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## The Construction of Masculinity Myths in the Namin Group's Bajidoran Arena as a Specific Gender Order

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**Abstract:** The Sundanese people have long recognized bajidoran as an entertainment art form that presents the aesthetics of dance and traditional Sundanese music (karawitan). However, beneath this surface lies the complexity of power struggles and masculine domination among individuals involved in the Bajidoran Enthusiast Community (Komunitas Pecinta Bajidoran or KPB). Interestingly, the power struggles are not limited to men but also involve women. This phenomenon prompts an inquiry into why bajidoran is heavily associated with practices of masculinity. This study aims to address the following questions: why is bajidoran associated with practices of masculinity, how is this construction process carried out, what are the contributing factors, and what are the implications for the KPB? This research employs a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach, wherein the researcher values the experiences and realities of the subjects under study, even if they differ radically from their own. The researcher applies three characteristics of this new ethnography: honesty, towards other facts, self-reflection, and polyvocality. Data collection involves literature review, observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings of the research explain that: 1) masculinity is strongly embedded in bajidoran due to: firstly, cultural, daily practices, and historical contexts that construct masculinity, which are dialectically intertwined with the experiences of the KPB, both present and past. Secondly, the situational and practical conditions within the bajidoran arena (social relations and interactions) have great potential to generate masculinity. 2) The process of constructing masculinity involves seven stages: production, socialization, appreciation, internalization and externalization, relationships and interactions, staging, and formation. Eight factors contribute to the construction of masculinity: patterns/sequences, the role of the mc and pesinden (vocalists), pencug ibing (leader), kendang (drum), selendang (scarf), economic capital, alcoholic beverages, and musical elements. The results of this research provide insights for the Bajidoran Enthusiast Community and relevant institutions to reconstruct the staging of masculinity in a way that accommodates gender equality.

**Keywords:** masculinity, myth, gender, Bajidoran



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## 1. Introduction

*Bajidoran* is among the highly popular forms of art in Karawang, West Java. It has been present in Karawang since the 1950s (Herdiani, 1999). This art form constitutes a folk performance involving Sundanese *karawitan* (traditional music) and dance. *Bajidoran* is a folk art that engages the audience as participants (referred to as *bajidor*) to spontaneously or improvisationally dance. *Bajidoran* also involves the act of giving money (*saweran*) to request songs, as a gesture of affection, or simply to greet the dancers and vocalists, while enjoying the beauty of the music and the movements of the dancers on stage. All these processes are orchestrated by the *kendang* player, who delivers *tepak* (various rhythmic patterns) with vigorous variations.

Research on masculinity in *bajidoran*, especially its relation to gender equality, is a topic of significant interest and importance. This research provides insights into *bajidoran* from a different perspective, focusing on masculinity. Various studies have been conducted on *bajidoran*, including (Herdiani, 1999), (Spiller, 2001), (Setyobudi, I, and Alkaf, 2011), (Herdiani, 2012), (Suryaman, 2017), (Suryaman, 2019), (Ruchimat, 2015), (Abdulah, 2008), (Aprilianti, 2013), and (Setiawati, 2019). These studies generally discuss *bajidoran* from an artistic and aesthetic standpoint with a focus on performance art.

However, previous researchers have not addressed the topic of masculinity in *bajidoran*. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to elucidate the process of constructing masculinity in *bajidoran* in Karawang, along with the factors shaping it, both textual and practical. This research complements previous studies on the presence of *bajidoran* in Karawang but is analyzed from a different perspective, particularly examining the relational dynamics between masculinity and gender equality in the *bajidoran* arena.

The researcher posits that *bajidoran* does not merely concern itself with the aesthetics of dance and *karawitan* alone but also speaks to the masculinity of the people of Karawang, which is inherently linked to gender equality. *Bajidoran* holds another meaning related to gender issues, especially in the construction of masculinity. The community of *bajidoran* enthusiasts creates, sustains, and reproduces patterns or gender orders to attain masculine power and dominance.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Masculinity and Gender

