender socialization process is even legitimized according to custom and religion, which strictly separates the authority and power of women and men. If women as a *tunggu tubang* are legitimized as masters of the inherited resources, while the males in the position of *meraje* and *lautan* are legitimized as controllers of the resource management, that ought to be conducted by *tunggu tubang* it is facing a clash. In reality, this assertion of authority and power sometimes does not always place women in the position they should be,( Erin Hatton & Mary Nell Trautner, “Images of powerful women in the age of ‘choice feminism’” (2013) 22:1 *J Gend Stud* 65–78,) but instead occurs in an act of female deprivation by men. The Semende case clearly shows that men have committed appropriation by taking over the woman’s power and authority in controlling the inheritance.

The presence of women as inherited right property is what legitimizes many experts that Semende is matrilineal.( Moyer, *supra* note 1; Moyer, *supra* note 1; Guspitawaty, *supra* note 1; Iskandar, *supra* note 1; Setiawan, *supra* note 1.) This statement needs to be questioned because the matrilineal of the Semende society is relatively different from the matrilineal pattern in general. Following the thoughts of Parkin & Stone,( Robert Parkin & Linda Stone, *Kinship and family: an anthropological reader* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004),) the matrilineal inheritance system is not limited to one woman, but inheritance is given to all women in the matrilineal lineage. For example, this can be shown in the Minangkabau matrilineal case, where all women in a matrilineal family have the same rights to the family inheritance.( Zainal Arifin, *Politik Perkawinan. Dualitas Praktik Sosial Masyarakat Minangkabau* [Politik of marriage: the duality of social practice of Minangkabau society] (Yogyakarta: Yogyakarta: Histokultura-Graha Ilmu, 2018),) In the



Minangkabau matrilineal society, this takeover of authority by men also often occurs, but this takeover is temporary and is carried out as an effort to avoid conflict between siblings in the matrilineal group. ( Franz von Benda-Beckmann & Keebet von Benda-Beckmann, Political and legal transformations of an Indonesian polity: the Nagari from colonisation to decentralisation (Cambridge: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Evelyn Blackwood, Webs of power: Women, kin, and community in a Sumatran village (Lanham, MD: Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000); Jennifer Martha Krier, Displacing distinction: Political processes in the Minangkabau backcountry (Harvard: Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1994).) Likewise, in the matrilineal society in Kerinci (Jambi), the takeover of power by men aims to renegotiate who has more rights in managing agricultural land. ( Martini Jufri & C W Watson, "Decision-making in rural households in Kerinci and Minangkabau" (1998) 26:74 *Indones Malay World* 13–31.) This shows that men's intervention in the family property inheritance system in the matrilineal Minangkabau and Kerinci (Jambi) communities is more aimed at regulating the rotation of agricultural land management so that all members of the extended family feel the benefits of the inherited land. ( Agnes R Quisumbing & Keijiro Otsuka, "Land inheritance and schooling in matrilineal societies: evidence from Sumatra" (2001) 29:12 *World Dev* 2093–2110; Grace B Villamor & Meine van Noordwijk, "Gender specific land-use decisions and implications for ecosystem services in semi-matrilineal Sumatra" (2016) 39 *Glob Environ Chang* 69–80.) This is different from the case in the Semende community, where men usurp the authority and power that should be in the hands of women.

### 3.2. Women as Inheritees in the Semende Custom

*Tunggu tubang* is a term used to refer to the pattern of inheritance of family property in the Semende community. ( Tubang is the name for a container made of bamboo which is used as a container for cooking spices. So that the cooking spices are not disturbed by ants and rodents, the tubang will usually be hung above the kitchen fireplace. Therefore, the tunggu tubang can be interpreted as the activity of waiting for the tubang in the kitchen) This inheritance pattern follows the female lineage, thus the *tunggu tubang* is also often used to refer to women who receive the mandate to use and utilize the inherited assets. Ideally, the woman who receives the trust as a *tunggu tubang* is the eldest daughter. If the eldest daughter is unwilling or is "fired" from being a *tunggu tubang*, then she can delegate it to her younger sisters. However, if no daughter is willing and able to be *tunggu tubang*, then it can be delegated to a son

