

## Women as "The Power of *Emak-Emak*" Dealing with Patriarchal Male in Purwokerto

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**ABSTRACT:** The concept of gender is often understood in terms of sex. In this understanding, gender is not based on social construction, and thus, through social practices, men and women are still differentiated. This understanding and perception of gender renders men culturally immutable, particularly patriarchal. Women are not unaware of the gender characteristics of men in this understanding. In such situations, women do not intend to change or resist their interactions with men. Women today often avoid the risks associated with men. Women's efforts are manifested in new actions and behaviors, known as "The Power of *Emak-Emak*" (TPoEE). This term refers to women's efforts to overcome subjugation by men. Domestication, as a patriarchal power of men in the face of new women, appears to be a complex issue. This is where the study of women's newness, specifically as TPoEE, becomes interesting. This research will be conducted using qualitative research methods. Therefore, the research subjects will be determined purposively. In accordance with the objectives of this research, women are the subjects of the study, specifically women who interact with men in general and with their husbands. This research will be conducted in Purwokerto. In this study, data and information are obtained through in-depth interviews and observations. The data and information will be analyzed and validated. The results of this study are expected to provide insight into women's experiences, both in dealing with men and in efforts to overcome and avoid the risk of conflict with men. In addition, this study seeks to uncover women's actions and behaviors known as TPoEE. The output of this research will be an article in an international journal.

**KEYWORDS:** *Women, the power of Emak-Emak, patriarchal male*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Culture, an institutionalized institution in society, in reality regulates and adapts men and women in their interactions. Social practices between men and women embrace values and norms appropriate to their respective genders. In general, men and women have distinct genders and are not identical to one another (Tohirin & Zamahsari, 2021; Salim, 2021; Fakhri, 2022; Novitria & Khoirrunisa, 2022; Saputra et al., 2024). Men are characterized by a penis, an Adam's apple (kalamenjing), and sperm production. Women, as such, possess a vagina, a uterus, and breasts/organs for breastfeeding. In experiencing their gender, men and women are certainly not the same. Biologically, men and women can give birth to children, both from the male's sperm and from the female's womb. However, it is possible that both parties are childless due to biological constraints (for example, the man's sperm condition or the woman's uterine obstruction) and the failure of their marriage (for example, a man who is a priest and a woman who is a Catholic nun). The differences between men and women are more due to culture and gender. The power of men over women is often referred to today as patriarchal or more patriarchal. Such power often indicates that women are more submissive to men (Siregar, et al., 2023; Mitamimah, 2021; Hanani, 2021; Febryani, 2022; Pramudawardhani, 2019). As a male authority, he is the leader of the community elected by the members of his community. In addition, socially, men are figures who are seen as obligated to build and establish a family. For this reason, men are positioned as heads of families by proposing and asking women to become their wives. The way women approach marriage differs from that of men in the Minangkabau community of West Sumatra (Lonanda & Tala, 2022; Nadia et al., 2022; Wahyuni & Simatupang, 2024; Lilis, 2023). In Minangkabau society, women propose to men and propose to them as their husbands. This social interaction is completely different from that found elsewhere in Indonesia—and indeed other countries. Men in other regions, therefore, are largely dominated by men. In this way, patriarchal culture and social practices place men above women.

Women often avoid male authority, both in dealing with their husbands and in navigating their own lives. Women also avoid the potential risks of interacting with men. In this way, women's resistance avoids interaction and submission to men. In this understanding, there is a term new to women in some communities known as "The Power of Emak-Emak." This term is intended to refer to women's seemingly resilient actions in facing life and social interactions in general. The impression is that women, in this term, are placed on an equal footing with men. However, many women are viewed as unequal to men and experience injustice (Fakih, 2022; Balgis, 2022; Aula, 2023). Based on this reality, it becomes interesting to focus on this research: How can we uncover and broadcast the women referred to as "The Power of Emak-Emak"?