Masculinity, in general terms, relates to the constructed aspects of men's lives defined by male characteristics. Manliness typically serves as a measure characterized by physical attributes (strength, robustness, prowess), mental qualities (assertiveness,



toughness, bravery, dominance), symbolic values (distinct from femininity), and sexuality (such as having multiple wives). Traits like smoking, alcohol consumption, violence (Donaldson, 1993: 643), competition, dominance, exploitation, and oppression are closely associated with the ideology of masculinity (Fakih, 2013: 100). According to Connell (2005), masculinity should not merely focus on the male body but should be understood through practices and how these practices shape and restrict knowledge related to masculinity (Connell, 2005: 6). The term masculinity goes beyond the differences in gender by delineating how men and women differ among themselves (Connell, 2005: 69). Masculinity is the site where gender relations occur, practices in which men and women are engaged, thereby affecting bodily experiences, personalities, and cultures (Connell, 2005: 71). Masculinity is not a fixed entity inherent to individual bodies/personalities but a configuration of practices achieved through social action and varies according to gender relations (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 835).

Masculinity is intricately linked to an individual's experiences that intersect gender and power relations (Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994: 3-4). Gender refers to the structure of social relations centered around the reproductive arena and a set of practices that bring about reproductive differences among bodies into social positions (Connell, 2009: 11). Oakley explains that sex and gender are two separate entities, where sex pertains to biological characteristics while gender concerns psychological and cultural aspects (Oakley, 1972: 158-159). Gender is the social aspect of sex, referring to attitudes and roles learned through education and socialization from childhood (Bandel, 2016: 37). Both men and women have the potential to embody masculinity or femininity (Oakley, 1972: 158-159). The existence of gender is constantly constructed and maintained because they contain values that shape personality formation and identity to exhibit masculine or feminine behavior (Davis, Kathy, Evans, Mary, and Lorber, 2006: 2). However, gender arrangements predominantly prioritize men over women (R. Connell, 2005: 260-261). This is manifested as the production of hegemonic masculinity, which materializes, organizes, and legitimizes male domination within the gender order worldwide (R. Connell, 2005: 261).

## 2.2. Arena

The arena is a site of struggle where agents vie for power, staking their claims for monopolizing legitimacy (Bourdieu, 2010: 22). It is a network or configuration, an objective relationship between the positions of agents in distributing power through the capital they possess to gain specific advantages (Bourdieu, Pierre and Wacquant,



1992). The arena is not just a commonplace, but rather a battleground, a place of contention, and a struggle for power among agents with different habitus through the capital they possess. The arena serves as a site for the legitimization struggle to gain power. The arena is also defined as a space formed by dominant and subdominant relations, or a space of agent relational structures with differing capital. The arena possesses relative autonomy within itself (Swartz, 1997: 122-126), causing individuals to dominate or be dominated. Agents employ various forms of capital and strategies to control the arena. The arena is a type of open and competitive market, where various types of capital are utilized and distributed. The arena generates hierarchy as a form of power relationship and helps structure all other arenas (Ritzer, 2012: 907).

The ownership of various forms of capital by agents is crucial in contesting positions within the arena. Capital encompasses a set of resources of power and authority used to attain positions (Bourdieu, 1996, 114). Four forms of capital are employed by agents in the arena's struggle, namely economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 243-248); (Haryatmoko, 2003: 12). Possession of diverse forms of capital can determine hierarchy in social reality, even to acquire power. Ownership of symbolic capital is highly sought after, as the struggle in the arena is fundamentally a symbolic one rather than physical (Bourdieu, 2010: 152). Symbolic power is almost akin to magic, as it holds a potency equivalent to economic power, connecting those who wield power and those who submit within the arena's structure where belief is generated and produced (Bourdieu, 1995: 170).

### 2.3. Myth

In general terms, a myth is a story or fable, serving as a symbolic guide or map of meanings and significances within the universe (Barker, 2014, 184). Anything can function as a myth as long as it holds meaning within it (Barthes, 1972a: 8). Myths do not solely belong to the past; even modern individuals are replete with myths. All products of mass culture have created a language or communication tool called myths, which are myths of contemporary people (Sunardi, 2004: 78). Myths are part of semiotics because myths fundamentally represent how people speak, communicating with full meanings and signs. Semiotics is essentially a theory about signs or language. Semiotic analysis views cultural practices and meanings of social relations as analogous to language. This means that all forms of communication are signs (Denzin, 2009: 617). Myths belong to the second-level semiotic system, termed "type of speech," because myths are a way people speak.