in the family. “Therefore, if the position of a *tunggu tubang* is handed over to a boy, then the man must carry out a *ngangkit* marriage.( Ngangkit means “to resurrect or return to normal”. For example, when people are drying rice in the morning, it suddenly starts to drizzle, indicating that it is going to rain, so in everyday life, Semende people often say *ngangkit padi* (lift the drying rice so that it doesn’t get wet by the rain). Therefore, *ngangkit* marriage means marriage by asking an outside female child (usually still in the extended family) to become a wife for a male child in the family, who is then transferred to the status of an “insider” in her husband’s family.)

The position of *tunggu tubang* is only given to a married woman. Therefore, when she marries, her rights and obligations as a maid of honor will be announced and attached to her. A *tunggu tubang* woman’s right is to inherit her extended family’s property in the form of a house and agricultural landholdings and sometimes she will even inherit a fish pond around the house. However, as a *tunggu tubang*, she is obliged to manage and utilize the inherited assets for the benefit of all members of her extended family, and must not use them for the personal interests of her immediate family only.

The obligations imposed on *tunggu tubang* women, sometimes will not always be by customary provisions. For this reason, the mother’s brother called the *meraje*,( Meraje means being king, or positioning oneself like a king) will be given the power to exercise control over the *tunggu tubang* woman so that they carry out their role well. *Meraje* was also tasked with guarding and protecting so that the *tunggu tubang* treasures were not sold. Therefore, the *meraje* are given the power to judge the *tunggu tubang* women if they are deemed not to carry out their obligations according to customary regulations.

To assist the *meraje* in carrying out their role as controllers, the brother of *tunggu tubang* called *lautan*, will be given the authority to remind his sister (*tunggu tubang*).(*Lautan* means an ocean that has no edges, so its upstream and downstream are not clear) Therefore, ideally, the *lautan* helps his sister to carry out her obligations, not as someone who judges the position of the *meraje*. With this role and position, the *lautan* is also often referred to as a *meraje* candidate, because one day he will be the one who will replace the role and position of a *meraje*.

### 3.3. The Process of Taking Over Women's Authority and Power

Traditionally, the treasures of the *tunggu tubang* (houses and agricultural land) are an inseparable unit. This is because each other is enabled to support each other. The house is positioned as a shared (communal) house, a place to return home for her brothers who fail to migrate. The *tunggu tubang*’s house is also a place to care for the elderly parents



TABLE 2: Scheme of authority and power of the *lautan* and *tunggu tubang* in the Semende custom.

Characteristics	<i>Lautan</i>	<i>Tunggu Tubang</i>
Authority and power in custom	As the leader of an extended family	As heir and administrator of inherited assets
Ownership and management of communal land (inheritance)	The right to supervise	The right to inherit, manage, and utilize
Ownership and management of communal houses (inheritance)	The right to use	The right to inherit, and use as a residence
Private ownership of house and land	Have authority	Have authority

Source: processed from field data (2015-2017)

who need to be taken care of by their children and also as a place for holding traditional activities for their extended family. Meanwhile, the agricultural landholdings are a source of livelihood for all members of the house, as well as to finance the ceremonies held at the *tunggu tubang's* house. Therefore, the production of this inherited agricultural land is more intended to finance the activities of the extended family members, not to finance the personal needs of the *tunggu tubang* and her core family.

Along with developments, when there was a taking over of the legacies of the *tunggu tubang*, the legacies of the *tunggu tubang* as a whole eventually experienced a shift. Now, the *tunggu tubang's* treasure is only in the form of a house to live in, while the agricultural land that was formerly under the control of the *tunggu tubang* woman, is now controlled by the *lautan* or *tunggu tubang's* brother. He is now the one who has more authority to use the inherited land.

