Matrifocality and Collective Solidarity in Practicing Agency: Marriage Negotiation Among the Bimanese Muslim Women in Eastern Indonesia

Atun Wardatun

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By Atun Wardatun[1]

Abstract

This article demonstrates how matrifocality (centrality of women) as a cultural value of the kinship system forms collective solidarity as a main way of enacting agency (capacity to act) among the Bimanese Muslims in eastern Indonesia. It aims to argue that the context and method of performing agency are interdependent such that the first is a cause while the latter is a consequence. Scholars tend to focus on the link between source and goal of agency as the motivation of doing agency determining the goal people conceive. Although some scholars have turned their attention to the interconnection of context and method of agency, few of them highlight the collectiveness of performing agency since agency is simply seen as autonomy. By drawing on cases of how Bimanese Muslim women make decisions about marriage partners and negotiate their roles and rights in contributing and receiving marriage payment, the article shows that women's roles, network, and solidarity are central in constructing agency. The participant observations in 2013 and 2016 illuminate how communality underpins the way Bimanese women pursue their personal goals, underlining their individuality within solidarity. This notion contests the widely accepted binary opposition of individual autonomy and collective solidarity in practicing agency.

Keywords: Collective Solidarity, Women's Agency, Ethnography

Introduction

Numerous definitions of agency (capacity to act) offered by various scholars in the existing literature have focused on different aspects pertaining to it which can be classified into four elements: source, form, goal, and method. Source refers to context and basic values or principles from which agency arises and is formed, while goal addresses the result toward which agency is projected. Form means the type of response involved in manifesting agency and method is the way agency is yielded and exercised. I suggest that in order to ascertain of proper definition of women's agency it is necessary to examine these four elements and their interconnectedness.

Ahearn has provided a provisional definition, stating that "[a]gency refers to the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (2012:112), emphasizing the source element which drives the

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[1] Atun Wardatun, PhD. Lecturer at Shari'a and Islamic Law Department, the State Islamic University (UIN) Mataram NTB, eastern Indonesia. Obtained her PhD on Anthropology of Islamic Law from the School of Social Sciences and Psychology at the Western Sydney University, Australia in 2017. Her recent publications are:

> Confirming Domestic Identity, Supporting Public Commitment (The Case of Tuan Guru's Wives in Lombok Nusatenggara of Eastern Indonesia), *Musawa, Journal Study Gender and Islam*, Vol 14 No. 2 (2015)
>
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action. Meanwhile, Hay (2005:38) proposes a definition of agency as "a motivated capacity to act," that is, that people conceive a goal for doing any particular action, and its outcome really matters. Many scholars see the source and goal elements of agency as being interdependent. Hay (2005:54) refers to these two elements as the "context and concern," while Parker and Dales (2014:165) call them "motivation and end." Ortner (2006) argues that the form and goal elements of agency, also, are not two separate things.

There has been scant attention paid to the linking between source and method of agency in existing academic literature, particularly in the ways of understanding agency in terms of collectiveness. As the concept of agency originates from the West, and "is a deeply liberal concept in its philosophical sense" (Bilge, 2010:12), agency tends to be defined as "the free exercise of self-willed behaviour" (Mack, 2003:149). This emphasizes the autonomy of an individual within society and his or her freedom to make decisions.

This article sets out to explore an extended perspective on women's agency and is aimed at highlighting how a particular context determines the method of performing agency. This is established by arguing that 'collective solidarity' is a main method of exercising women's agency in Bima and individual goals can still be achieved in the collectiveness. I will show how matrifocality or the centrality of women in the Bimanese kinship system is visible in those particular sites and becomes a main cultural foundation of enacting collective solidarity.

Matrifocality means, literally, 'mother-focused' and was first coined by R. T. Smith (1956). Tanner (1974) later distinguished between 'matrifocality' and 'momism,' with the latter referring to the centrality of white American women within their families affectively, which is a counterbalance to their economic dependence. In contrast, 'matrifocality' is the centrality of women affectively within families, as well as culturally and structurally at a social level.

My argument above is built upon findings from participant observations (2013 and 2016) and analysis of two cultural practices regarding decision-making to marry and negotiation of marriage payment among the Bimanese Muslims. The centrality of women and their agency has been absent from many scholars' attention when they conduct research in Bima and about the Bimanese until recently (Brewer, 1979; Just, 1986; Hitchcock, 1996; Prager, 2010; Rahman and Nurmukminah, 2011; Sila, 2014). This article, thus, not only highlights an alternative way of performing agency but also situates the topic as a subject of research within the Bimanese context which has been overlooked.