Myth has a dual system, consisting of linguistic and semiotic systems (Barthes,



1972a: 110-119). The myth system comprises signs, signifiers, and signifieds. A sign always has three facets: the sign itself (sign), the signifier (material aspect/concrete), and the signified (mental or conceptual aspect, idea, notion, or meaning). These three aspects cannot be separated; they must always be present when analyzing a sign. Myth readers cannot analyze signs or meanings in a language if one of these aspects is missing (Joseph, 2004: 59-75); (Gordon, 2004: 76-87); (Sunardi, 2004: 39). 'The emergence of mythic meaning is not from actual reality but outside of reality' (Barthes, 1964: 35-48). Structural analysis of myths involves synchronic analysis to examine the interpretation of practices/texts in the society being studied and diachronic analysis to understand the social conditions in which the text is produced and consumed (Sunardi, 2004: 120). Synchrony is prioritized over diachrony because it aligns with the reality of its users (R. Harris, 1915: 135). Synchrony and diachrony are essentially the foundation of Barthes' myth theory regarding ideology. Ideology spreads through the service of myths. Myth, as semiology, is a formal science analyzed synchronically, while as ideology, myths are studied diachronically or unravel the history of ideas in form (historical in nature).

The discussion of masculinity in Bajidoran employs the three concepts outlined in the literature review above. These concepts serve to strengthen the foundation regarding the concept of masculinity and its relationship with gender, particularly in the case study of the Namin Group Bajidoran in Karawang.

### 3. Methods

The focus of this research is on masculinity in Bajidoran in Karawang. The research site is centered in Cicangor Hamlet, Jalan Raya Cicagor, Rt. 002/Rw 003, Belendung Village, Klari District, Karawang Regency, specifically within one of the Bajidoran groups, namely Namin Group. Belendung Village is of particular interest to the author in order to understand the geographical conditions of its community in detail, thus yielding meaning in the reality of their socio-cultural life (Nashihuddin, 2019: 2-3). The reason for selecting Namin Group as the research object is:

*Firstly*, Namin Group has been established since the 1970s, making it the oldest Bajidoran group in Karawang. *Secondly*, Namin Group represents the development and changes in contemporary Bajidoran through its various new creative endeavors. *Thirdly*, Namin Group is often considered a benchmark by other Bajidoran groups in West Java. *Fourthly*, Namin Group is currently one of the most popular groups in West Java. The frequency of Namin Group's performances remains high every month throughout West Java. *Fifthly*, Namin Group serves as the origin of various Bajidoran creative innovations, particularly in *kendang* (drum) arrangements. *Lastly*, the symbol



of Namin Group, especially Abah Namin as the leader and embodiment of the Bajidoran habitus, remains unparalleled to this day. Bajidoran has become synonymous with Abah Namin, even becoming known as the "Namin Style".

The research employed a qualitative methodology utilizing an ethnographic approach. This new ethnography is an approach where a researcher seeks to better understand or appreciate the experiences and realities occurring within the subjects under study, despite radical differences from their own. Three characteristics of this "new ethnography" include honesty towards differing realities, thereby rendering the collaborative strategies between researchers and participants crucial; self-reflection, which involves critically assessing one's own commitments by comprehending various radical differences between oneself and the existing social reality; and polyvocality, which entails attention to the various living realities or broader structures within the social world (Saukko, 2011: 55-73). The author conducted participant observation, immersing themselves in the daily life of the bajidoran community, as well as observing and interviewing the artists, both from the Namin Group and others (adapted from Creswell, 2015: 125). Information sources were gathered through online and manual literature searches. Members of the Namin Group and the bajidor performers were considered primary informants for data collection through interviews.

Data collection was conducted through literature review, observation, interviews, and documentation. Direct observations were carried out three times, namely on October 20, 2017, December 24, 2019, and from November 2022 to January 2023. The author positioned themselves as an engaged observer to comprehend the realities that truly occurred in the field. Interviews were conducted with artists, cultural scholars, observers, bajidor performers, pesinden (vocalists), and dancers, including Wa Sako, Wa Alek, Mang Enonk, Bos H. Oman, H. Eron, Abah Ukat, Mamah Nanik, The Bule, Kokom Dongkrak, Ujang Lanay, Ang Bontot (Kosasih), Pak Obar, Kang Asep Sundapura.

