

The Other in Tradition: A Study of Gender Roles and Power Structures in Javanese *Rewang*

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Abstract. The Javanese tradition of *Rewang* exemplifies a spirit of collective action and reciprocal support, manifested during significant events or festivities. The objective of this study is to analyze gender roles within the *Rewang* tradition. To that end, the study seeks to achieve three primary goals. First, it will analyze the division of tasks and responsibilities based on gender. Second, it will identify potential inequalities in participation and decision-making. Third, it will investigate how gender norms influence the implementation of *Rewang*. The study employs Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "the Other" and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *Habitus* as the theoretical framework. It utilizes a qualitative approach, incorporating descriptive-analytical methods and ethnographic techniques for data collection. The results of the study indicate a distinct gender-based division of labor in *Rewang*, wherein women are responsible for domestic tasks and men engage in those requiring physical strength. Despite the pivotal role women play in the facilitation of celebrations, their contributions require further evaluation. The practice of *Rewang* is indicative of and reinforces gender inequalities in society, positioning women as secondary subjects and limiting their choices and opportunities. The study posits that social practices such as *Rewang* have the potential to reinforce power structures that position women as "the Other," thereby restricting their potential and perpetuating gender inequalities in society.

Keywords: Gender, Javanese society, *Rewang* Tradition, Women's Role

1 Introduction

Rewang represents a time-honored tradition of mutual cooperation within Javanese society, exemplifying a profound sense of communal togetherness and reciprocal support. This tradition is typically practiced during significant events or communal feasts, such as weddings, circumcisions, or communal feasts. The practice of *Rewang*, which is deeply entrenched in the agrarian culture of Java, is a social mechanism that emerged as a means of alleviating the burden placed on the host of an event by virtue of their role. This practice is predicated on the principle of communal cooperation, a hallmark of Javanese culture. The practice of *Rewang* tradition has been demonstrated to offer numerous advantages for event proprietors, as it eliminates the necessity of incurring expenses associated with providing sustenance and remuneration to *Rewang*

participants. The social benefits of the *Rewang* tradition are manifold. These benefits include the establishment of social relationships, an increase in social solidarity, serving of as social capital, and fostering of mutual assistance. The economic advantages of the *rewang* tradition are manifold. They include support for borrowing tools, reduction in event organization costs, potential investment in merchandise, and energy investment [1]. In Javanese culture, *Rewang* is of profound significance as an expression of solidarity, a means of maintaining social harmony, and a method of strengthening family bonds [2]. Participation in *Rewang* is regarded as a moral obligation and a form of social investment. The rationales underlying an individual's decision to engage in *Rewang* activities are multifaceted. Some participants are driven by altruistic intentions, genuinely desiring to contribute to the collective good. In contrast, others are motivated by the anticipation of personal gain, such as the receipt of rewards, while still others find themselves compelled by a fear of social sanction if they do not participate [3]. This tradition continues to be a part of contemporary society, and it is upheld by Javanese communities residing in Malaysia [4][5].

The role of women is of considerable significance in the execution of various tasks, including culinary endeavors, the creation of decorative elements, and the provision of hospitality to guests. This involvement has been shown to have two primary benefits. First, it serves to alleviate the workload of the host, thereby facilitating the development of a stronger sense of community cohesion and collaboration. However, a more thorough examination is necessary to understand the dynamics of roles and task distribution between women and men within this tradition. Historically, the role of Javanese women was largely confined to the domestic sphere, revolving around household duties symbolized by the concept of "konco wingking." However, in modern times, this role has expanded into public domains, allowing women to actively participate in both maintaining household integrity and engaging in public responsibilities [6]. The *Rewang* tradition, which endures to the present day, continues to underscore the role of women in the domestic sphere.

The objective of this research is to analyze gender roles in the practice of *Rewang* in Javanese society. This study is significant for its potential to enhance our understanding of the division of tasks and responsibilities based on gender, the identification of potential inequalities in participation and decision-making, and the investigation of how gender norms influence the implementation of *Rewang*. The significance of this study lies in its ability to provide profound insights into gender dynamics in traditional cultural practices, reveal the relationship between *Rewang* and the construction of gender roles in society, and contribute to a broader understanding of gender inequality in the context of local culture.

The theoretical framework employed in this study is Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "the Other" to analyze gender dynamics in the *Rewang* tradition. Bourdieu's concept of habitus elucidates how systems of disposition, acquired through experience and socialization, subconsciously shape individuals' cognitive processes, behavioral tendencies, emotional responses, and the reproduction of social structures and power relations. Concurrently, de Beauvoir's concept of "the Other" offers a critique of the construction of women as objects in a patriarchal society, wherein women are defined in relation to men and not as autonomous individuals. Both theories are pertinent for comprehending gender dynamics within the context of the *Rewang* tradition. The concept of "habitus" can elucidate the internalization and reproduction of gender roles in *Rewang*. The notion of "the Other" facilitates the analysis of women's position within this practice. The utilization of both theories enables the study to unveil the underlying power relations and gender structures of the *Rewang* tradition. This, in turn, facilitates a more profound comprehension of how this social practice either maintains or challenges existing gender norms.