Arguably, the individualization of personhood in Western culture really shapes how agency is enacted in its context. However, other parts of the world with different contexts based upon different norms and values have their own way of enacting agency. In this article I use the term 'collective solidarity' to name the principle of agency held by the Bimanese as opposed to 'individual autonomy' which is usually associated with the concept of 'agency' in Western contexts.

In the first section I introduce the location, ethnic group, and kinship system where the research was conducted. I then move to an outline of what I mean by collective solidarity in this sense. Next, I illustrate an ethnographic account of collective solidarity as a way to enact women's agency in the practice of making the decision to marry and negotiating payment among the Bimanese Muslims. I conclude this article by highlighting the value of matrifocality in practicing collective agency.

Bima, the Bimanese and Kinship System

Bima is located at the eastern end of Sumbawa Island, one of two main islands in West Nusatenggara, eastern Indonesia. Sumbawa's total land area is 133,300 square kilometres. It is 275 kilometres long and 90 kilometres wide. Culturally and linguistically, Sumbawa Island can be divided into two parts: the western part, which is inhabited by *Tau Samawa*, an ethnic name for Sumbawanese, and the eastern part, home to *Dou Mbojo*, which refers to the Bimanese. The Tau Samawa language has close affinities with the Sasak language of Lombok and has been classified as Western Malayo-Polynesian, while Dou Mbojo language, spoken by people in Bima and Dompu, is Central Malayo-Polynesian. *Nggahi Mbojo* (Bimanese language) has almost 755,000 speakers, including those who migrated to neighbouring islands (Prager, 2010).

Although *Dou Mbojo* (Bimanese) are the indigenous people of Bima, there is also some heterogeneity in its population. The inhabitants of Bima are mostly Dou Mbojo, but there are also some people who belong to other ethnicities from all over Indonesia, such as South Sulawesi, Java, East Nusatenggara, Bali, and Padang. There are also a significant number of Chinese (who are predominately in commerce in Bima). The Arabic-Bimanese are concentrated in a Melayu village in the urban area and earn a living primarily by trading. This variety of ethnicities can be found more easily in the urban areas rather than in the semi-urban and rural areas.

Bimanese society is, for the most part, bilateral, meaning that descent is traced through both the father's and the mother's line. The patrilineal influence in Islamic rules of inheritance can be seen in that while they give rights to both male and female descendants to inherit from both parents, the men's share of the inheritance is twice as big as the women's. Customary law in Bima, however, divides inherited property equally among sons and daughters. Part of the reason for this is that both sons and daughters will contribute equally to their marriages later. Indeed, as highlighted by Ali (2010a), understanding why Islamic law allots a greater share of inheritances to men than to women entails understanding that it also assigns the bulk of responsibility to men as the economic providers of family, both in the form of *mahr* (marriage payment) and of *nafaqa* (earned income used for providing economic support to the family).

Parents are expected to strive for their children's ongoing wellbeing, and this is seen as their long-term responsibility. Raudah (53 years old) and Amrullah (56 years old) explained to me that children are their most precious gift from God. For them, the success and happiness of their children are parents' primary interests: "*ndi aumu nami sura wa'i ro ana*" (We are not important; our grandchildren and children are). Just (1986) characterized the highland Bimanese as "child-centred or teknocentric":

> What I mean by this is the presence of a general ideological ethos that places the proper rearing of children and the assurance of their future security as the highest and most basic motive in framing social action and the most basic context for the transaction of social business. (1986:324)

This is also the reason why daughters are given land; it is unmovable property, and keeping the new couple near the matrilocal residence is the preferred choice. Both parents are typically very comfortable living close to their extended family, but this particularly applies to the mother and her daughters. In Bimanese, 'marriage' is also referred to as '*kalai uma*' (separating the house), and this requires that the newly established family has its own space, especially the kitchen (*kalai riha*).

Collective Solidarity as a Concept

The phrases 'individual autonomy' and 'collective solidarity' both seem to be tautologies. One might ask, 'Could autonomy be collective?' or, 'Could solidarity be individual?' or, 'Is there such a thing as collective autonomy or individual solidarity, and if not, why use repetitive words?'