The analysis of masculinity in *bajidoran* begins with the collection of all research data, including audio, audiovisual recordings, photographs, and other documents. Subsequently, data transcription is conducted, involving the transcription of interview data into written notes, capturing the words contained in the recordings, both audio and video. The next step involves archiving, separating, and sorting selected data by coding based on various themes necessary for writing the research report. The final stage entails making decisions regarding the themes and concepts developed, validating them as part of the author's interpretation for writing purposes.





## 4. Result

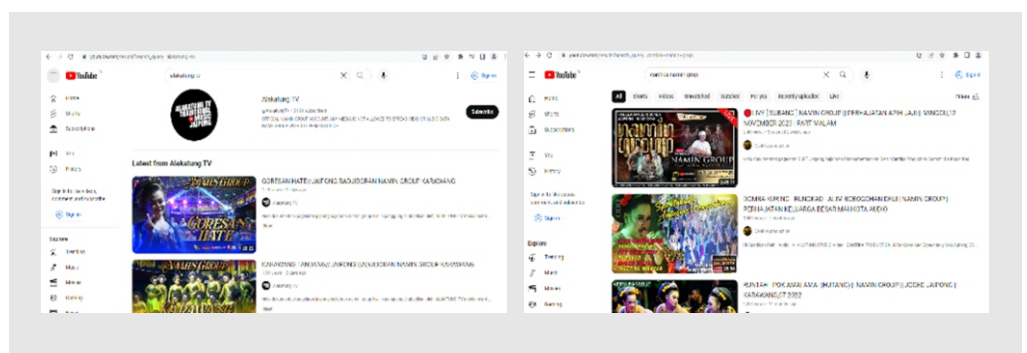
### 4.1 The Bajidoran Namin Grup

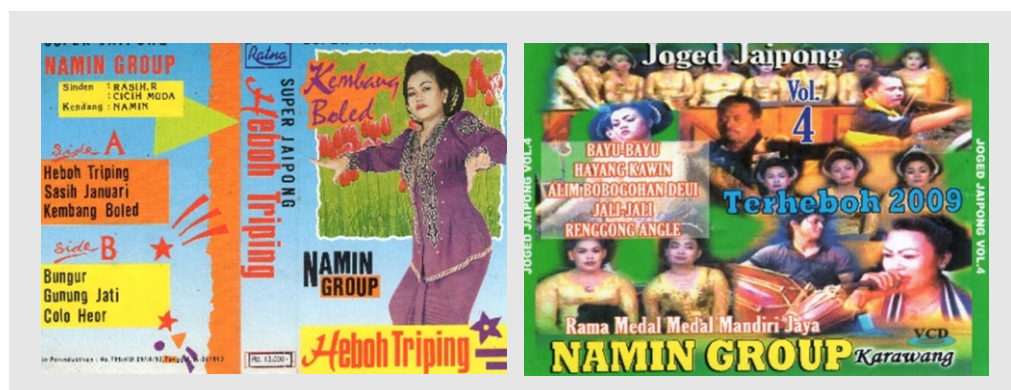
The Namin Group is considered one of the enduringly popular *Bajidoran* groups in Karawang to the present day. This ensemble, more formally known as Putra Rama Medal Mandiri Jaya (PRRMJ), is situated in Cicangor Rt. 02/Rw. of Belendung Village, Klari Subdistrict, East Karawang, West Java. The Namin Group can be acknowledged as a prominent *Bajidoran* ensemble of contemporary times, renowned for its multifaceted creativity, particularly in the realm of kendang musical composition and arrangement. Various musical innovations in the *Bajidoran* tradition have been generated by this group, manifesting in formats such as cassette recordings, CDs, VCDs, YouTube uploads, as well as live performances at celebratory events.

Figure 1. Performance Data of Namin Group in Various Regions, including Karawang, Bandung, Cikarang, Subang, Bogor, Bekasi, and Others.



Figure 2. Namin's Works Data in the Form of Cassettes, CDs, and on the YouTube Channel. Alkatung TV is included as Namin Group's official channel.





Namin Group is regarded as a representative of the contemporary youth, particularly through its various musical creations that are often emulated by other groups. The diverse rhythmic patterns of the kendang, crafted in both traditional and modern versions, allow Bajidoran music to be embraced and appreciated by various communities, including fellow artists and those outside the realm of artistic appreciation (Bajidoran enthusiasts). The Bajidoran arena serves as a platform for social interaction and gathering among enthusiasts from different backgrounds and arenas.