2 Methods

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method. The qualitative approach is chosen because it focuses on an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, utilizing non-numerical data such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, as well as emphasizing interpretation and context. The descriptive-analytical method is used to systematically and accurately describe phenomena, analyze data to identify patterns, themes, and relationships, and combine detailed descriptions with interpretative analysis. This allows for a comprehensive understanding of the research subject. Data collection in this study uses ethnographic techniques including participant observation, in-depth interviews, and the creation of field notes. The analytical framework of this research is the concept of "Other" ("liyan") by Simone de Beauvoir to examine the position and identity of women in social structures. De Beauvoir's concept helps analyze the construction of women's identities in a patriarchal society.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Women's Contributions to *Rewang*

The *Rewang* tradition is indicative of a pronounced gender-based division of labor within the societal structure. Women are typically responsible for domestic tasks such as meal preparation, cooking, serving dishes, and cleaning kitchen utensils. Conversely, men are assigned tasks that require physical strength, such as lifting heavy items, slaughtering sacrificial animals, and building tents or stages. The establishment and

perpetuation of gender roles are shaped by early socialization, during which children observe and engage in activities that align with their gender. The social and cultural expectations that are in place, in conjunction with the reinforcement of these expectations through praise or criticism from the community, also serve to shape these roles. Gender-specific knowledge and skills are transmitted across generations. This division of roles has implications at both the individual and societal levels. At the individual level, this dynamic can impose limitations on personal choices and opportunities for self-development. Additionally, it has the potential to engender stress due to the demands imposed by these roles. At the societal level, this practice preserves traditional values and fosters social cohesion through the division of labor. However, it can also perpetuate gender inequality. A thorough examination of gender roles in *Rewang* reveals a reflection and reinforcement of the prevailing social norms within the societal context.

Women play a crucial role in the *Rewang* tradition. Their contributions encompass a variety of pivotal aspects of celebration facilitation, including food preparation, décor, coordination with community members, and guest reception. Furthermore, gender roles are intricately linked to dietary practices, as evidenced by the historical prevalence of women assuming the primary cooking responsibilities in traditional societies. These roles are dictated by cultural and familial norms, which influence women's decisions and the broader societal perception of gender dynamics [7]. The involvement of women in *Rewang* is not only essential for the smooth execution of events, but also plays a part in preserving the tradition, strengthening social bonds, and transmitting knowledge across generations. Nevertheless, the recognition afforded to women's contributions in *Rewang* merits further evaluation. Such an evaluation should include an analysis of community perceptions and an identification of the challenges that impede the achievement of equal recognition. The involvement of women in *Rewang* is also associated with significant social and cultural implications, including its impact on the social structure of society and its potential for women's empowerment. However, women continue to be burdened with domestic roles, suggesting that patriarchal values persist.

3.2 Gender Inequality in Rewang Practices

In the context of *Rewang*, a discernible dichotomy exists between the roles of men and women. Women are typically responsible for domestic tasks such as cooking, preparing food, and cleaning, while men are more involved in physical labor such as building tents or lifting heavy objects. The dynamics of power and decision-making processes in *Rewang* also reflect gender inequality, with key decisions often dominated by men, particularly with regard to budgeting and logistics. Despite women's increased authority in matters related to the kitchen and food arrangements, social hierarchies continue to influence the extent of their participation and the impact they exert in the overall decision-making process. This practice of *Rewang* both reflects and reinforces existing gender inequalities in society. It is characterized by a division of labor that mirrors traditional roles, greater involvement of women in unpaid work, and the reinforcement

of gender stereotypes through rigid task assignments. This dynamic has the potential to perpetuate social norms that impose limitations on women's roles and contributions within society. Addressing this disparity necessitates initiatives aimed at fostering equitable participation in all dimensions of *Rewang*, challenging prevailing gender stereotypes, promoting flexibility in roles, and enhancing awareness of the equal value of men's and women's contributions in these communal endeavors.

The concept of "the Other" by Simone de Beauvoir can be applied to analyze the position of women in the practice of *Rewang*. In her seminal work, "The Second Sex," Beauvoir explores how women have historically been positioned as "The Other" in a male-dominated society. This concept underscores the relational dynamics between the self and the other, wherein the "self" is defined by its distance from and negation of "the other" [8][9]. Within this paradigm, women are frequently positioned as secondary subjects, with their roles primarily defined in relation to the needs of others. The social identity of women is often reduced to domestic functions, positioning them as servants or helpers at social events. The process of othering is facilitated by the rigid gender-based division of labor, social expectations that women must serve, and the naturalization of their domestic roles. This phenomenon culminates in the marginalization of women from public spaces and decision-making processes.

The implications of this practice for women's agency and identity are significant. Women encounter constraints that limit their options and opportunities, and often internalize their subordinate roles. This dynamic engenders challenges in the development of identities that transcend conventional domestic roles, potentially curtailing autonomy and the capacity to shape one's own destiny. Women encounter challenges to their sense of self, as they strive to perceive themselves as complete and autonomous subjects, constrained by social expectations of the "ideal woman," and confronted with potential discord between personal aspirations and role demands. The long-term ramifications of this state of affairs encompass the perpetuation of gender inequality, barriers to women's empowerment, and the potential for the loss of women's talents and contributions across various domains of life. The prevailing notion suggests that traditional gender roles are often associated with elevated levels of depression and anxiety, particularly among women. This finding suggests a substantial impact of cultural norms on mental health, underscoring the need for a reevaluation and better understanding of these constructs [10]. This analysis demonstrates how social practices, such as *Rewang*, can serve to reinforce power structures that position women as "the Other," thereby limiting their potential and contributing to the perpetuation of gender inequality in society.

4 Conclusion

Women play a pivotal role in the *Rewang* tradition, contributing to various aspects of the celebration, including food preparation, decoration, coordination with community

members, and the welcoming of guests. However, a discernible delineation of roles between men and women is evident, with women assuming responsibility for domestic tasks while men engage in physical labor. This division reflects and reinforces gender inequalities in society, thereby limiting women's choices and opportunities. This process of othering is facilitated by a rigid gender-based division of labor, social expectations, and the naturalization of women's domestic roles, resulting in their marginalization from public spaces and decision-making processes. The long-term repercussions of this phenomenon encompass the perpetuation of gender inequality, the establishment of barriers to women's empowerment, and the potential for the loss of women's talents and contributions across various domains of life.

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