Gender is better understood as the interconnectedness of each person in building and interacting with others. In this sense, each person possesses traits that are socially and culturally constructed (Fakih, 2022; Maulida, 2021; Afandi, 2019; Utomo & Ekowati, 2019). Through this understanding of gender, humans actually possess characteristics such as gentle, emotional, strong, rational, and powerful, but also handsome, beautiful, maternal, and masculine. This understanding demonstrates that everyone possesses gender traits, both male and female. However, over time, understanding gender has become inseparable from sex. Gender traits such as strong, rational, masculine, and powerful are understood and interpreted as male characteristics. Meanwhile, gender traits are understood and applied to women, such as gentle, emotional, beautiful, and maternal. This understanding and understanding of gender biases social and cultural constructs. Cultural power and character, in general, do not escape the understanding of gender based on patriarchal power, male power. It was within this male power that gender began to be understood, and their interactions with women created different relationships, positioning women as the second sex (Dewi & Primasti, 2022; Dewi et al., 2020; Saniro, 2022). It seems that, in this understanding, a "new" woman emerged, yet remained in a submissive position before the general public and especially the men she encountered. This is also how women are understood today. Nearly all women are Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) (Aeni, 2019; Istianah & Imelda, 2021; Wuryandari, 2022). Most women also work in markets (Kurniawan, 2020; Pitamouldi, 2021; Korlefura & Tupamahu, 2021; Murniati et al., 2023). This depiction shows women have a functional role, both for their families and society in general. Facing this "new" situation, women today have the courage and ability to navigate life.

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

This research aims to identify, describe, and explain women's relationships with "The Power of Emak-Emak." This type of research will begin with a grounded approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Creswell, 2007). In this case, the researcher will not prepare the research design deductively, but inductively. This design was chosen because it provides the researcher with ample room to explore the data and information obtained. However, this research will not be conducted without direction because, deductively, the researcher has determined the research problem and objectives, although both are flexible and adaptable, following the development of data and information obtained in the field. This is because the researcher does not have sufficient detailed knowledge of the issues being studied or the target community. Furthermore, in this research, the issues being studied actually become one of the directions to be pursued. Therefore, the final product of this research is the discovery of issues regarding the position and interactions that prevent women from being at risk with men. This research will be conducted in Purwokerto, Banyumas Regency, Central Java. Technically, all members of the research team reside in Purwokerto and are quite familiar with its natural conditions, society, communities, and culture. Furthermore, all members of the research team have previously conducted research in the region on other topics. These considerations make this research a reasonable undertaking.

In accordance with the aforementioned research objectives, the purposive target of this research is women from the community who are familiar with the actions, behaviors, and lives of Purwokerto women. As the research progresses, the possibility of developing these research objectives is not excluded.

In this study, data and information will be collected through three methods. First, in-depth interviews. These interviews are conducted to obtain data directly related to the research objectives, and they serve as the primary data source for this study. These interviews are conducted by creating a comfortable atmosphere for the research subjects to freely share and explain their life experiences. If necessary, interviews with these subjects will be conducted several times. Second, observation. In this study, data and information come not only from the statements and explanations of the research subjects but also from visits to the women's workplaces and/or their families. Therefore, observations of the women's lives will serve as a secondary data source, supporting the data and information collected through interviews. This secondary data will also be explored through, and third, documents related to the research objectives, such as scientific articles in research journals, textbooks, and other information from the internet.

From a process perspective, data analysis in this study will be conducted interactively/ongoing analysis (Miles, Huberman, Saldana, 2014; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). In this process, researchers conduct analysis simultaneously, synchronously, or back and forth between research components, such as data collection, data display, data condensation, conclusion drawing, and report writing. Meanwhile, the collected data and

information will be analyzed using taxonomic and domain models (Spreadly, 1997). Through these two models, data were interpreted and analyzed according to the socio-cultural context in which the research was conducted. In this study, data were validated using the triangulation model. This model safeguards against potential bias by interviewing different targets (Miles, Huberman, Saldana, 2014; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Therefore, in this study, data and information validation will be conducted by interviewing community members not involved in TPoEE behavior in Purwokerto.