Namin Group is considered a dominant symbol within the Bajidoran community. This status is attributed to Namin's influential presence as the epitome of Bajidoran culture in the region, a position yet to be surpassed by others. Namin's symbol in the Bajidoran sphere appears unchallenged by any other individual. Namin's dominance is prominently showcased in prestigious events such as festivals, gatherings, and *kemprung tarung* (competitive performances). Typically, Namin is accorded the honor of commencing performances at festivals or *kemprung tarung* (competitive events). Similarly, in gatherings or seminars, Namin plays a pivotal role in reaching consensus and making decisions based on the collective agreements forged during such meetings.

#### 4.2 The Practice of Masculinity in the Namin Group Bajidoran Arena

Behind its reputation as a form of entertainment showcasing the aesthetics of Sundanese dance and music, *Bajidoran* harbors complexities in the realm of power struggles and masculine dominance within the Community of Bajidoran Enthusiasts (KPB). Interestingly, the contest for power is not exclusive to males but also involves females. Masculinity within Bajidoran encompasses a unique expression of masculinity that may not be acceptable in everyday life outside the stage. This specificity arises because masculinity is constructed within a specific context defined





by form, space, and a particular time frame during performances. The Bajidoran arena functions as a gender order that constructs masculinity through the relationships and interactions among members of the Bajidoran Enthusiast Community, which involve a combination of power relations, practices, emotions, and symbolism. Masculinity is constructed through texts and practices in daily life, culture, and even past experiences within the *Bajidoran* Enthusiast Community.

The arena of masculinity within *Bajidoran* is a space where power struggles and masculine dominance occur among the members of the Community of *Bajidoran* Enthusiasts (KPB). The arena of masculinity also signifies a battleground formed by the relationships between *Bajidoran* as the dominant class, Namin as the petite bourgeoisie class, and the audience as the popular class. Every subject involved in the *Bajidoran* arena seeks to obtain legitimacy of power through the possession of their capital. The arena of masculinity is not merely an ordinary space but serves as a field of struggle for legitimacy and the pursuit of masculine dominance. Power struggles arise due to the relationships and interactions among subjects with different habitus and arenas. The arena of masculinity serves as an open market for competition, a battleground for the struggle to attain masculine dominance. The contest for power and masculine dominance in *Bajidoran* is supported by four different locations: the stage of the Namin Group (as a space for the production of music and dance), the backstage area (as a space for the production of competition and the contest for masculine dominance), the place for invited guests (as a space for the consolidation and competitiveness of every involved subject), and the audience area (as a space for appreciation and perception of the legitimacy of power and masculine dominance). These four locations serve as evidence that *Bajidoran* not only presents aesthetic and artistic values but is also steeped in practices of masculinity. The Masculinity within *Bajidoran* permeates every space and time with various practices carried out by the Community of *Bajidoran* Enthusiasts. Practices of masculinity can be observed in various aspects ranging from music, dance, costumes, words, the practices of musicians, and the practices of *Bajidoran* performers during performances.

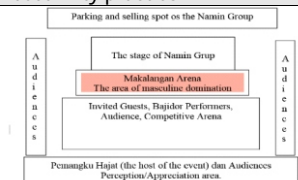




The research findings have identified eight aspects of masculinity practices within the Namin Group *Bajidoran*, which embody masculinity. These aspects include performance arrangements/patterns, language, kendang musical instruments, scarves, movements, economic capital, alcoholic beverages, and musical elements (refer to Tables 1 and 2):




**Table 1. Eight Aspects of Masculinity Practices**

No	Performance arrangement aspect	Description	Explanation
1	Pattern of performance arrangement	The Structure of Bajidoran and Kemprung Tarung (Gender Arrangement)	Pattern, rules, structure
2	Language/words	Lyrics of the Sinden Song and MC (master of ceremony) Words	The power of words
3	Movement/dance.	<i>Ibing pencug</i> dancer and <i>bajidor</i>	Masculine movements.
4	Waditra/Instruments	Kendang (traditional drum)	Masculine spirit
5	Accessories	Selendang (shawl)	Tools of power struggle and domination
6	Capital resources	Economics/money contributions, skills, culture.	Core instrument of domination
7	Hard liquor	The beverage synonymous with <i>bajidoran</i> is alcohol.	Instrument of masculinity
8	Musical elements	Tempo, Embat (beat), Buka'an (opening), Mincid (cues )	Lahan dominasi