This taking over of the inherited assets in the form of agricultural land by the *lautan* ultimately creates a dilemma. On the one hand, as the leader of a family, he is widely seen as someone who should help his *tunggu tubang* sister to be able to maintain the survival of the inheritance as a unit. But on the other hand, the *lautan* is considered to conflict with his sister, by dividing the inheritance which should be held as one unit. Because he has a customary legitimacy, the process of taking over the inherited assets in the form of agricultural land by the *lautan* tends only to be seen as a taking over of power and is considered not a problem, if he can use the agricultural land for the benefit of his extended family. However, in many cases, this taking over of power tends to be detrimental to the *tunggu tubang* women. They are still “forced by custom” to finance the needs of their extended family, while the source of financing the family by utilizing the fruits of the agricultural landholdings, is no longer within her possession or control.

The taking over of women's authority and power occurs in line with the establishment of male domination in determining access to and control over resources.( Hatton & Trautner, supra note 9.) Strengthening male domination involves social relations between groups within the community as a medium of legitimacy and will be socialized in every family. In many communities, this power relationship between men and women can be observed, for example, in the division of household tasks. Even though men's contribution to household chores has increased, women are still positioned as a group that doesn't work only within the household.( Rosemary Crompton, Michaela Brockmann & Clare Lyonette, "Attitudes, women's employment and the domestic division of labour: a cross-national analysis in two waves" (2005) 19:2 Work Employ Soc 213–233.) This dichotomy not only encourages the emergence of different gender roles between men and women( Richard J Harris & Juanita M Firestone, "Changes in predictors of gender role ideologies among women: A multivariate analysis" (1998) 38:3–4 Sex Roles 239–252.) but also applies to the differentiation of roles economically and politically.( Boe, supra note 7.)

### 3.4. Legitimacy Basis for Taking Over the Control of Resources

Traditionally, family inheritance in the form of a house and agricultural land is one unit so it will only be referred to as *tunggu tubang's* property. In the current context, the treasures of the *tunggu tubang* are undergoing a redefinition of the concept, where the inherited property in the form of a house is called *tungguan*, and that (*tungguan*) is now the property of *tunggu tubang*. Meanwhile, the agricultural land is called *harte*, and now it is no longer considered a treasure of the *tunggu tubang* because control has shifted to the *lautan*.( Zainal Arifin, Maskota Delfi & Sidarta Pujiraharjo, "Harte dan tungguan: Redefinisi adat tunggu tubang pada komunitas Semende migran [Harte and tungguan: Redefinitioan of tunggu tubang tradition on migrant Semende community]" (2020) 22:2 J Masy dan Budaya 31–43.)

The redefinition of this concept ultimately has implications for the function of inheritance itself, where the family members' house holdings, as well as being a place for the family to live it is also for the *tunggu tubang* and her core family to live. Meanwhile, *harte* (agricultural land) is used more for the benefit of the *lautan's* family only, than to be used for the extended family, it depends on the decision and kindness of the *lautan* to share.

This taking over of authority and power over inherited assets and agricultural land-holdings, often begins with internal conflicts within the family. Usually, the *lautan* often

accuses his sister or the *tunggu tubang* of using the agricultural land for the benefit of herself and her core family only. Based on that accusation, the *lautan* finally will ask the *meraje* to legitimize himself in taking over the inheritance. On the other hand, the *tunggu tubang*'s husband is sometimes accused of intervening too much in the pattern of utilizing the assets of *tunggu tubang*. He is even often seen as using his wife's inheritance for the benefit of his family (husband's family).