### III. THE POWER AND STRENGTH OF JAVANESE WOMEN

Culturally, women are not placed in a "higher" position than men. In socio-cultural life and interactions, men are "higher" than women. Organizations, institutions, and families are social institutions that require men to typically hold general positions of leadership. Culturally, Javanese society positions men not only as leaders but also as rulers. The story of Javanese women is often portrayed as a defeated figure. Research conducted by Qurotul Uyun (2002) showed that women perform 24 roles and tasks at home during a single day. In contrast, according to Qurotul, men perform the same number of roles and tasks for only 17. This indicates that the division of roles and tasks between women and men at home is highly unequal. This inventory of tasks and roles also confirms the possibility of a double burden experienced by women. This means that even if women have the opportunity to work outside the home, they still cannot abandon their duties and roles at home. Women's duties and roles at home are handled by their husbands, demonstrating their hegemony over their wives. This culturally places a woman's obligation to fulfill her duties and role as a housewife. In Javanese society, men are portrayed as victorious figures. Research conducted by Atik Triratnawati (2005) demonstrates that the parameters of male success are based on the ownership of five things: *turonggo* (horse, mount), *kukilo* (bird, hobby), *wismo* (house), *curigo* (weapon, intelligence, skill, knowledge), and *wanito* (woman, wife). In the characters described by Atik, women's position is merely as property, complementing masculinity. In this sense, women are equated with men's vehicles, hobbies, houses, and skills or knowledge. The story of Javanese women truly has its own glorious story. In the beliefs of the Javanese people of Yogyakarta, Nyi Roro Kidul is not only a figure who is the Queen who rules the South Sea (Indian Ocean) but also the protector of the Yogyakarta Sultanate Palace (Oftavia, et al., 2023; Vianingias & Yapi, 2025). In fact, the *jumenengan* (coronation) of Sultan Hamengku Buwono (the title of King of the Yogyakarta Sultanate Palace) must obtain permission and be accompanied by the Queen. The greatness of women in Javanese culture is not only limited to legends and myths. Juwariyah (2017), for example, wrote about Queen Kalinyamat who came from Jung Mara (present-day Jepara) seen from the perspective of her leadership strategy. The greatness of Queen Kalinyamat is also described in detail by Al Qurtubi (2003). According to Qurtubi, during her reign, Queen Kalinyamat once launched attacks on Malacca, which was then controlled by the Portuguese, in 1550 and 1574. As described in the book, the attacks carried out by Queen Kalinyamat were supported by a force of 300 sailing ships, 80 of which were large ships weighing 400 tons, with a selected Javanese army of 15,000 men. Despite the failure of both attacks, Queen Kalinyamat was a brave and wealthy Javanese woman – a strong character usually attributed to men. In the book, Qurtubi also mentions the existence of Queen Suhita, the 6th ruler of Majapahit – one of the great kingdoms originating from the area around present-day East Java – who ruled from 1429-1447. She was the granddaughter of Tribhuwana Wijayatunggadewi, the 3rd ruler of Majapahit who ruled from 1328-1350 (Wikipedia. Accessed on 10/29/2019). Tribhuwana is rightly called the "Iron Woman" because of her success in personally leading the suppression of several rebellions in Majapahit at that time. In the late 19th century to the early 20th century, Indonesia also knew the figure of Raden Ajeng (RA) Kartini, a Jepara native who is considered an early Indonesian female figure. Pramudya Ananta Toer, a prominent Indonesian writer, described Kartini's greatness in detail in his famous work, "Just Call Me Kartini" (1962/2012). One interesting quote from the book is Kartini's writing:

"...I will work extensively to realize my ideals, and to elevate the status and civilization of our people."

This quote demonstrates that, amidst the still-strong grip of Javanese culture and customs, Kartini did not solely work and fight for women—as is commonly known—but for society as a whole, young and old, women and men alike. From the stories of Nyai Roro Kidul, Queen Kalinyamat, Queen Suhita, Tribhuwana Wijayatunggadewi, to RA Kartini, all of these demonstrate that there is no justification for considering Javanese women's stories to be merely ones of helplessness and suffering, but also of freedom, independence, strength, and courage. The brilliance of these women is illustrated by the stories of Javanese women centuries ago.