**Table 2. Description of Eight Masculinity Practices**

No	Masculinity practice	Description
1	 <p>The diagram illustrates the layout of the Makalangan Arena. It shows a central stage area labeled 'The stage of Namin Grup' and 'Makalangan Arena'. Surrounding the stage are 'Invited Guests, Bajidor Performers, Audience, Competitive Arena'. The entire setup is within a 'Pensungku Hajat (the host of the event) dan Audiences Perception/Appreciation area'.</p>	<i>The makalangan order</i> is a system or structure created, maintained, and continuously reproduced by the Namin group from the beginning to the end of the performance. Various discourses, languages, and strategies are produced within this order for the purpose of dominance
		<i>Kemprung tarung</i> is a performance pattern in bajidoran involving the presentation of at least two groups in one show. "Kemprung" means the beginning, while "tarung" means 'duel' or 'clash'. "Kemprung tarung" serves as a symbolic arena for group duels.
2		<i>Pencug</i> is a freestyle movement in <i>bajidoran</i> that incorporates martial arts -like motions for defense, attack, striking, resisting, and even subduing opponents. <i>Pencug</i> serves as a showcasing tool for <i>bajidor</i> performers to demonstrate their masculinity in the bajidoran arena.
3		In <i>bajidoran</i> , language/words are not only used as a means of communication to convey messages, but also serve as tools of power and domination for the <i>pesinden</i> (vocalists) and MCs over the <i>bajidor</i> performers throughout the performance. The objective is to earn as much money as possible through <i>nyawer</i> (the act of throwing money to performers).
4		In the context of <i>bajidoran</i> , the <i>selendang</i> (shawl) serves not only as a fashion accessory but also functions as a tool of masculine power and domination for the <i>bajidor</i> performers. The <i>selendang</i> becomes a symbolic arena for duels through its various practices.



5		The <i>waditra</i> (kendang instrument) can serve as a tool for constructing masculinity within <i>bajidoran</i> . The kendang possesses masculine characteristics as it requires strong, firm, fast, and agile physical exertion during its performance. Furthermore, the kendang acts as the leader of the <i>wirahma</i> (percussion ensemble) throughout the masculine performance within the <i>bajidoran</i> arena.
6		Ownership of capital, be it economic, social, cultural, or symbolic, significantly determines who dominates and who is dominated. Economic capital is the most effective means for a <i>bajidor</i> performer to attain masculine dominance during the <i>makalangan</i> (performance) within the <i>bajidoran</i> arena.
7		Hard liquor is not a part of the <i>bajidoran</i> performance itself, but its presence in the <i>bajidoran</i> arena is often associated with showcasing masculinity or masculine traits, whether by the number of drinkers in the arena or the impact of drinking on male confidence.
8		Musical elements support the construction of masculinity in <i>bajidoran</i> . For instance, a fast tempo can imbue a masculine character compared to a slow tempo, as it conveys strength, energy, agility, gallantry, vigor, and masculinity. Conversely, a slow tempo may be perceived as weak, lethargic, lacking in enthusiasm, and feminine..

#### 4.3 The Process of Constructing Masculinity in Bajidoran Namin Group

Masculinity is deeply ingrained in *bajidoran* due to the situational and practical conditions in the *bajidoran* arena (patterns/orders and social relations), which have a high potential for producing masculinity. The social relations among different *bajidoran* communities with diverse habitus and arenas compel individuals to assert their masculine dominance using various resources at their disposal. These relations give rise to competition, prestige, the desire for recognition/respect, the desire to perform, receive appreciation, dominate, and even seek power. Each individual strives for dominance through various practices utilizing their available resources (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital). This aims to demonstrate their dominant masculinity to avoid appearing weak in the eyes of others, as it is tied to self-esteem and honor. These relations give rise to masculine anxieties, where men do not want to be perceived as weak in front of other men or women, and similarly, women do not want to be perceived as weak by men or other women.