I argue that the phrase 'collective solidarity' contains a strong reference to the firm sense of togetherness and mutual responsibility exhibited by kinswomen, such as mothers, sisters and the female network, and the marriage mediator in helping the bride enacting agency. The collective solidarity is considerably noticeable in two momentous steps of their lives, that is, when they decide to marry and negotiate to pay matrimonial funding.

Their solidarity is also supported by cultural values of matrifocality and communality of society, generating workable and solid cooperation. Furthermore, due to the collective character of agency among the Bimanese, their agency could be seen as shared subjectivities, influenced by external aspects such as social solidarity, rather than merely a personal-internal subjectivity. However, there are nuances to this solidarity, in that it can in fact be challenged by personal goals and interests, as in the case of *londo iha* (elopement), where the couple elope to fight against their parents' interests, their families' reputation, and local tradition.

The concept of collective solidarity is derived from the theory of solidarity presented by Emile Durkheim, where solidarity is classified into "mechanical solidarity" and "organic solidarity" (1984). Mechanical solidarity refers to social bonding and interdependency within traditional and small societies with little division of labour or modernization. Bonds are built through ties of kinship, cooperation, or shared activities and beliefs, generating a collective consciousness among group members.

Organic solidarity is associated with the interdependency within a society which has a more complex division of labour. In this case, people need each other because group members are specialized in different forms of occupations and areas of expertise, which creates a degree of mutual dependency among them.

Thijseen further clarifies the difference between these two forms of solidarity, stating that mechanical solidarity is built within "likeness and cohesion" (2012:455) of group members, while organic solidarity, in a group which has members with differences in background, promotes "unity in diversity" (2012:456). Collective solidarity embedded in this cultural practice is a variant of mechanical solidarity in Durkheim's term.

'Collective action' and 'solidarity,' separately, although not mutually exclusive, are, in fact, familiar concepts for the feminist movement. Sweetman, for example, asserts that collective action "involves women discussing their lives, analysing their shared experiences of injustice and oppression and developing common goals" (2013:218). Due to the powerful and socially embedded injustice and oppression faced by many women, they engage in feminist solidarity, which she broadly defines as "the principle of mutual support between individuals, groups and organisations working on gender equality and women's rights" (Sweetman, 2013:219). The concept of collective solidarity I offer is not as an organized movement, as implied by Sweetman's terms, but rather as an expression of the cultural value of togetherness. Collective solidarity here refers to common responsibilities and the engagement of women's female relatives and the female network as a collective consciousness. This solidarity enables an individual woman, a bride, to achieve her personal goal, as well as benefitting both her natal and her new family.

Performing Collective Agency in Negotiating Marriage
　　Marriage, for the Bimanese, appears to be an institution where reciprocal obligations between the bride and groom and between their families on both sides and also the communality of society are created and reinforced. The wedding celebration is considered a *rawi rasa* (community concern), in which all married and/or adult members of society should take part to ensure the celebration is a success. For the large number of people who turn up to help, accepting the invitation of the host indicates their commitment. However, they expect that what they have given in *pamaco* (material contribution) will be paid back one day, when they in turn are in need of help.
　　The Bimanese recognizes two forms of marriage, *nika taho* (literally, good marriage) and *nika iha* (literally, wrong marriage). The first form can be achieved when mutual agreement exists. In this case, the bride and groom and their parents all agree upon the chosen partner, no matter who made the initial selection. A marriage could be considered *nika iha* if it is a marriage based on love, in which the children find their own partners and get married without the approval of their parents (*londo iha*). *Nika iha* could also be a forced marriage (*nika paksa*) where the children are pushed to accept the marriage partner of their parents' choice.
　　Marriage is also regarded as *kacampo fu'u* (a joint investment) in Bimanese society, in which both the man and the woman indicate their readiness to get married by bringing property (*harta bawaan*), a traditional wooden house for men and land to place the house for women, and demonstrating particular skills, farming for men and weaving for women. Interestingly, both the property and skills are gender related. This arrangement shows that not only the men are expected to shoulder financial responsibilities but that the women should complement them in making a financial contribution to the family.
　　Marriage is an important part of life for the Bimanese, laying out the communality and reciprocity values as basic elements in their social life. A further question should be elaborated, then: How is women's agency performed in this collectiveness? The following account will outline how the female network and kinswomen strikingly support individual women to construct and enact their agency. The first cultural practice relates to wrong marriage where women defy the mutual principle in deciding marriage, explaining their self-decision for the sake of their personal goal. The second illustrates how women situate themselves in a collaborative attempt at bargaining on marriage payment. In both cases, the centrality of women as actors of collective solidarity in performing agency is significant.

