

# Gender Construction of Traditional Marriage at Sikka Krowe Ethnic

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## ABSTRACT

*Gender discrimination remains a contentious issue in Indonesian society. A misunderstanding of gender equality is one of the main causes. The utilization of local wisdom as an effort to provide understanding and uphold gender equality is one effective option. This research aims to explore gender equality in one of the local wisdoms of the Sikka Krowe ethnic, specifically in the customary marriage rituals. This research is a type of qualitative study utilizing an ethnographic approach. Data collection in this research utilizes interview and documentation techniques. The results of this research show that the traditional marriage rituals of the Sikka Krowe ethnic uphold gender equality in community life. Men and women in their roles as husband and wife in a household have complementary roles. The attitude of mutual respect is also emphasized in the customary expressions within the belis ritual. Thus, the ritual is very worthy of being preserved by the Sikka Krowe ethnic from one generation to the next.*

**Keywords:** Gender equality; Belis; Sikka Krowe

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender is viewed as a characteristic and action associated with individuals identified as male and female, influenced by social and cultural contexts. Gender encompasses a set of attitudes, roles, responsibilities, functions, rights, and behaviors inherent to men and women as a result of the cultural or environmental shaping of the society in which individuals grow up and are raised. (Zakia, 2011). The discussion about gender becomes interesting in countries that adhere to a patrilineal kinship system like Indonesia. (Afif et al., 2021) state that equality is a goal that must be achieved by all of humanity spread across all countries in the world, so that no one feels superior to others. (dari segi bias).

In every society, there is always a division of labor between men and women, leading to the recognition of different gender roles for men and women. The differences in gender are actually a common occurrence or a normality as long as they do not lead to gender injustice. Gender injustice

can result in an unequal distribution of roles and responsibilities on one side, whether it be women or men. Gender differences have indeed led to the emergence of various forms of gender injustice that occur within families and society. That gender injustice is something that deserves to be eradicated so that gender equality can be achieved. Gender equality and justice refer to the partnership and alignment between men and women in sociological aspects, value systems, insights, development strategies, harmony, and balance. Gender equality means the same conditions for men and women to obtain opportunities and their rights as human beings, enabling them to play a role and participate in educational, political, legal, economic, socio-cultural activities, and including national defense and security. Gender equality also includes the elimination of discrimination and structural injustices, both against men and women.

Culture serves as a set of values and beliefs that can influence the behavior of society arising from social transmission (Deke et al., 2020). One form of culture that we often encounter in daily life is the wedding ritual. In Indonesia, several forms of marriage are recognized within indigenous communities. This aims to clarify the position, status, as well as the roles and responsibilities after marriage. The Sikka Krowe ethnic understands that marriage and married life are an integral part of the human journey. For that reason, marriage will always be a primary concern. There are many things to consider when preparing someone to take the step into marriage. Every person, both the individuals who are about to marry and their extended families, must prepare various things and go through a lengthy series of traditional rituals.

Issues in marriage often trigger the emergence of gender inequality concerns within the family. To answer various questions regarding the positions of men and women in marriage, this writing will reveal the various forms of equality in the traditional marriage of the Sikka Krowe ethnic, which should be understood to avoid biased views towards certain gender groups.

## **METHOD**

This research was conducted in Sikka regency, East Nusa Tenggara, because this location is the home of the Krowe Sikka ethnic. This ethnic still holds tightly to and preserves their cultural heritage. This research is classified as qualitative research with an ethnographic approach. The data collection techniques used are interviews and documentation. Interviews were conducted with traditional leaders and couples from the Sikka Krowe ethnic who have undergone traditional marriage rituals. The documentation technique was also employed by the researcher to obtain information from documents containing details about the traditional marriage rituals. The information collected will be presented in the form of narrative text, tables, or charts. This research

employs a content analysis approach that is useful for interpreting research data, identifying the symbolic meanings present in each piece of data, in accordance with the research objectives, which are then linked to theory to form a coherent chain of meaning. The process involved is the examination, evaluation, and understanding of the content of a material, text, image, video, or information with the aim of uncovering meaning, purpose, message, or specific characteristics.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Traditional Marriage of Sikka Krowe Ethnic*

Marriage is a spiritual and physical bond between a man and a woman as husband and wife, aimed at forming a happy and lasting family (*satya alaki rabi*) (Adnyani, 2016). In Indonesia, there are several forms of marriage within indigenous communities, which aim to clarify positions, status, as well as roles and responsibilities after marriage (Hidayat, 2016). The traditional marriage of the Sikka Krowe ethnic consists of several stages, namely:

1. *Pano Ahu* is the earliest stage in the traditional marriage of the Sikka Krowe ethnic, where the family of the groom visits the house of the prospective bride. The aim is to inform the family of the prospective bride that there is a desire to propose to the bride. In addition, this aims to ensure that the bride is truly not involved with any man. If this stage of *pano ahu* is successful, then the engagement can proceed.
2. *Poto Wua Ta'a*  
*Poto Wua Ta'a* is the stage where the groom officially proposes to the bride. The groom's party will come bringing several types of items, namely horses, chickens, money, gold, and bananas. The number of items brought does not have a limit, but follows the capacity and desires of the groom's side. At this stage, both parties will discuss what needs to be brought by the groom's side as well as the timing for the next stage, which is the *weli gete* stage. The extent of the requests from the bride's side is determined by several factors, such as educational background, her position in the family, family background, and so on.
3. *Weli Gete*  
At this stage of the wedding ceremony, the groom's side will return bringing gifts, commonly known as *belis*. *Belis* is a traditional marriage belis given by the groom's family to the bride's family (Lede et al., 2018). In general, the bride's family requests a belis in the form of elephant ivory, horses, money, and gold. There are also other things that are not requested but are mandatory to bring at this stage, namely agricultural and plantation products such as betel leaves, areca nuts, rice, bananas, jackfruit, pineapples,

and also livestock products like chickens. The amount of the bride price brought depends on the ability and willingness of the groom's side. However, on the other hand, the amount or size of the bride price brought indicates the level of appreciation given by the groom's side to the bride, who will become his wife. This is in line with (Dewi Kusuma Wardani, 2023) who states that the bride price to be given by the groom is proportional to the social status of the bride. Based on that reasoning, the bride's side has the right to request an increase in the amount of the belis demanded or to refuse if the belis presented does not reflect appreciation for the bride. On the other hand, if the belis brought is perceived as a sign of appreciation for the bride, then an agreement will be reached between both parties. The agreement will eventually be concluded with the slaughter of a pig, from which the heart will be taken to carry out the next steps. The response that will be given by the bride's side to the groom's side will consist of animals (pig, goat), rice, woven sarongs, tuak (traditional drink), and various types of food.

#### 4. *Wotik Wawi Waten*

This stage is the peak of the traditional marriage rite of the Sikka Krowe ethnic. Literally, the term *wotik wawi waten* means to suck the pig's heart. In practice, the appointed customary leader will feed the newlyweds pieces of cooked pig heart without any seasoning. The pig's heart that will be offered to the bride and groom is first 'read' by the traditional leader to gain insight into the lives of the couple in their future household. After that, the traditional leader will share this insight with the bride and groom and their families. The traditional leader will also provide advice in the form of traditional poetry to guide the couple through their married life ahead. After the advice has been given, the customary leader will take a plate containing rice and pieces of pig's heart and then feed it to the bride and groom alternately to eat. By consuming the pig's heart, the couple is officially recognized according to tradition as husband and wife.

The stages described above clearly demonstrate gender equality, where both men and women have their respective duties, responsibilities, and rights, which can be seen from the roles of each party at every stage involved. Although the Krowe Sikka ethnic group adheres to a patriarchal culture, in this customary marriage ritual, it is not evident that women are always treated in a way that restricts their rights and freedoms.

### ***The Sikka Krowe Ethnic Perspective on Belis***

In the traditional marriage of the Sikka Krowe ethnic group, the belis or belis is a noble value, serving as recognition and appreciation for the dignity and worth of a woman. The Sikka Krowe ethnic group views belis not as a material exchange of goods, but rather as a form of respect for human dignity itself. Therefore, the items brought are not a burden imposed upon us, but rather the result of a mutual agreement. With this, it becomes clear that a bribe is not a form of commercialization. Such a great sacrifice to obtain those goods is precisely due to a sense of humanity. Humans need to be valued and respected because their dignity is inherently tied to them, which is symbolically manifested in the form of goods. The amount of bride price given by the male party is a symbolic appreciation of the status of women. Women, often regarded as the weaker sex, need to be defended, and their humanitarian values should be appreciated. One of the appreciations for their status is through the belis ritual. The status of women as partners in community life is increasingly valued with the presence of bride price. Indirectly, the value and amount of their belis will reflect their social status, especially for the girl and her family. This will evoke pride, even on a larger scale, including becoming a source of pride for their tribe. Likewise, from the side of the groom's family who pays the belis (Juliawati, 2013). The moral life of women is increasingly assured, both for young girls and for those who are already married. Due to the demands of dowries, people have become aware that purity or moral integrity should be well maintained by both men and women who are prospective spouses. Similarly, parents must protect their children's virginity or purity. In addition, the bride price also helps to maintain the integrity of the husband-wife relationship within society.