This redefinition of the concept of the *tunggu tubang* treasure shows that there was an attempt by a brother to legitimize the taking over of authority and power over the resources of the agricultural landholdings. Through the redefinition of the holdings, the taking over by this brother was deemed not to be against custom, because the house or *tungguan* was still legitimized as the property of the *tunggu tubang* which means the *tunggu tubang* custom is still maintained. The process of expropriation of the *tunggu tubang* inheritance of the agricultural land holdings which caused the redefinition of this inheritance, is predicted to have taken place when Islamic teachings began to strengthen in the Semende community. It is estimated that Islam began to enter the Semende community in the early 19th century through the Besemah area. (Besemah is the name of one of the ethnic groups in northern Semende. Culturally, the Semende claim that their ancestors came from Besemah, so this close relationship makes the Semende tied to the Besemah ethnic group in a confederation known as Lampik Empat Merdeka Due Zainal Arifin, Diversity and Patterns of Ethnic Formation in Indonesia (Learning from cases in South Sumatra Province, Indonesia) (International comperence "Contemporary Indonesian History, Culture, and Society, 25 -26th August 2023. Indonesian Studies Departement, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU-HCM. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, 2023). ) The application of Islamic teachings gained even more legitimacy after a meeting of the Semende figures in Perdipe village. This is one of the villages in the Semende Darat Laut sub-district of Muara Enim. This is estimated to have taken place in 1870 (Fridiyanto Cahyono, "Kepemimpinan Meraje Keluarga Semende di Rejang Lebong Dan Relevansinya dengan Ajaran Islam [The Meraje Leadership of the Semende Family in Rejang Lebong and Its Relevance to Islamic Teachings]" (2022) 7:1 Manthiq 71–82.) led by a Semende figure called Puyang Awak. (Alihanafiah, Mengenal sepintas masyarakat hukum adat Semende [Recognizing the Semend customary law community] (Palembang: Pemda Provinsi Sumatra Selatan, 2008).) In fact, according to Sakai, (Minako Sakai, The nut cannot forget its shell: origin rituals among the Gumai of South Sumatra (Camberra: [Doctoral dissertatio,. The Australian National University], 1999).) in the 1880s Islamic

teachings had covered most community life in the highlands of South Sumatra, including in the Semende community.

Entering and strengthening Islamic teachings has made the patterns and activities of life in the Semende community begin to be based on Islamic teachings. One of the influences is seen in the leadership system implemented in the community, where authority and power are more oriented towards men. In the context of inheritance, “in the name of Islamic teachings,” the taking over of inherited property (agricultural land) by men has begun to gain legitimacy. This is done with the assumption that men are leaders in their families and communities so that various life activities are under the control of men’s power. However, because the house or the *tunggu tubang* is an important identity as a basis for acknowledging one’s Semendeness, the custom of *tunggu tubang* must still be maintained. This is what makes the existence of women as the *tunggu tubang* tends to be maintained, while still giving the authority and power to the family’s inherited house.

The authority and power of Semende men became stronger when the traditional *marge* government system was implemented in their community. The *marge* government system is a traditional government system implemented by the Palembang Sultanate, where the territory of power is more based on genealogical territory.(Mohammad Syawaludin, “Kontribusi Teori Fungsionalisme Struktural Parsons; Pengelolaan Sistem Sosial Marga di Sumatera Selatan [Parsons Structural Functionalism Theory Contributions; Management of the Marga Social System in South Sumatra]” (2015) 10:01 Sosiologi Reflektif 175–198.) According to Alihanafiah,( Alihanafiah, supra note 27.) since 1860 this *marge* government system began to strengthen in the Semende community, through a figure known to the Semende community as *Puyang Rene*. The *marge* administrative area will be led by a *pesirah*, and the *marge* area will consist of several smaller administrative areas called *dusun* or hamlets, which are led by the *pembarab* or *krio*. A *pesirah* will be selected from one of the highest traditional leaders in the *marge* area.(Dedi Supriyadi Adhuri, “Antara Desa dan Marga: Pemilihan struktur pada perilaku elit lokal di Kabupaten Lahat, Sumatera Selatan [Between the village and the marga. Local elite behavior structure selection in Lahat Regency, South Sumatra].” (2014) 68 Antropologi Indonesia 1–12.) This makes a *meraje* the highest figure and traditional leader of the Semende who has a great chance of being chosen as a *pesirah* or *marge* leader, while a *lautan*, as the leader of the extended family, has a chance of being chosen as a *pembarab* or *krio* as a hamlet leader. The strengthening of the authority and power of the *meraje* and the *lautan* in the *marge* government system ultimately strengthens the legitimacy of men to exercise control over the *tunggu tubang* custom. As a result, as

leaders, “in the name of custom and religion”, men have the power to judge the *tunggu tubang* women who are deemed not to comply with good customary regulations.

