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Asian Journal of Indigenous Studies (AJIS)

Gender Issues in Modern Society  
**MAN'S WITHOUT POWER: GENDER PARADIGM  
 IN WEST SUMATERA**

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### Abstrak

Masyarakat Minangkabau merupakan masyarakat matrilineal terbesar di dunia; di mana kepemilikan seperti tanah dan rumah diwariskan melalui garis keturunan ibu (nasab ibu). Beberapa ilmuan masih berdebat dikarenakan diaspora (Minangkabau, "merantau") dari lelaki Minang ke berbagai daerah di wilayah Asia tenggara sebagai usaha untuk mencari keuntungan melalui kegiatan perdagangan. Walau bagaimanapun, masyarakat asli Minangkabau sependapat bahwa, budaya matrilineal menjadi penyebab utama diaspora tersebut. Dengan bepergiannya para kaum pria untuk merantau dalam jangka waktu yang tidak dapat dipastikan (bahkan terkadang mereka tidak pernah pulang kampung lagi, karena mereka malu gagal diperantauan), itu lebih disebabkan oleh ketiadaan kepemilikan tanah dan rumah yang telah dijelaskan di atas. Itu juga dipandang sebagai masa depan sebuah generasi yang tidak bisa ditawar-tawar. Selanjutnya ada pandangan bahwa, lelaki. dapat hidup atau tinggal di mana saja, terutama disurau dan mereka tidak membutuhkan rumah seperti kaum perempuan yang membutuhkannya. Sungguhpun para lelaki tersebut di kampung mereka diwajibkan menjaga harta keluarga (nasab ibu), tanpa berhak memiliki seluruh atau sebagian harta tersebut.

Kata Kunci : Merantau, Masyarakat Minangkabau, Kesetaraan *Gender* (Laki-Laki dan Perempuan).

### Intriduction

The Minangkabau ethnic group, also known as Minang (*Urang Minang in Minangkabau language*), is *indigenous* to the Minangkabau Highlands of West Sumatra, in Indonesia. Their culture is matrilineal, with property and land passing down from mother to daughter, while religious and political affairs are the responsibility of men. Today 4 million Minangs live in West Sumatra, while about 3 million more are scattered throughout many Indonesian and Malay peninsular cities and towns. The Minangkabau are strongly Islamic, but also follow their ethnic traditions, or adat. The Minangkabau adat was derived from animist beliefs before the arrival of Islam, and remnants of animist beliefs still exist even among some practicing Muslims. The present relationship between Islam and adat is described in the saying "tradition founded upon Islamic law, Islamic law founded upon the Qur'an" (*adat basandi syara', syara' basandi Kitabullah*).

The name Minangkabau is thought to be a conjunction of two words, minang ("victorious") and kabau ("buffalo"). *There is a legend that the name is derived from a territorial dispute between the Minangkabau and a neighbouring prince. To avoid a battle, the local people proposed a fight to the death between two water buffalo to settle the dispute. The prince agreed and produced the largest, meanest, most aggressive buffalo. The Minangkabau produced a hungry baby buffalo with its small horns ground to be as sharp as knives. Seeing the adult buffalo across the field, the baby ran forward, hoping for milk. The big buffalo saw no threat in the baby buffalo and paid no attention to it, looking around for a worthy opponent. But when the baby thrust his head under the big bull's belly,*

*looking for an udder, the sharpened horns punctured and killed the bull, and the Minangkabau won the contest and the dispute.*