Belis is also a form of appreciation for parents and family. In accordance with the patrilinear tradition upheld by the Sikka Krowe ethnic group, a married woman will reside in her husband's house. Therefore, at the previous stage, namely the weli gete stage, a young man is required to show appreciation to the family of the woman who has given birth to and raised their children. Thus, the belis is not only a form of respect for the status of the woman but also a way to honor the parents and family for raising and nurturing their child. Therefore, some refer to belis as a substitute for mother's milk.

The union between a man and a woman in forming a family is one manifestation of human sociality. However, the social relationship within a marriage not only establishes an inter-subjective relationship between the two partners but can also foster a social relationship for many parties. The purchasing matters need to involve all parties who have authority, such as the family of the bride along with all its members, commonly referred to as *Ina Ama*, and the family of the

groom or the *Me Pu* side. Belis also means a connection between the families of the man and the woman. (Simatupang, 2019) confirms that in a marriage, it must be bound by the prevailing customs and acknowledged by the entire extended family. The relationship will continue from one generation to the next. In other words, the practice of belis, which is the exchange of goods between two lineages, will never disappear. In fact, the incompleteness or the unsettled bride price from the male family to the female family actually strengthens the bond between both parties even more. With that, the man's family feels indebted and remains loyal at all times when the woman's family needs them, for example, during events of death, customary matters, inheritance, and so on (Manuk & Bato, 2023).

Belis means *woter loen*. *Woter loen* is the process where the bride leaving her family name and becoming husband's family name. '*Loen*' atau *fam*, is something very important in the social structure of the Sikka Krowe ethnic community. This lineage will determine a person's ancestry and also has a significant influence in matters of belis. When a husband has given a bride price to his wife, the wife, who initially belonged to her family's lineage, will enter into her husband's family lineage. Similarly, if they have children, those children will become part of or included in the male lineage or descent. In other words, the husband has full rights over their children.

Belis itself is also a manifestation of sacrifice and love. Belis as a symbol of love sacrifice, in the traditional language of the Sikka Krowe ethnic group is expressed with the phrase "*megu nulu, gu ngawun depo*" (love comes first, things follow later). It means that the value of human humanity is prioritized even though material goods also hold value. Material goods in purchasing are a symbolic expression of human dignity, and the main motif will be love manifested in the form of goods. With the presence of belis, the girl does not idolize herself in front of the man but rather appreciates him, as the sacrifice of love from the man and his family is indeed very significant, manifested in the form of material goods. Similarly, the young man should not treat the girl as a mere possession, because his right to marry her is not solely based on paying for her material worth, but also involves a material return from the woman's family as proof of their genuine love. The groom's responsibility will be assessed based on his success and efforts to meet the stipulated bride price. The responsibilities held by the groom are considered as initial capital for navigating his future household. Thus, the bride's family can entrust their daughter to enter and live with the groom and his family (Djawa, 2023).

Another noble value found in belis is its role as a norm. This is expressed in customary terms as "*tena blau ha nora ha*" which means to create a sense of respect between one another. Reluctance is better understood in the sense of mutual respect between individuals. So, buying

also contains moral elements. With the presence of a *belis*, society will respect each other, especially women who are often regarded as the weaker sex. Beliefs as a norm mean that they must be practiced and adhered to by all members of society.

### ***Gender Construction in Traditional Marriage of the Sikka Krowe Ethnic***

As a logical consequence of a marriage, several rights and obligations will arise that must be fulfilled by each partner. The fulfilment of rights by men and women is equal and proportional to the burdens of obligations that must be met by both man and woman (wife and husband). A balanced relationship (gender equality) between men and women in all aspects of life can accelerate the development process based on high human values, without the imperiousness of one gender on one side and the superiority of the other gender on the other side (Rahmawaty, 2015). Thus, in essence, neither partner is superior or inferior in the fulfillment of rights and the execution of obligations. The balance and equality between men and women in the Sikka Krowe ethnic community have been affirmed in the expression” *la’i naha nora lin, du’a naha nora welin*” which means that men have authority and women possess a degree that must be respected.