Londo Iha (Elopement): Breaking Mutual Agreement
　　Basically, as stated before, the decision to marry for the Bimanese should be based on everyone's voices, that is, bride's, groom's, and both side's parents. In addition to the requirements laid down by Islamic family law regarding the bride, groom, guardian (*wali*), two witnesses, and *ijab qabul*, the Bimanese stipulate that the bride and groom and their parents should all agree upon the chosen partner, no matter who made the initial selection. A marriage that fulfils the Islamic requirements is regarded as *nika ma saha* (a valid marriage), but to make it a *nika taho* (good marriage) with a harmonious relationship between the couple and both families, the aforementioned local principle of mutual agreement should be met.
　　Listening to everyone's say highlights that agency is collectively constructed by family members rather than on an individual basis. However, this (familial) collective agency is not

always the case when an individual woman needs female network support, as in the following case, to go against her family's decision.

> It was my ninth month in Renda-Bima and I was about to head for the city to buy some groceries and a new handbag for the wedding party to be held in the village the following week. I received a phone call from Mr. Ahmad (an officer in the village office), the uncle of the bride-to-be, telling me that the wedding party of his niece appeared to have been cancelled. I was so surprised because I knew that all the villagers had prepared for the wedding party and traditional initiation rituals. However, the 18-year-old bride had just run away with a man of her choice to a neighboring village, leaving the man who was supposed to be her groom. Her family was furious and felt ashamed at losing face. The male family members were about to seek her out and force her return. However, a group of women, loosely related to her, gathered in the front yard of her house to discuss the case, telling the parents they should not allow the planned marriage to take place because it started in the wrong way, it would always be wrong, and the young woman needed to decide her own future. I had been invited to attend the meeting and was sitting there, observing the exchange of opinions and how the group of men paid attention to what the women said. Finally, the wedding was cancelled as it was agreed that they should not force the girl to marry a man of her parents' choice. The following day, I learnt that the couple had run away to Lombok, and gone to her uncle, because her father refused to be *wali* (guardian) to marry her to the man of her choice. Four months later, when I left the village after finishing my fieldwork, the couple had not come to visit the girl's parents and had gone to East Nusatenggara where they had both found jobs. (Personal journal, 9 September 2013)

The case of elopement (*londo iha*) above provides a particularly rich context for discussing women's agency in Bimanese society. Literally, *londo iha* means 'descend to break.' Elopement is expressed as to 'descend' because the traditional Bimanese house is a high wooden house, reached with a ladder, so that moving out or running away from the house involves descending. 'To break' refers to breaking the mutual agreement of a marriage decision.

When the couple decide to elope, they arrange to meet in a particular place and then go to a religious or traditional leader (or the chief of their neighborhood) declaring that they want to get married. They ask him to help to persuade their parents, especially the girl's parents, as they need to have a guardian (*wali*) from the girl's side for the marriage declaration. Should the father refuse to be the guardian and not provide an alternative to represent him, they must go to a religious court to seek a legal guardian (*wali hakim*). In most cases, this process takes time, except if the girl is already pregnant. However, there will never be any elaborate wedding ceremony for this kind of marriage. In some cases, the conflict between parents and children, or between the families of the bride and the groom, can create tension for a long period of time and may even result in the children being disinherited.

The serious negative consequences of *londo iha,* including the sacrifices the parties have to make and their fight against tradition and religion, shed light on the issue of women's agency.[2]

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[2] There is a striking difference in both the meaning and practice of elopement, between Bimanese Muslims and Sasaknese Muslims. For the latter, *merariq* (elopement) is seen as a source of pride for men and respect for women.

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In this case, women's agency can be seen as taking the form of "oppositional agency" (Ahearn, 2012), whereby a woman has to decide what is best for her to do in relation to the dominant power of her parents. Women who opt for *londo iha* are, in fact, taking an enormous risk for their own future, as they can never be sure what will happen next and they will not be able to turn back to their parents asking for help if they have problems.