The roofline of traditional houses in West Sumatra, called Rumah Gadang (Minangkabau, "big house"), curve upward from the middle and end in points, in imitation of the water buffalo's upward-curving horns. The first mention of the name Minangkabau as Minangkabwa, is in the 1365 Majapahit court poem, the *Desawarnana* (or *Nagarakrtagama*) composed by *Mpu Prapanca*. People who spoke Austronesian languages first arrived in Sumatra around 500 BC, as part of the Austronesian expansion from Taiwan to Southeast Asia. The Minangkabau language is a member of the Austronesian language family, and is closest to the Malay language, though when the two languages split from a common ancestor and the precise historical relationship between Malay and Minangkabau culture is not known. Until the 20th century the majority of the Sumatran population lived in the highlands. The highlands are well suited for human habitation, with plentiful fresh water, fertile soil, a cool climate, and valuable commodities. It is probable that wet rice cultivation evolved in the Minangkabau Highlands long before it appeared in other parts of Sumatra, and predates significant foreign contact. Adityawarman, a follower of Tantric Buddhism with ties to the Singhasari and Majapahit kingdoms of Java, is believed to have founded a kingdom in the Minangkabau highlands at Pagaruyung and ruled between 1347 and 1375. The establishment of a royal system seems to have involved conflict and violence, eventually leading to a division of villages into one of two systems of tradition, Bodi Caniago and Koto Piliang, the later having overt allegiances to royalty. By the 16th century, the time of the next report after the reign of Adityawarman, royal power had been split into three recognized reigning kings. They were the King of the World (Raja Alam), the King of Adat (Raja Adat), and the King of Religion (Raja Ibadat), and collectively they were known as the Kings of the Three Seats (Rajo Tigo Selo). The Minangkabau kings were charismatic or magical figures, but did not have much authority over the conduct of village affairs. It was around the 16th century that Islam started to be adopted by the Minangkabau. The first contact between the Minangkabau and western nations occurred with the 1529 voyage of Jean Parmentier to Sumatra. The Dutch East India Company first acquired gold at Pariaman in 1651, but later moved south to Padang to avoid interference from the Acehese occupiers. In 1663 the Dutch agreed to protect and liberate local villages from the Acehese in return for a trading monopoly, and as a result setup trading posts at Painan and Padang. Until early in the 19th century the Dutch remained content with their coastal trade of gold and produce, and made no attempt to visit the Minangkabau highlands. As a result of conflict in Europe, the British occupied Padang from 1781 to 1784 during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, and again from 1795 to 1819 during the Napoleonic Wars.

Late in the 18th century the gold supply which provided the economic base for Minangkabau royalty began to be exhausted. Around the same time other parts of the Minangkabau economy had a period of unparalleled expansion as new opportunities for the export of agricultural commodities arose, particularly with coffee which was in very high demand. A civil war started in 1803 with the Padri fundamentalist Islamic group in conflict with the traditional syncretic groups, elite families and Pagaruyung royals. As a result of a treaty with a number of penghulu and representatives of the Minangkabau royal family, Dutch forces made their first attack on a Padri village in April 1821. The first phase of the war ended in 1825 when the Dutch signed an agreement with the Padri leader Tuanku Imam Bonjol to halt hostilities, allowing them to redeploy their forces to fight the Java War. When fighting resumed in 1832, the reinforced Dutch troops were able to more effectively attack the Padri. The main center of resistance was captured in 1837, Tuanku Imam Bonjol was captured and exiled soon after, and by the end of the next year the war was effectively over. With the Minangkabau territories now under the control of the Dutch, transportation systems were improved and economic exploitation was intensified. New forms of education were introduced, allowing some Minangkabau to take advantage of a modern education system. The 20th century marked a rise and

cultural and political nationalism, culminating in the demand for Indonesian independence. Later rebellions against the Dutch occupation occurred such as the 1908 Anti-Tax Rebellion and the 1927 Communist Uprising. During World War II the Minangkabau territories were occupied by the Japanese, and when the Japanese surrendered in August 1945 Indonesia proclaimed independence. The Dutch attempts to regain control of the area were ultimately unsuccessful and in 1949 the Minangkabau territories became part of Indonesia as the province of Central Sumatra.

In February 1958, dissatisfaction with the centralist and communist-leaning policies of the Sukarno administration triggered a revolt which was centered in the Minangkabau region of Sumatra, with rebels proclaiming the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI) in Bukittinggi. The Indonesian military invaded West Sumatra in April 1958 and had recaptured major towns within the next month. A period of guerrilla warfare ensued, but most rebels had surrendered by August 1961. In the years following, West Sumatra was like an occupied territory with Javanese officials occupying most senior civilian, military and police positions. The policies of centralization continued under the Suharto regime. The national government legislated to apply the Javanese desa village system throughout Indonesia, and in 1983 the traditional Minangkabau nagari village units were split into smaller jorong units, thereby destroying the traditional village social and cultural institutions. In the years following the downfall of the Suharto regime decentralization policies were implemented, giving more autonomy to provinces, thereby allowing West Sumatra to reinstitute the nagari system.