The duties and responsibilities of a man in the Sikka Krowe ethnic, in their roles as fathers and husbands within the household, have been clearly outlined in the following expression:

*Au mo’an ba’a mangan plamang woga* (O noble warrior of the family)

*Naha harang blebo ganu hewon* (Please offer advice with gentle manners)

*Ganu hewon tua wutun* (Like a bee atop a palm tree)

*Lopa harang wawa lasa lawing* (Do not let anger consume you)

*Odi mata ngasun wawa ni’a ita* (Hundreds of eyes are watching)

*Odi mata berat ganu bunu* (You will bow down as if dead)

*Gou naha lau leman* (Seek your fortune in the sea)

*Gou mai saing wain* (Bring it home for your wife)

*Bata naha reta tana maran* (Find sustenance on land)

*Bata mai toma men* (Bring it home for your child)

*Nian poa lero ha’e* (When the sun begins to rise)

*Reging sai taka, rema sai poron* (Take the axe and machete)

*Gopi sai roin, lema sai kabor* (Open the forest, plant the coconuts)

*Kare sai tua peni sai manu* (Tap the sap, raise the chickens)

*Dena bihing wain botik men* (To provide for your wife and child)

*Nian waunlero wawa* (As evening approaches night)

*Ait naha mai degu lewu* (Firewood you must gather)

*Wair naha mai hading ata* (Water must also be available)

*Saing wain toma men* (For your wife and child)

The above expression clearly illustrates the fundamental principle in establishing the husband's obligation to provide for his wife in order to keep family members free from neglect. As the head of the household, a man must be able to meet the needs of his family members by effectively utilizing the available resources. Furthermore, as the head of the household, a man is also expected to demonstrate his wisdom in leading his family. His attitude, actions, and way of speaking in resolving issues within his household are key to maintaining his reputation and the integrity of his marriage.

In her status as a wife and mother, a woman has fundamental rights in her household life, namely the right to receive welfare guarantees, commonly known as alimony. This relates to the crucial functions and roles of women or wives as reproductive actors (conceiving, giving birth, breastfeeding/caring for children), which cannot be transferred to men or husbands. In addition, there are still household management tasks and serving the husband that fall under the wife's responsibilities (Harahap, 2013). The duties and responsibilities of women in the Sikka Krowe ethnic, in their roles as wives and mothers, are clearly mandated in the following expression:

*Ata du'a ba'a giit meti lepo* (O woman of the house)

*Naha tutur gepu ganu hepun* (Speak gently and politely)

*Ganu hepun papan unen* (Like the sound of a mosquito in a shell)

*Lopa tutur dete wawa lean blon* (Do not shout at length)

*Odi tilu riwun wawa diri rena* (For hundreds of ears will hear)

*Odi wae meang ganu mate* (You will feel shame as if you were dead)

*Nian poa lero ha'e* (When morning begins to approach)

*Bu'ut sai buhar, rema sai ehar* (Take up your weaving tools)

*Jata sai kappa moru lorun* (Skillfully spin the thread into cloth)

*Dena sapu la'in pelang men* (For your husband and your children)

*Nian waun lero wawa* (Your kitchen must be smoky)

*Api naha bara damar naha nilo* (Prepare food and drink)

*Utat naha blain, wair naha gahu* (Sediakan makanan dan minuman)

*Dena api al'in gahu men* (For your husband and your children)

Women from the Sikka Krowe ethnic group are depicted as weavers in their households. This not only contains a literal meaning but also holds a profound symbolic meaning that explains the dual role of women themselves. As weavers, Sikka Krowe ethnic women are portrayed as



creative individuals who do not just stay at home and wait for their husbands to work. This is in line with (Zakia, 2011) who states that Minang women are depicted as skilled embroiderers, which also signifies the ability to unite what is scattered, possessing wisdom, and being capable of solving problems.

## CONCLUSION

The traditional wedding ritual of the Sikka Krowe ethnic group is one of the cultural rites that upholds equality and gender justice. This is clearly evident in the process, the type and amount of bride price given, as well as in the customary expressions conveyed as advice for both newlyweds to build and navigate their household in the future. The traditional wedding rites of the Sikka Krowe ethnic group must be preserved to maintain the honor, status, and dignity of humanity itself. A culture, whether it be customs, traditions, or habits in a certain area, must be preserved in its integrity from that culture. The traditions in the Sikka Krowe ethnic wedding and the symbols contained within them continue to be preserved so as not to be swallowed by the passage of time. If this culture disappears, it means there is a problem that will lead to the destruction of that culture. Future research is expected to utilize other cultures from various regions in Indonesia to provide more literature on gender construction from a cultural perspective.

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