This redefinition process was and is possible as according to custom, the Semende men are also given the power to control the implementation of women’s role as appointed *tunggu tubang*. This role is assigned to the mother’s brother, known as the *meraje*. He has according to the Semende custom, the right to judge and punish the *tunggu tubang* female. This punishment can be executed if she does not carry out her traditional role well. The brothers of the *tunggu tubang* called the *meraje*, appear ambiguous. On the one hand, as a *tunggu tubang* brother, he is asked to help the *tunggu tubang* woman so that she can carry out her role as a *tunggu tubang* to the maximum. But on the other hand, the *meraje* is also given the power to act as the executor of the results of the *meraje*’s decision regarding what to be done by *tunggu tubang*. Therefore, “in the name of *meraje*”, a *lautan* sometimes takes on the role of an executor who is allowed to take upon him the management of the inheritance.

### 3.5. Implications of Taking Over the Authority and the Power of the *Tunggu Tubang* Custom and the Social Structure of the Semende Community

The taking over of women’s authority and power does not necessarily eliminate the *tunggu tubang* tradition itself, because the *tunggu tubang* tradition is still considered important as a medium for recognizing one’s Semende identity. The *tunggu tubang* custom, which is symbolized by the family house (*tungguan*), is a symbol of the existence of a person’s Semendeness. In the Semende community, a person will not be recognized as part of a village if they are not able to show where the *tunggu tubang*’s house is. At least a Semende must be able to show the position of the *tembokan* or the land where *tunggu tubang*’s house used to stand. (Tembokan is a term used to refer to empty land on which a house owned by a family once stood)

This shows that the family house or *tungguan* for Semende people is important because the house is a medium for legitimizing their identity as Semende people. This means, that if a Semende person can no longer show their *tunggu tubang*’s house or the walls where their house used to be, then they are considered to have disappeared from their hometown. Because the *tunggu tubang*’s house is what will indicate whether one is Semende or not. “That’s why the *tunggu tubang*’s house and the land on which it stands cannot be bought and sold.

As a marker of identity, the *tungguan* must still function as determined by custom, namely a place for joint activities within the extended family, a place to go home for family members who have migrated, a place for family members to go home if they fail as a migrant, and a place to raise and care for parents and siblings who are old and sick. Therefore, the taking over of the authority and power over the legacies of the *tunggu tubang* or the agricultural landholdings eventually had implications for the community. In many cases, being a woman who is positioned as a *tunggu tubang* is often seen as being pressured. The reason is because of the heavy responsibility that must be borne as a *tunggu tubang*, while the source of livelihood (agricultural land) in carrying out the function as a *tunggu tubang* is no longer available.

This takeover of authority and power should not be a problem, because it was only the transfer of responsibilities from the chosen daughter or *tunggu tubang* to their brothers (*lautan*). However, problems often arise, because the *lautan* sometimes does not want to be responsible for the burden that must be borne by the *tunggu tubang*. Meanwhile, if the activities do not turn out as expected, then in the community, *tunggu tubang* will often be accused of being incompetent in carrying out their duties, that's why many women now don't want to be a *tunggu tubang*.

Semende women's refusal to be the *tunggu tubang* is sometimes also influenced by her future husband who refuses that his future wife will be nominated as a *tunggu tubang*, (A woman will be *tunggu tubang* when she is married, so that a husband of *tunggu tubang* is also considered part of the duties and burdens that his wife must bear as *tunggu tubang*.) The reason why the men or future husbands refuse the family's wish to make their wife a *tunggu tubang* is more due to fear of internal conflicts within the family. There are often accusations often arise that the husbands like to take away their wife's family inheritance. Sometimes there are even accusations that husbands often use inheritance from their wives for the benefit of their husband's family.