## **The History and Culture of Minangkabau**

Minangkabau a region and ethnic located in West Sumatra province on the western side of Sumatra Island, Republic of Indonesia. West Sumatra is a province with 42.297,50 square kilometer. It lies between the North Sumatra province to the North, Riau province to the East, and Jambi and South Sumatra to the South. It is located on the island of Sumatra which is one among 13,000 islands that makes up Indonesia. Its most distinctive feature of Sumatra Island is the Bukit Barisan mountain range, which stretches from the north-western to the south-eastern tip dividing the island into two unequal parts: the narrow western coast and the wide eastern half comprised of hills and the alluvial lowlands from where, short rivers run down the steep western slopes toward the Indian Ocean and Strait of Malacca. Minangkabau people belong to the highland farming groups and have been since Neolithic age by nature seafarers engulfed in overseas exploration tradition from South-China and Pacific up to East Africa. They were well known of its paddy-farming-based cultural traits, overseas sailing traditions, house-granary type and Bronze technology, while bringing with them paddy-farming agriculture and its institutions including matrilineal descent-rule and technology. The cultural constitution of Minangkabau as ethnic territory was instituted by Tambo Alam Minangkabau (text on Minangkabau land), or generally and for the purpose of this research it would be called "Tambo". Tambo exposes the culture, people, origin, organizational principles, and the territory of the Minangkabau. It covered principles of social stratifications, cultural traits, economic and corporate managements. The author was anonymous and historical context of its writing was unknown. But the constitution is so strong, widely accepted by the people that every nagaris in Minangkabau claimed to have their local version of tambo.

Legend has it that the founders of Minangkabau had come from a local volcano, Merapi Mountain. According to Tambo, they were descendant of Alexander the great who sailed and settled in Southeast Asia, before finally they made their way to Sumatra, went through Kampar River and rested and settled to establish the Minangkabau regions on volcano. It was said that when they found the island the summit had been described as of the size of an egg. As the water decreased the surface spread from the apex running downward slopes to the valleys. The area covering the slopes and the intervening valleys and plains had been traditionally called as the heartland, (or darek, literally means "high land above water"). On that feet of the mountain, the first nagari in Minangkabau had been

established, namely nagari Pariangan. It had been later referred as ancestral and cultural region for all nagaris and people of Minangkabau in and out of Minangkabau regions.

Minangkabau have large corporate descent groups, but they traditionally reckon descent matrilineally. A young boy, for instance, has his primary responsibility to his mother's and sisters' clans. It is considered "customary" and ideal for married sisters to remain in their parental home, with their husbands having a sort of visiting status. Not everyone lives up to this ideal, however. In the 1990s, anthropologist Evelyn Blackwood studied a relatively conservative village in Sumatera Barat where only about 22 percent of the households were "matrihouses", consisting of a mother and a married daughter or daughters.[13] Nonetheless, there is a shared ideal among Minangkabau in which sisters and unmarried lineage members try to live close to one another or even in the same house. Landholding is one of the crucial functions of the suku (female lineage unit). Because Minangkabau men, like Acehnese men, often migrate to seek experience, wealth, and commercial success, the women's kin group is responsible for maintaining the continuity of the family and the distribution and cultivation of the land. These family groups, however, are typically led by a penghulu (headman), elected by groups of lineage leaders. With the agrarian base of the Minangkabau economy in decline, the suku—as a landholding unit—has also been declining somewhat in importance, especially in urban areas. Indeed, the position of penghulu is not always filled after the death of the incumbent, particularly if lineage members are not willing to bear the expense of the ceremony required to install a new penghulu. The Minangs are the world's largest matrilineal society; properties such as land and houses are inherited through female lineage. Some scholars argue that this might have caused the diaspora (Minangkabau, "*merantau*") of Minangkabau males throughout the Maritime Southeast Asia to become scholars or to seek fortune as merchants.