However, as can be seen clearly from the above case, *londo iha* can take place and end in a marriage with the help of others. The female network who shared the feeling of being women willing to determine their own life partners supported the action taken by the girl. In this case, women, who were not only close relatives but also neighbours, were heard and provided an opportunity to influence her family's response. It is interesting how the communality of a particular society can intervene in someone's private life. If Ortner's (2006) categorization of agency is applied in the sample case related above, two forms of agency can be applied, first "the agency of project," as it requires the assistance of others (solidarity), and "the agency of power" as a means to resist parental domination.

Londo iha in the above case shows a situation where cohesion between parents and children does not always work and where a woman's personal goal rather than a familial one directs her action. However, the solidarity shown by a group of women, who have something to say about the girl's decision, supports the idea of how agency can be exercised collectively by a female network.

Collective agency is also observed in the ways that a girl can escape an early marriage with a man of her parents' choice and still avoid the social stigma of having to resort to elopement. The following is one of most compelling stories I found during my fieldwork which shows that the support from female friends and kinswomen such as grandmothers can facilitate agency. It concerns a seventeen-year-old girl who was still in her second year of senior high school.

Her parents matched her with a policeman who was also her brother's friend and in the same duty area in east Nusatenggara. In fact, she had another love interest, her classmate who lived in the same village. However, the girl wanted to continue her education and go on to university, as she was good at sport and aspired to be a sports teacher. Her parents had no more money for her education as they had spent it on her brother to get him a job as a policeman. Moreover, they argued that spending money for her education was not a guarantee that she would get a better job and a good husband like the one who wanted to marry her now. Their daughter remained firm in her position and started to develop a strategy on her own in which her grandmother assisted her. The night before the wedding was to take place, she asked her parents' permission to stay overnight at her grandmother's house, but she had arranged a meeting with her boyfriend, of whom she knew her prospective husband was jealous. While she was at her grandmother's house at night, her

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This is because, as precious human beings, women should not be asked for by their future husbands and men should go through a challenge in order to win their ideal partners. Linda Rae Benett explains about merariq as follows:

> For families with high regard for *adat*, *kawin-lari* can be the preferred practice and it may even be considered offensive for a man to request parental permission to marry a woman. At the same time, young people who tend to be less concerned with adherence to adat sometimes express a preference for kawin-lari by describing it as an exciting and romantic interlude before marriage. The associated risk of being captured and returned to their natal homes is experienced as quite thrilling by some women. Others romanticize the heroism of their boyfriends in daring to 'steal' them from their watchful father. (Bennett, 2005:78)

To the Bimanese, elopement means just the opposite. They see it as a humiliation of the woman who is taken from her natal family without a show of respect for her parents. It is, therefore, considered as a wrong marriage. For further comparison of elopement among three ethnic groups in West Nusatenggara (Mbojo (Bima), Samawa, and Sasak), see Wardatun et al. (2010).

boyfriend came to the house next door and pretended to clean their backyard. As they had both assumed, her future husband was checking up on them, and finding the boyfriend nearby made him very angry, and he punched him in the face. She heard their voices and ran out of the house and begged them to stop fighting. In the morning, she went back to her house where the wedding was about to take place. Just two hours before the wedding the groom's family came, and she left without saying anything. Her family and relatives, who were busy at that time, only realized her absence when they wanted to dress her and could not find her in her room. Her family looked for her, and when her future husband heard this, he right away thought that she had eloped with her boyfriend. This certainly made him so enraged and disappointed that he cancelled the wedding. In fact, she had just gone alone to visit her female friends in the neighbouring village to avoid the wedding, but she was sure the incident the previous night would make her future husband associate her disappearance with elopement with her boyfriend, and, therefore, there would be no way he would allow the wedding to go ahead.

Scholars such as Platt (2017), and Aisyah and Parker (2014), who have conducted research on agency in Indonesia, have always found that the communal values there are integrated into how the people practice agency. Although these scholars do not specifically focus their attention on the collective aspect of constructing and enacting agency, their observations are very useful in building my argument in this thesis that women's agency involves collective solidarity as a method, which is established from communal values as the source element of agency. The above cases illuminate the cultural view of marriage as a community concern and affect ways of exercising women's agency.

Ampa Co'i ndai (Negotiation of Marriage Payment)

During my fieldwork I managed to observe ten marriage negotiations in 2013 and five in 2016. I found that in the negotiation process, not only did they bargain about how much to pay but also who will pay the marriage payment. In this case, the brides and their family can initiate and offer their contribution to the marriage payment (*ampa co'i ndai*). Examining the process of marriage negotiation and payment and describing the actors in the process will throw light on the actual mechanism through which women collectively exercise their agency.