### IV. WOMEN TODAY AND THE DOMESTICATION THEY EXPERIENCE

Today, women are no longer confined to the domestic sphere, at home. In any place, at any time, many women are seen engaged in various activities, both directly related to economic activities and those not. Traditional markets, in particular, have long been known as the "kingdom" of women, both as traders and buyers. In fact, it's a bit of a cliché that women are not only visible and capable as neighborhood heads in a

village but can also become presidents who lead the country. This phenomenon not only demonstrates the increasing and high level of women's participation in the public sphere but also a shift in women's mindsets. Regarding this change, in the words of Jujuk (a pseudonym), a 54-year-old woman from a village in North Purwokerto, she stated:

"Yes, it means this, miss. If women can work, they should work. Not just as housewives. Why should it be like that? Well, let's put it this way, miss, *paribasane wong Java* (Javanese people) say, the husband looks for rice, the wife looks for salt. That's the *paribasa*. If the wife is capable, then we should help each other, right, *mbok?! That doesn't mean we have to rely on our husbands. No. That's my principle.*"

Jujuk is not a woman with an academic degree, nor is she a gender activist, let alone a feminist. She is not a woman who lives in a gender-conscious social environment. She is a food vendor at Pasar Wage, the "kingdom" of women. Her social circle at Pasar Wage taught her that women are independent figures who are free to compete in the public sphere. The independence Jujuk gained was not at all the independence seen in the study conducted by Winarda and Hendro (2021), which examined women's independence through online shopping efforts through social media (particularly Instagram), nor was it the independence experienced by women who were members of the 'Independent Food Women' group,' who had the opportunity to be empowered through hydroponic planting, as in the study by Hasba et al. (2020). Jujuk's independence is a phenomenological independence gained through her interactions with fellow traders at Pasar Wage. In these interactions, Jujuk exchanged perspectives and experiences; in simple terms, Jujuk shared her thoughts and experiences with fellow traders at Pasar Wage. Women traders at the market determine their own commodities, deal directly with commodity producers, sell them, and interact with buyers—their conversations with buyers are not entirely about buying and selling, but sometimes interspersed with small talk about children, husbands, and family. Uniquely, women's rational thinking and behavior are not calculated, instrumental rationality. Modernity has pushed humans to the brink of their humanity.

In the modern world, economic interests are paramount, leading people to exploit others for their own gain. Several recent cases of online loans (PINJOL) demonstrate the use of NIK (National Identification Number) and KK (Family Card) numbers to borrow money by individuals who do not own these two identification numbers. Furthermore, loans that appear to rely more on interpersonal trust but in fact charge exorbitant interest rates, such as those practiced by loan sharks, are far from the image of such calculated rationality. Sрни, a 47-year-old woman in Batturaden, changed her career from a retailer of turmeric and tamarind jamu (turmeric and tamarind jamu) in a small business to a reseller of crackers, not without careful calculation. In Sрни's (pseudonym) words:

"Thank God, I feel an increase in income. Compared to when I delivered orders for turmeric and tamarind jamu (herbal drink made from turmeric and tamarind), which was only 20,000 rupiah (twenty thousand rupiah – ed.) per day, and that was uncertain. But selling crackers, I definitely earn at least 50,000 rupiah (fifty thousand rupiah – ed.). Obviously not, sir (the income is not enough – ed.), because the proceeds from the cracker sales are only enough for food. Even so, I'm still grateful, sir. Yes, sir, what you said earlier is true. I'm always grateful, no matter what happens."