However, the native Minangkabaus agreed that this matrilineal culture is indeed the result of (not the reason for) diaspora. With their men travelling out of the country for unspecified time (with possibility of some of them not returning home), it is only logical to hand the land and property to those who do not have to leave it: The women. This also ensures the women's (meaning: mothers of the future generations') welfare and hence ensuring their offsprings welfare. Besides, native MinangKabaus argue that "Men can live anywhere and hence they do not need a house like women do". The concept of matrilineal can be seen from the naming of important museums such as "The house where Buya HAMKA was born" by Maninjau Lake. It has never been and never will be Buya HAMKA's house because it was his mother's house and passed down only to his sisters. Another museum in Bukit Tinggi was called by the locals: "Muhammad Hatta's Mom's house" where you will see that Muhammad Hatta (the Indonesia's Independence Proclamator) only had a room outside of the house, albeit attached to it. As early as the age of 7, boys traditionally leave their homes and live in a surau (a prayer house and community centre) to learn religious and cultural (adat) teachings.

When they are teenagers, they are encouraged to leave their hometown to learn from schools or from experiences out of their hometown so that when they are adults they can return home wise and 'useful' for the society and can contribute their thinking and experience to run the family or nagari (hometown) when they sit as the member of 'council of uncles'. This tradition has created Minang communities in many Indonesian cities and towns, which nevertheless are still tied closely to their homeland; a state in Malaysia named Negeri Sembilan is heavily influenced by Minang culture because Negeri Sembilan was originally Minangkabau's territory. The traditions of sharia—in which inheritance laws favor males—and indigenous female-oriented adat are often depicted as conflicting forces in Minangkabau society. The male-oriented sharia appears to offer young men something of a balance against the dominance of law in local villages, which forces a young man to wait passively for a marriage proposal from some young woman's family. By acquiring property and education through merantau experience, a young man can attempt to influence his own destiny in positive ways.

Increasingly, married couples go off on merantau; in such situations, the woman's role tends to change. When married couples reside in urban areas or outside the Minangkabau region, women lose some of their social and economic rights in property. One apparent consequence is an increased

likelihood of divorce. Minangkabau were prominent among the intellectual figures in the Indonesian independence movement. Not only were they strongly Islamic (meaning: Their religious belief is different from the occupying Protestant Dutch), and like every other Sumatran: They are culturally and naturally proud people, they also have traditional belief of egalitarianism of "Standing as tall, sitting as low" (that no body stand or sit on an increased stage), they speak a language closely related to Bahasa Indonesia, which was considerably freer of hierarchical connotations than Javanese. Partly because of their tradition of merantau, Minangkabau developed a cosmopolitan bourgeoisie that readily adopted and promoted the ideas of an emerging nation-state. Due to their culture that stresses the importance of learning, Minang people are over-represented in the educated professions in Indonesia, with many ministers from Minang.

In addition to being renowned as merchants, the Minangs have produced some of Indonesia's most influential poets, writers, statesmen, scholars, and religious scholars. Being fervent Muslims, many of them embraced the idea of incorporating Islamic ideals into modern society. Furthermore, the presence of these intellectuals combined with the people's basically proud character, made the Minangkabau homeland (the province of West Sumatra) one of the powerhouses in the Indonesian struggle for independence.

### **Minangkabau People as Matriarchy Community**

A matriarchy is a social organizational form in which the mother or oldest female heads the family and descent and relationship are determined through the female line and it is government or rule by a woman or women. While those definitions apply in general English, definitions specific to the disciplines of anthropology and feminism differ in some respects. Most anthropologists hold that there are no known societies that are unambiguously matriarchal, but some authors believe that exceptions are possible, some of them in the past. Matriarchies may also be confused with matrilineal, matrilocal, and matrifocal societies. A few people consider any nonpatriarchal system to be matriarchal, thus including generally equalitarian systems, but most academics exclude them from matriarchies strictly defined. In 19th century Western scholarship, the hypothesis of matriarchy representing an early stage of human development—now mostly lost in prehistory, with the exception of some so-called primitive societies—enjoyed popularity. The hypothesis survived into the 20th century and was notably advanced in the context of second-wave feminism, but this hypothesis is mostly discredited today, as that stage never having existed. Some older myths describe supposed matriarchies. Several modern feminists have advocated for matriarchy now or in the future and it has appeared in feminist fiction. Several theologies have opposed forms of matriarchy. It has often been presented as negative, in contrast to patriarchy as natural and inevitable for society.