The Process of Negotiation

Bimanese symbolize a woman as 'a well' from which people can gather water as a basic need for life, while men are 'a bucket' to bring the water up from the well. These symbols are open to different interpretations, depending on the standpoint one chooses to adopt regarding male and female representation or perspective. Abu Ishaka (64 years old), a man who represents 'typical' male thinking, says that a well implies that a woman should passively wait for a man to make her his wife, while, as a bucket, the man is actively involved in finding a woman and should make the effort in choosing her. Umi Rohana (46 years old), a woman informant, states that the symbols could be read as meaning that women are more stable and have the power to choose whether they accept the man's proposal, while men have to expend more energy running around to find a potential wife. While their interpretations are somewhat similar, Umi Rohana's view represents a greater acknowledgement of women's agency, whereas Abu Ishaka focuses more on the passivity of women. This difference in outlook justifies further my choice to include more women's voices in this study, in order to comprehend women's lives from their own perspective through feminist ethnographic methods, as suggested by Stanley and Wise (1983) and Reinharz (1992).

The ideal roles and attitudes of men and women as alluded to above are more theoretical than empirical because, if actual experiences of marriage negotiation are scrutinized, it becomes clear that both the bride's and the groom's families actively participate and to some extent have their own ways of initiating a relationship. What is more, the process of negotiation shows to some degree the communal nature of personhood, which confirms what Hoffman (1999) suggested, that the experience of 'the self' in some cultures is not built from being against each other, but rather with and through each other.

There are at least four steps that the parties need to go through in the negotiation of marriage payment, as set out below.

Step 1: Sama Ngawa (Equally Willing)

Whatever the type of marriage, whether arranged by the parents, or decided by the couple, all involved must be sure that not only the parents but also the prospective bride and groom are supportive of the union. If it is a love marriage, the bride-to-be, especially if she will contribute to or provide the payment, also needs permission from her parents, as they too will contribute.

Step 2: Tampu'u Nuntu (Initiation and Approach)

Either the parents or the children will decide who initiates the discussions leading to an agreement and what kind of approach they will take. In love marriages, where the bride and the groom have courted, the couple initiates the idea of marriage and will advise their respective parents of their plans. In arranged marriages (arranged either by parents or with the help of a mediator or *panati*), the discussion is usually initiated by the bride's parents or the future groom.

Step 3: Kasabua Nggahi (Negotiate and Reach an Agreement)

After finding a good match, the families set about reaching an agreement on how much each will contribute to the marriage, and what kind of goods to provide. This step involves two stages: *nuntu nari* (silent negotiation) and *mbolo weki* (open negotiation). Silent negotiation means that the parties will not let anybody outside their family know about their decision or the content of their negotiation, except for, possibly, the *panati*, if they include her or him in the process. However, once it is agreed what the bride, the groom and/or her/his family will provide in the way of contribution or payment, including what form it will take, and the amount, there will be an open formal negotiation. Millar (1989) observes that in the Buginese wedding protocol, elderly relatives and neighbours (*tau matoa*) play important roles in the negotiation process because they are considered to indicate one's 'social location.' This is not the case with elderly relatives and neighbours among the Bimanese (*dou ma tua-tua*). However, they do give some wise advice and are consulted in case of conflict or difficulties in reaching an agreement, even though the final decision rests with the nuclear family. The opinion of the mothers is always sought. They have to be listened to, although during the negotiation they do not appear as a spokesperson to mediate between the two families.

Step 4: Karinga Dou (Sharing Information)

After they are satisfied that everything has been arranged, both parties are ready to share the good news about the upcoming wedding with the neighbors and villagers. The mother of the bride might also share, in confidence, the arrangement of their side's contribution for marriage funding (if any) with relatives and close neighbors, using an indirect expression such as '*cua kaneo ro bantu angi*' (to lighten the burden and help each other).

Interestingly, in the process of negotiation, women play a strategic part as supporters (with mothers, aunts, sisters, and *panati* initiating, mediating, and making decisions). The roles and strategies used by these female actors demonstrate the value of matrifocality as suggested by Hildred Geertz (1961). Geertz points to the authority held by mothers and the affection felt towards them within their nuclear family, which enables them to build networks with strong bonds and shared responsibilities for achieving their goals.