Sрни is simply a woman who feels obligated to provide for her family's economic needs. She doesn't have enough capital to start a business. She works to earn money to meet her family's basic needs: food. This awareness is very rational and calculating. With these basic needs met, she believes her family members will be able to carry out their respective activities, whether studying or working. Another interesting thing is that this calculating rationality is based on beliefs linked to religious values. This is typical of Indonesians, who are acutely aware of a power beyond themselves that they believe influences their lives: gratitude. Several studies demonstrate the "power" of expressing gratitude, such as one conducted by Asmarani and Sugiasih (2019), which explored the psychological well-being of mothers with mentally disabled children through gratitude. A study by Putra (2020) examined the relationship between gratitude and quality of life related to health in low-income communities. Here, calculative rationality based on religious values has more humane implications in the hands of women like Sрни. The reality shows that women do not interpret things in ways that align with cultural forces and patriarchal values/norms. The stories of these women demonstrate not only the courage and leadership of Nyai Loro Kidul, Queen Kalinyamat, and Raden Ayu Kartini, but also women confronting their responsibilities as family figures, such as Jujuk and Sрни. Traditional markets in Purwokerto, such as Pasar Wage and Pasar Manis, demonstrate that these markets are "kingdoms" of women. In this sense, women possess the power to fulfill the roles and duties of owners and financiers, traders, and even transporters/lifters of goods in the market. Furthermore, some women come to the market to purchase goods to meet their needs. The practices women engage in are seen as inherently within a realistic gender context. Women's refined manners and polite speech are forms of social interaction that are simply practiced and practiced in their lives. Furthermore, women are not simply incapable of thinking and being irrational. Research into the stories above actually demonstrates that women possess the ability to think and calculate everything rationally. Facing a

challenging life is not solely a matter of men calculating their adaptation efforts. The activities demonstrated by the women in this study illustrate that their efforts are not merely to adapt to life but also to build a rational life. Queen Kalinyamat's resistance to the Portuguese who colonized and controlled Malaysia, Kartini who wanted to realize her ideals and raise the status and civilization of society under the VOC/Dutch rule at that time, to women in their ability to carry out activities in traditional markets that still exist today, cannot be interpreted simply as women adapting. In this sense, life is not easy and difficult, women face it not only by adapting but more than that creating a new, better life. At this point, it is not wrong to emerge the meaning of "the Power of Emak-Emak" which is the understanding of women who are brave, have a rational way of thinking, are wise, and have deep strength.

## V. THE HISTORY OF MARGINALIZATION OF WOMEN AND WOMEN AS THE POWER OF *EMAK-EMAK*

Both men and women can be intelligent and useful human beings for the Indonesian nation. The previous writing shows that the Indonesian nation has had intelligent women and men who have played a role, such as Queen Kalinyamat, Queen Suhita, Tribhuwana Wijayatunggadewi, and RA. Kartini. Also men such as Raden Wijaya who founded Majapahit, Sultan Agung who founded Mataram (Islam), where both not only confirmed the existence, strength, and power of the largest kingdom in Indonesia but also introduced religions that still exist today: Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. All of this history shows that intelligent women and men have been able to become leaders. However, it must be admitted, this history seems to have developed and been built by Indonesia by many brave and intelligent male figures. The role of women seems to have faded "lost" such as RA Kartini and Cut Nyak Dhien, two brave and intelligent women in the early 20th century. Women's organizations began in the 20th century, particularly with the First Women's Congress in 1928. Such organizations faded in the 1960s and "disappeared" with the ban and association with communism. From that early age, patriarchy seemed to become a new culture for men, and through it, men gained power and authority in social life. By the early 2000s, in various rural areas in Indonesia, men were being given the opportunity to pursue education so they could later become heads of families. Conversely, women were placed at home and prepared to become wives.

Through a patriarchal culture dominated by men, women are "assigned" feminine characteristics. In this sense, women are positioned as companions to their husbands (men) in managing the family. As a husband's companion, a study by Christianna (2021) states that women should be creative, sociable, and work more than they talk. Meanwhile, a study by Yuswara (2021) shows that women are constructed as irrational and maternal. Based on these two studies, women are more often viewed as capable of carrying out and being placed in domestic roles such as childcare and maintaining the cleanliness and comfort of the home.

This placement of women does not mean that women have not attempted to challenge male dominance. A study by Murniati et al. (2022) shows that the popular Javanese song "Walang Kekek" from 1967 portrays women as having a distinctly independent character at that time. In some interesting verses of the song:

Oh, it's annoying, because people are *wedhok*  
 If I was left limp, you will half dead.....  
 If you wants me, to go with me  
 If you may be admit, I will leave you at home.....