### **“Theoretically” : The Male Should Dominate The Power**

There are two overlapping organizations in nagari, based on spatial organization (guguak) and clan organization (suku). Basically the territorial coherence is more social rather than physical or spatial. Guguak is a topographical confinement on which stands settlement organization called in local terminology as jorong (lane of houses) and in political division as koto (fortified area). However the guguak (table land) or jorong is not a control unit therefore does not have traditional leading roles.

The leading roles are therefore bestowed to clan leader (kepala suku or datuk pucuk) or *nagari assembly* (ninik-mamak or officially called kerapatan adat nagari) which is situated beyond the scope of guguak. Nevertheless it has physical reference (lambasan). In Tambo the property of koto was described as a coherent settlement configuration but not yet established as polity and therefore does not have council hall (balai adat), common place for meeting and other activity (galangan) and mosques.

Therefore *guguak* organization is more a topographical unit within which several maternal joint families from various clans stand as a configuration. *Suku* is clan organization or clan group which means a mythical origin of the community<sup>48</sup>. A *suku* is led by male-leader called *kepala suku* or *datuk pucuak* and they sat in community council or *Kerapatan Adat Nagari (KAN)*. *Suku* is a control unit and they have hierarchy of organization. The *suku* (or *pasukuan*) are: *Bodi, Caniago, Koto, Piliang, Patapang, Koto Anyie, Melayu, Bendang, and Mandahiliang*. It is prescribed in *Tambo* that the *suku/clan group* are occasionally set in pair, namely *suku Bodi Caniago, suku Koto-Piliang, suku Patapang-Kotoanyie, and Bendang-Mandailiang*. This trait of four clans or pair of clans is seen in the *Kurumba* tribe in *Nilgiri* mountain ranges between *Kerala* and *Tamil Nadu*. The four *nagari's* clan group leaders or *kepala suku* assemble in *Kerapatan Adat Nagari (KAN)*.

The member of *assembly are chieftain (wali nagari), elder member of the village (ninik-mamak), senior women of the community (bundo-kandung), the male-heads of each maternal joint family compound (penghulu), and the clan leaders (tuo-kampung, kepala suku or datuk pucuak)*. Its role has been supervising executive functions of law and customs in *Nagari*. Some decisive roles that hold are: deciding the start of planting seeds in *sawah* or *rice field*, maintaining irrigation, market and any other judicial practices including settling family disputes. Under the clan leader (*kepala suku*) there are also levels of traditional officers which has been *Kotik, and Bilal (religious affair), Angku ampe (the four clan leaders), and dubalang adat (soldier)*: People of a particular *suku (clan-group)* do not necessarily concentrate themselves in single spot, It can be spatially dispersed in different settlement units (*jorong/ koto/ guguak*) within the larger settlement unit *Nagari*. It made each *jorong/ koto/ guguak* always consisted of more than one *sukus*. But it would be obvious that each maternal joint family (*kampung*) adheres tone of this *suku* or *pasukuan* and each has a male-leader, called *penghulu* who run dual organization, the *kin (kaum), household (kampung)* and its corporate unit. In executing this authority he has to obtain sanction from assembly of married ladies of the clan group (*bundo kandung*).

*Penghulu*, or male-leader is distinguished by the title in front of his name, *Datuk*. He is a traditional sub-clan leader responsible for the corporate management of family estates which would have multi-dimensional values, i.e. spiritual, religious, functional and social obligation the blood related *kin (kaum)* and non-blood related *kin (warga)*. The title *Datuk*, does not attach to the person but to the land which is with his mother. Therefore his attribute and symbol has been kept with his mother. In executing his authority he always has to obtain sanction from the married female members of the family (*bundo-kandung*). In case of the death of *penghulu*, the people of *kampung* could still refer to his title. His important role has been metaphorically described in *Tambo* as a "tree". In every inauguration of *Penghulu*, they have been always reminded that a good tree is that which grows up spread branches and have strong roots.

The male role in the *Minangkabau* community : (a) *Tungganai* (literally means column) is care taker of the households for maintenance duty. (b) *Mamak* or *Penghulu* (which are male-head of a maternal joint family), by the sanction of eldest female member (*Tuo*) and higher clan leader (*kepala suku*). (c) *Tuo kampung* or *penghulu pucuk* (clan leader) of confederation and consent of inter clan assembly. (d) *Penghulu suku* by sanctions from member of *jurai*. (d) No formal or central apex but its trait is governed in *Tambo*. Although male had many kinds of role ; as a leader or *elder member of the village*. But in fact the senior women of the community (*bundo-kandung*) had more *power-full* for making decision in matriarchy society (which called as *Minangkabau*).