The Actors and the Roles

Mother and Aunt: Negotiator and Decision-Maker
The mother, sometimes with the aunts and older sisters of the bride, is at the heart of the negotiations and the decisions about marriage payment. She is the planner with the prime responsibility of communicating with her daughter about the plans as they evolve. If the future bride is not happy with them, the mother will use her position to remind her daughter that it is she who gave life to her children and shared 'meat and blood' (*hi'i ro ra'a*) with them when they were in her womb. This is code, used to convince her daughter that she, her mother, would never allow any harm to come to her, as it would be the same as hurting herself. This persuasive approach is the most compelling part of the process, especially for daughters who do not have any choice of partner, have never had a close friend, or have just broken up with their loved one. In these cases, the father is usually just kept informed about the progress or will offer advice to the mother in order to help move the process along.

It is therefore evident that an important role is attributed to mothers, but also that aunts, too, enjoy a degree of affection and authority, as do other women involved in this practice, such as sisters and marriage brokers. All play their part in ensuring the smooth running of the process. Likewise, the bride, the central player in the process, when making her decision, strives to make her mother happy, imagining how she herself will feel when she becomes a mother. This situation illustrates that the matrifocality or the centrality of women that Hildred Geertz (1961) observed among bilateral Javanese families does also exist in Bima. It also confirms Alexander's (1987) observation that matrifocality does not make the role of the father peripheral, opposing what Hildred Geertz previously suggested. The Bimanese case shows that the father plays an important role in supporting his wife and endorsing her efforts. However, the Bimanese consider the direct persuasive approach between women as being more effective than discussion across genders.

Brides: 'I want him to be my partner.'
The bride is not expected just to remain silent or nod her head to signal submission to the plan, but to give her consent out loud by saying, '*Mada ku nee ku ndai kasona ndi dou di uma'* (I want him to be my partner). At each wedding I attended, the declaration of consent by the bride was officially made before the offer and acceptance ritual was conducted between the groom and the guardian. The bride, accompanied by her mother and the marriage registry official, was taken into a small room and speaking into a microphone, so that the guests outside could hear, asked her father or guardian to marry her to her prospective husband. This is an emotional moment because it signifies a parting between the parents and the bride, who will now belong to her new family.

In Islam, there has been much debate about the notion of women's consent and parental coercion in marriage. Kecia Ali (2010b) discusses this in detail, highlighting that Islamic jurists agreed on two set of circumstances in which women could be forced into marriage by their paternal

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parents: being a minor (before reaching maturity/having menarche), and being a virgin (never married).

All the brides in the Bimanese marriages I attended were of girls who were over the age of consent and who had not been married before. The articulation of their consent indicates women's agency in the context of Bimanese marriage, especially when we consider that women's consent is not required to be verbalized in Islamic marriage ceremonies.

Panati (Mediators): 'Let's make it happen!'

The *panati* not only mediate during communications between the two families but are also assigned the task of talking to the bride if there is a breakdown in communication between her and her mother. If the daughter is not happy with the proposed marriage, the *panati* is asked to help her see it from a different perspective and to understand why it is important for her. It is clear, therefore, when a marriage involves financial contribution from a woman and/or her family, it is preferable for the *panati* to be female, because a woman can more easily convey the feelings and considerations of the mother as having her daughter's best interests at heart. The Bimanese feel that men cannot share feelings with women as well as another female can, as the male experience of family life is different from a woman's.

Another duty of a *panati* involves investigating whether the man already has a serious relationship (proposed and accepted) with another woman and also to ensure that the woman is 'still empty' (*mbuipu ntaruna*), which means she has not accepted another man.

One *panati* I interviewed proudly announced that she had introduced more than ten couples who ended up getting married, and she takes great pleasure in seeing them happy with their children: "They sometimes come to visit me and bring me some new clothes. It is great to be visited by them, especially when they occupy a high position in society (*ma ntau bora ro ngara*; literally, who has good position and name)." She highlighted the fact that the smooth running of the wedding and the future family's life is also part of her success.