The emergence of women's refusal to become a *tunggu tubang* also has implications for the limitations of women who are willing to be *tunggu tubang*. Because the status of *tunggu tubang* only applies to women, in the Semende migrant areas, this problem was later resolved by reviving *ngangkit* marriages, namely by looking for a woman to be matched with one of her sons, where the status of this woman (wife) will be positioned as the *tunggu tubang* in the family. The existence of the *ngangkit* tradition in the the Semende community shows that the tradition of *tunggu tubang* is still being maintained, amidst the changes that are constantly happening. *Ngangkit* is seen not only as a solution to maintain the *tunggu tubang* custom as a pattern of inheritance



for family assets but also as a solution to maintain the Semende identity among other communities.

This shows that the takeover of women's authority by Semende men not only has implications for the inheritance system itself but also has implications for the social structure of the community. The adverse effects of gender-related abuse of power have been harming women and have stereotyping framing of women as the guilty party. In fact, according to Vermeule,( Adrian Vermeule, "Optimal abuse of power" (2014) 109 Nw UL Rev 673, online: <<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:12073911>>.) this abuse of power also has an impact on institutional compromise. This compromise then gave rise to the term "optimized abuse of power" which was used by Vermeule to describe a compromise between institutional risks

#### 4. Discussion and Analysis

The findings of the study show that the arguments of experts who claim that the custom of *tunggu tubang* is proof that Semende women's power needs to be questioned. The results of the study indicate that the custom of *tunggu tubang* has become a legitimate tool for the Semende men to strengthen their power. The researchers claim that the custom of *tunggu tubang* is proof that the Semende community is matrilineal also needs to be debated. The results of the study show that the position for the *tunggu tubang* is only attached to one woman, usually the oldest daughter, not to the daughters as a whole. Conceptually, matrilineal is centered on women but tends to be attached to all women in the community. On the other hand, matrilinealism is not only related to the pattern of mastery of resources by women but also related to the system of descent based on the mother's or female line. Matrilinealism is also often related to patterns of settling down after marriage which tend to be matrilocal, as well as patterns of power that are centered on women.( Zainal Arifin, Maskota Delfi & Sidarta Pujiraharjo, "Tunggu tubang and the extended family property inheritance system in Semende community, Indonesia" (2023) 29:3 Soc Identities 243–265.)

Many studies show that the strengthening of Islamic teachings became the initial basis for the transformation of authority and power in the Semende community,( Murdiati & Taqwa, supra note 1; Sakai, supra note 28; Minako Sakai, "The origin structure of Kute among the Gumai: An analysis of an indigenous territorial institution in the highlands of South Sumatra" in *Shar earth, Divid L L Territ Austronesian World* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2006) 39; Minako Sakai, "Remembering origins: ancestors and places in the Gumai society of South Sumatra" in James J Fox, ed, *Poet Power*

Place Comp Perspect Austronesian Ideas Locality (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2006) 43; Minako Sakai, "Still remembering the origins: The continuity of syncretic Islamic practice among the Gumay (Gumai) in South Sumatra, Indonesia" (2017) 45:131 *Indones Malay World* 44–65.) which has eroded old beliefs and matrilineal values. Islamic teachings which place a great emphasis on the importance of men as leaders of the family and society, eventually became a legitimate tool to assert male power. The strengthening of men's authority and power has gotten stronger after the traditional *marge* governance system was implemented in the Semende community. The territory of the *marge* government is based on genealogical territory so that the *marge* leader and its sub-regions or hamlets will be led by a traditional leader (genealogist) in the area. This strengthens the position of the *meraje* and the *lautan*, because a *meraje* and *lautan* have a great opportunity to become the leader of the *marge* and its sub-regions. The implication is that various life activities in the community will always be based on Islamic teachings, and the regulation of life patterns will be based on rules in the *marge* government system, which places men as leaders.