## The Devine Queens of Minangkabau Lore

The Minangkabau matriarchaat deserves our attention because it has managed to accommodate patrilineal influences for centuries brought by immigrant kings, traders and religious proselytizers looking to establish a base in the gold and pepper rich regions of the Minangkabau heartland. At the end of the 20th century, the Minangkabau people are aware of the threat to their "matriarchal customs" posed by the explosion of modernity that made Indonesia one of the top developing economies in the last part of the 20th century. Today, tradition and modernity live in visible coexistence in the cities of West Sumatra. Malls, universities, banks, and book stores share the same street with traditional market places in the capital city of Padang.

The colorful cities of the highlands attract tourists from all over the world. Buses link most villages to the cities. Satellite dishes beam CNN, Asian MTV, Indonesian soap operas, Japanese and Indian movies to TV's in village homes and food stalls. All of these influences filtered into Belubus once the village was wired for electricity in the early 1990's and got a road that was passable during the rainy season. How these diverse influences are accommodated in village life is part of my story.

The Minangkabau matriarchaat suggests that the time is long overdue for challenging the Western definition of matriarchy as rule by women. This definition has had the unfortunate consequence of producing over a century of squabbling over a vision that could only have been crafted through a Western patriarchal lense. From the time of the first delineation of the Western definition of matriarchy in the 19th century, its meaning was fashioned by analogy with "patriarchy" or "father right," not by reference to ethnographic studies of female-oriented social forms. Because patriarchy developed as a code word for paternal tribal rule based on Biblical sources, matriarchy was defined as its mirror image, patriarchy's female twin. Armed with such a definition, it is not surprising that the countless scholars who went looking for "primitive matriarchies" during the 20th century turned up nothing. It is impossible to find something that has been defined out of existence from the start. Defining a female-oriented social form as the mirror image of a male form is like saying that women's contribution to society and culture deserves a special label only if women act like men. Furthermore, to look narrowly at secular rule in one domain of life to the exclusion of all other domains is to ignore much that is going on in the traditional societies of the human record.

The excision of matriarchy from the psychological perspective canon on the grounds that women don't rule obscures the dominant role played by maternal meanings in many societies. To neglect this role because women do not flood the domain of male politics, despite the fact that they play a central role in other ways, has always struck me as androcentric bordering on misogyny.

A number of feminist writers within and outside psychology are not so myopic in their vision. Many understand the social implications of maternal meanings and refer to a female ethos in social relations which emphasizes love, duty, and common commitment to a sacred tradition. Following psychology's lead, most of these writers avoid using the term matriarchy choosing instead replacement terms like gynarchy, matrix, matristic, matri-centered, or matri-focal to avoid any connotation of gynocracy. With respect to the relationship between the sexes in these cases, these scholars speak of the sexes as being on an equal footing, egalitarian, or "linked" rather than "ranked," in a "partnership" rather than a "dominator" relationship. This characterization fits the Minangkabau as many of the anthropologists who have studied them have been at pains to point out.

## Conclusion

I prefer to retain the term matriarchy out of courtesy and respect for Minangkabau usage. As an psychologist I see my task as one of understanding what the Minangkabau mean before devising a new term. I hope the reader will agree with my conclusion that rather than abolishing the word it should be refurbished. Had the original definition been devised based on what was known of female-oriented societies in the 19th century the word matriarchy would have had a very different genealogy in psychological usage. In the interest of starting from ground zero, the chronicle of my journey includes the kind of ethnographic analysis that might have led to a different conceptualization of matriarchy.

How the Minangkabau conceive of their world and think humans should behave in it along with the practices and rituals they have devised to uphold this world operates as a central theme in the story I tell. My experience of the centrality of women in this world at the end of the 20th century is the stage from which I speak. Based on this experience, I suggest that the term matriarchy is relevant in societies where maternal symbols are linked to social practices influencing the lives of both sexes and women play a central role in these practices. Then, the main point that I want to share is “we should develop the new perspective on gender relation (male-female)” in Minangkabau community to protect male from the dominate of female position.

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