It is relevant to note here how Ortner (2006) has further discussed the differences between agency of power and agency of project, placing them within webs of relations experienced by agents. Those webs, she argues, are "of affection and solidarity, or of power and rivalry, or frequently of some mixture of the two" (Ortner, 2006:151). She defines agency of power as "people's ability to act on their own behalf, influence other people and events, and maintain some kind of control in their own lives" (Ortner, 2006:143–144). Agency of project, on the other hand, involves "the intense play of multiple positioned subjects pursuing cultural goals" (Ortner, 2006:144), or fully culturally constituted goals.

Although Ortner frequently points out that she sees those two forms as part of a continuum, rather than in opposition, she clearly highlights the dominant characteristic of each. However, she highlights that agency "is always in fact interactively negotiated" (Ortner, 2006:154–155) and agents are never free or capable of escaping from their social world.

It is important to highlight those two characteristics, as use them to show that while *londo iha* and *ampa co'i ndai* purports to promote the individual goal of a woman who wants to marry a man of her desire and achieve upward social mobility and power through marriage to a man of status, the practices themselves are collective cultural projects which are partly made possible by social solidarity.

Furthermore, the intertwined relationship of power and solidarity in facilitating agency is crucial to understanding the relationship of the individual and society, and the duality of structure, as suggested by Giddens (1984). The practice of marriage negotiations takes place within the

relations of solidarity and power. The practice seeks to pursue meaningful things and purposeful actions "defined by local logics of the good and the desirable and how to pursue them" (Ortner, 2006:145).

Concluding Remarks

The above cases on marriage decisions and negotiations not only illuminate collective agency but also shed light on the base where the agency is formed: matrifocality. As one important aspect of many kinship systems in Indonesia, matrifocality is the centrality of women in the family and in socio-cultural life. It is a key principle for understanding the practice of marriage decision-making and payment negotiation among the Bimanese.

Hildred Geertz (1961), in her research into Javanese families, found them to be matrifocal. Wives often have more authority, influence, and responsibility than their husbands within the family, leading to a strong sense of solidarity among women at a kindred level. Geertz highlights two aspects of matrifocality: the dominance of women in the household and social solidarity within female networks generated by such dominance (Geertz, 1961:78–79). She notes, further, that Javanese women have stronger emotional ties and affectionate relations with the children than the father usually does. Along with making some economic contribution, women can exert control over husbands and children and can be the decision-makers. That can mean that the father has a peripheral role within the family. This domestic influence of women is extended to the kindred level, where solidarity among relatives and with society, linked through women, is more possible than through men.

Matrifocality of the Bimanese is clearly noticeable in the local name attributed to the women as "*dou di uma*" or a person who own the house. This implies women's centrality and role as the economic manager of their families who are encouraged not only to contribute financially but also to ensure economic welfare of family.

The economic implications of matrifocality have been examined by many other scholars who endorse and extend Geertz's account. Jennifer Alexander (1987) agrees with Geertz on the economic roles of Javanese women—that they predominate in the economic domains of market and trading. However, she argues that the women's considerable economic contribution to the nuclear family does not actually make the husbands peripheral, because husbands generally have far more disposable income available for the family than do their wives (Alexander, 1987:20–21). Sullivan (1994) focuses on urban Javanese women's roles as managers within their families, which gives them control over household finances. She found, however, that the managerial role does not actually extend to the woman being assigned real power either within or outside the family, as her husband still has the 'master' role, which implies a hierarchical power relationship between them.

Matrifocality among the Bimanese is evident in both the women's dominance in their nuclear families and the female solidarity linked through their authority and control among relatives. Women's dominance pertains not only to their rights of inheritance of property, their marriage payment, and their economic income but also to their authority and influence over their children, for example, in deciding marriage arrangements. Meanwhile, solidarity is exemplified in the way a mother can create a female network involving a marriage mediator (*panati*) in order to achieve a successful marriage negotiation. Thus, both these aspects of matrifocality facilitate for brides and their families, particularly their mothers, the initiation and execution of the marriage.

Finally, with respect to this article's broader aims for impacting feminist thought, I have here rendered a more nuanced comprehension of women's agency as a site where individuality and communality may overlap. As women can exercise their personal autonomy within the group's

interests, collective solidarity upholds them, enabling women to pursue their individual goals. Collective agency, thus, is a particular method of performing the capacity to act, which frequently, if not always, occurs in a society where the involvement of family, relatives, and the public into personal matters is a "local logics of good." Therefore, it is essential in feminist methodology and theorizing, to link together the methods and sources of agency, which have been absent from feminists attention in the existing literatures.

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