"Walang Kekek" was first sung and made popular by Waljinah (born 1945, now 80). Waljinah's style of singing and the lyrics of "Walang Kekek" demonstrate that women cannot simply conform to the patriarchal cultural power of 1967. The song also emphasizes men's dependence on women. Furthermore, the song allows men to accompany women at home and allows women to work outside the home. Waljinah and the song remain popular to this day. Waljinah was the first woman to speak out, and it wasn't until several decades later—around the 1990s—that Indonesian society began to recognize and understand gender.

An interesting concept in this research is the Power of *Emsk-Emak* (TPoEE). History shows that women are limited in many ways, leaving men in power in the social world. Several studies have shown that women are not only restricted but, moreover, socially silenced (Stephani & Sarwono, 2020; Putri, 2023; Sulistiani, 2024; Hapsari & Sarwono, 2024; Indra, 2025). Several subsequent studies have at least shown that women cannot escape patriarchal power (Aprianda and Krisnani, 2021; Iqbal et al., 2023; Halizah & Faralita, 2023; Anto et al., 2023; Dewi & Tobing, 2025). These studies demonstrate that women are figures portrayed by men as figures who can be controlled and managed. The reality shows that in social life, women interpret cultural patriarchy. In this way, patriarchal power does not simply dominate women. The existence of traditional markets, as discussed above, women in the social world become their "kingdom." Traditional markets are not simply dominated by men but demonstrate the strength and authority of women in such social worlds. Furthermore, women's efforts to confront cultural patriarchy through TPoEE. Several studies have demonstrated the existence of TPoEE (Asri, 2019; Lestari & Widarini, 2019; Patimah, 2019; Zahrotunnimah et al., 2020; Gumelar et al., 2022; Suwarji & Rahmawati, 2024) with various meanings. The term "emak-emak" is

understood as a woman who has become a mother, namely a woman who is a wife and has children. Furthermore, the term "emak" or mother refers to a woman who plays the role of caregiver and guardian of the family. In relation to the term "The Power..." the meaning of TPoEE is the support of "emak-emak" for one of the presidential and vice-presidential candidate pairs so that they are willing to attend campaigns and demonstrations. Another definition also shows that TPoEE is a social women's movement aware of and aware of the injustice and slowness of the government in resolving economic, social, political, and legal justice issues. TPoEE is also understood as a movement of women from the lower middle class who experience economic problems related to the lives of domestic women. Another definition, TPoEE is the issue of family economic problems and concern for several issues regarding the condition of their love for children. In the definition of TPoEE in this study, it is the existence of women who are responsible for their families - especially, their husbands and children - and are women who speak out to show themselves and women who carry out work related to the family economy. TPoEE is not only seen as an effort and goal of women in seizing patriarchal power and authority culturally. TPoEE is also not merely an understanding of who and how women are currently involved in the understanding of *cancut taliwanda* - *tandang gawe* meaning working diligently for togetherness. TPoEE is a female figure who has the power - the power - with which she can work and fulfill responsibilities to her family - both, husband and children - and the extended family and society in general. It is at this point, whether we admit it or not, whether we realize it or not, that men must see and acknowledge their equality with women.

## VI. CONCLUSION

- Javanese cultural history demonstrates that women are leadership figures. Names such as Queen Ruler of the South Seas, Queen Kalinyamat, Queen Suhita, Tribhuwana Wijayatunggadewi, and even RA Kartini are intelligent and courageous female leaders and rulers in Javanese kingdoms.
- Throughout their development, women have not experienced equality with men. They are often treated in a manner that is silenced and tamed. In such treatment, women lose their sense of self and become figures desired by men.
- The story of Javanese women is not one of helplessness and suffering, but rather one of freedom, independence, strength, and courage. The brilliance of women has been depicted in Javanese history for centuries.
- The meaning of "The Power of Emak-Emak" is the concept of women who are courageous, possess rational thinking, wisdom, and possess profound strength.
- History and culture cannot simply marginalize women. The reality is that women are figures with power—the power—allowing them to work and fulfill their responsibilities to their families—husbands and children—and to the extended family and society at large. It is at this point, whether they admit it or not, whether they realize it or not, that men must recognize and acknowledge their equality with women.

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