The strengthening of men's authority and power in the Semende community means that women's authority and power are slowly being usurped and taken over, thus making women's power increasingly subordinated and marginalized. The taking over of women's authority and power that occurred in the Semende community proves that male dominance is increasingly strengthening in matrilineal communities.( Karla O Poewe, *Matrilineal ideology: Male-female dynamics in Luapula, Zambia* (London: Academic Press, 1981).) Although experts consider this strengthening of male dominance to be not universal, it tends to occur because it is structured in the culture of the community.( Hatton & Trautner, *supra* note 9.) Hatton & Trautner further said that male dominance is established because it involves social relationships between groups that determine access and control over existing resources in the community. Therefore, the appropriation of resources as a basis for the legitimacy of the Semende women's authority and power proves that experts' arguments regarding the persistence of matrilineal values in a community need to be questioned.

The switching over of women's authority and power in the Semende matrilineal community was preceded by a fundamental transformation in the community. In some cases, the introduction and strengthening of Islamic teachings not only eroded the old beliefs but also sometimes eroded women's traditional authority and power over resources.( Sakai, *supra* note 28; Sakai, *supra* note 36.) her study of the Gumai community in South Sumatra showed that Islamic teachings not only changed the community's settlement pattern but even changed the social structure of the community as a whole. However, as

stated by Hatton & Trautner,( Hatton & Trautner, supra note 9.) domination is not always about sharing power but can also take the form of distribution of power, which always opens up space for authority negotiation. This means that the space for negotiating authority can produce a clear division of power between men and women, but also open up space for negotiating the division of authority.

When women lose their resource base in strengthening their authority and power in the matrilineal tradition, women still have to bear the costs of custom and the implications of these customary rules. In the Semende case, women are still required to pay for every ceremony that is carried out at the *tunggu tubangs'* house, even though the existing resources are no longer their authority and power. "In the name of custom," this demand must be accepted by women because the resources in the form of communal houses (*tungguan*) are still labeled and legitimized as belonging to women, even though the authority and power of other resources in the form of agricultural land have been taken over by men. This case further confirms the objection to classical feminists who see that women are always functioning as "jural persons" in managing resources, property, and decision-making processes.( Poewe, supra note 37)

The taking over of women's authority and power of course has implications for the matrilineality and the social structure of the Semende community as a whole. On the one hand, the cultural attributes of matrilineality must still be maintained, because it becomes an identity that differentiates itself from other communities. However, on the other hand, it also has implications for a change in matrilineal values with a new structure. That is, "in the name of custom" women are labeled as having the authority and power for the sake of the structure in maintaining their communal identity, but the authority and power that women have is distorted and marginalized. This pattern also confirms that even though women seem to have authority and power they do not have authority and power.( Hatton & Trautner, supra note 9.) The taking over of women's authority and power by men is more a form of re-actualization of the custom itself which in fact results in the marginalization of women.

This shows that customs in the matrilineal of the Semende community have become the basis for legitimizing the abuse and usurpation of women's authority and power, which is carried out by the Semende men themselves. However, this process of abuse and usurpation of authority and power tends not to be considered a deviation, because it has the legitimacy of custom (and even religion). In this case, the legitimacy of custom is even strengthened by rationalizing the myths of their origins. This rationalization is carried out by Islamizing the mythical images that have been developing so far. The myth of the origin of the Semende tells that the *tunggu tubang* to be born is a

form of women's resistance to male domination. However, this mythical image is then rationalized by emphasizing that women are "weak" creatures who need protection and are very "dependent" on men. It is the rationalized image of women as in the Semende myth that is often used as the basis for distorting women's authority to assert men's power.

This means that Islamic teachings as the basis for building new customary rules are the main basis for legitimizing the taking over of women's authority and power. Islamic teachings, which place men as leaders, are always discussed and become the basis for customary rules in strengthening men's rights as owners of power. Likewise, inheritance of property, which places men as having more rights than women, ultimately becomes a means of legitimizing the taking over of control of inherited property from women. This confirms that the strengthening of Islamic teachings in the Semende community not only legitimizes the taking over of women's authority and power but also becomes the basis for custom in legitimizing the new structure of the community. As a result, the transfer of power that occurs in the custom is considered part of the dynamics of the custom itself.

The factors described above show how culture has constructed gender differences in its communities, where women tend to always be marginalized and "become victims" of this imbalance. According to Boe et al, (Boe et al, supra note 6.) this imbalance is a result of women's access which tends to be limited and discriminated by culture. In the case of the Semende community, this kind of cultural construction is currently taking place, where the authority and power of the *tunggu tubang* women are slowly being "confiscated" by men. This thinking is also in line with Whiting, (Deborah L Best & Kelsey L Luvender, "Gender development: Cultural differences" in James D Wright, ed, Int Encycl Soc Behav Sci, 2nd editio ed (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015) 742.) and also Vindya (Undurti Vindhya, "Quality of women's lives in India: Some findings from two decades of psychological research on gender" (2007) 17:3 Fem Psychol 337–356.) who views that cultural practices in each community influence the birth of gender inequality. The root of the problem stems from the division of gender roles which is then legitimized through formal and informal institutions. This condition ultimately has a negative impact not only on women but also on their communities, (Lalitha Bhagavatheeswaran et al, "The barriers and enablers to education among scheduled caste and scheduled tribe adolescent girls in northern Karnataka, South India: A qualitative study" (2016) 49 Int J Educ Dev 262–270.) which gives rise to unequal power relations in the field of education, (Gregory White et al, "Gender inequality amid educational expansion in India: An analysis of gender differences in the attainment of reading and mathematics

skills” (2016) 6:2 J Res Gend Stud 153, online: <<https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=470849>>.) regarding occupational choice,( Harris & Firestone, supra note 22; Stephen K Wegren et al, “Gender inequality in Russia’s rural informal economy” (2017) 50:2 Communist Post-Communist Stud 87–98.) and even in the world of politics.( Boe et al, supra note 6; Diana Højlund Madsen, “Gender, power and institutional change—The role of formal and informal institutions in promoting women’s political representation in Ghana” (2019) 54:1 J Asian Afr Stud 70–87.)

Therefore, taking over women’s authority and power can be seen as a process of appropriating traditional space to actualize gender inequality in the Semende matrilineal community. The appropriation process carried out by these men is aimed at ensuring that the process of taking over power is legitimized not only by custom but also by religion (Islam). This appropriation process enables men to finally actualize the gender inequality that occurs in their community. This re-actualization takes place symbolically and unconsciously but has implications for limiting women’s movement space. The appropriation process has made women increasingly unaware that this reconstruction is part of the marginalization of women themselves. This new awareness that is growing among Semende women has made Semende women increasingly co-opted and subordinated by the new patriarchal structure. In other words, this new awareness means that Semende’s matrilineality is starting to be questioned and the claim that the *tunggu tubang* have power over resources is no longer justified.

## 5. Conclusion

The taking over and switch of female authority and power in the *tunggu tubang* tradition has had an impact on the matrilineal and power claims of the Semende women. Women who are traditionally given power over existing resources are slowly being confiscated by men or the *lautan*. In other words, the resources as a “marker of identity” for Semende women have been taken over by consideration of male power which must be upheld. The taking over of the authority and power of the Semende women has forced the tradition of the *tunggu tubang* to be maintained on the one hand, but on the other hand, there has also been a rationalization of tradition following the development of the community. The efforts to maintain the position of women as *tunggu tubang* are due more to the fact that the *tunggu tubang* is positioned as central to their communal identity which distinguishes it from other communities.

This shows that the custom in the Semende community has rationalized the legitimacy of taking over women’s authority and power by men. This taking over is symbolic and

unnoticed, but has led to restrictions on women's space for movement in the *tunggu tubang* custom, making the Semende women unwittingly marginalized within their social structure. This means that the social structure increasingly positions Semende women as part of the re-actualization of inequality constructed by men so that the taking over of authority and power is seen as a normal thing. This taking over of women's authority and power by men, makes the future of the Semende women co-opted and marginalized by the new patriarchal structure so that the Semende's claim of matrilineality can no longer be justified.

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The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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