Masculinity is deeply embedded in *bajidoran* because the existence of *bajidoran* is inseparable from the dialectics of present-day experiences and practices with the experiences and practices of the past from artists and *bajidor* performers. The



structure within the *bajidoran* arena cannot be detached from the external structure that frames it, namely the social structure of the Karawang community, which has undergone a long process of life, experience, and practice. The arena for producing masculinity within *bajidoran* (as a subjective entity) is the dialectical result of the broader production arena of Karawang society (as an objective entity). *Bajidor* performers adopt external structures (internalization of the exterior) to reinterpret them within the *bajidoran* arena (externalization of the interior). These experiences and practices stem from three icons used to construct masculinity: colonialists, Jawara (a person skilled in physical combat or fighting), and *bajidor* performers. The masculine dominance practiced by *bajidor* performers is actually a distortion and inheritance of masculine traits practiced by past champions/warriors and colonialists, whether merely to emulate, resist, or become obsessed with. Masculinity in *bajidoran* is constructed synchronically (through the production arena of present-day masculinity) and diachronically (through the production arena of past masculinity as part of history), through the experiences and practices of colonialists, *jawara* (a person skilled in physical combat or fighting) and *bajidor* performers.

The process of constructing masculinity within the *bajidoran* arena is formed through seven stages, including: production and reproduction, socialization, appreciation, interception and re-expression (internalization and externalization), relations and interactions, performance, and formation (identity, style, and ideology). The stage of performance of masculinity entails a phase wherein there is a struggle for masculine power and dominance among the subjects involved, whether originating from within the group (especially Namin) or from outside the group (other *bajidor* performers).

No	Stage name	Description
1	<i>Production/ reproduction</i>	It is the creation of patterns, discourse, and knowledge of masculinity produced by Namin and his group within the <i>bajidoran</i> arena.
2	<i>Socialization</i>	This is the stage where Namin provides information to the public about their presence, group, as well as various products of their masculine performances.
3	<i>Appreciation</i>	The Namin Group receives appreciation from artists, academics, and other <i>bajidor</i> performers. Appreciation can be interpreted as enjoyment, recognition, and understanding of an artistic work, which can stimulate appreciation, recognition, or changes in attitude toward accepting, rejecting, critiquing, following, or discussing it.
4	<i>Internalization of the Exterior and Externalization of the Interior</i>	Internalization of the Exterior: <i>Bajidor</i> performers absorb various discourses and knowledge related to the masculine practices of the Namin Group. Externalization of the Interior: <i>Bajidor</i> performers practice masculinity within the <i>bajidoran</i> arena.



5	<i>Relation and interaction</i>	Interactions among them evoke prestige, style, self-esteem, and even honor that are at stake during the performance. These interactions also give rise to masculine anxieties among the <i>bajidor</i> performers. Economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital, undoubtedly, come into play as part of the strategy to win the battle of masculine domination.
6	<i>Masculinity performance</i>	Masculinity Performance entails the theatricalization of diverse masculine practices within the context of the <i>bajidoran</i> arena. During this phase, there ensues a contest for masculine power and dominance among the <i>bajidor</i> performers, employing various forms of capital at their disposal. It is within this phase that the stakes for victory, operationalized power, strategies, and tactics for winning the competitive symbolic contest manifest. The performance stage serves as a platform for projecting the image, impression, and perception of the public towards those who achieve legitimacy in power. The principal objective of masculinity performance lies in the acquisition of masculine power and dominance as part of the legitimization of symbolic authority.
7	<i>Formation</i>	This stage represents the final phase, characterized by stability, crystallization, standardization, strength, and optimal operation, as each involved element has gained a comprehensive understanding of its operational dynamics. This applies to both service providers, exemplified by the Namin Group in this instance, and users (the <i>bajidor</i> performers). Within this phase, various aspects of masculine enactment have solidified into community identity, stylistic norms, and even ideological frameworks within the <i>bajidoran</i> community, encompassing both performers and audience members. During this stage, the entire <i>Bajidoran</i> Cultural Preservation (KPB) has achieved a thorough understanding of the patterns and structures underlying masculine enactment. Consequently, the enactment of masculinity within the <i>bajidoran</i> context operates seamlessly, flowing without the need for external guidance or direction. At this juncture, identities, styles, and ideologies emerge as a result of the crystallization of the process involved in constructing masculine practices within the <i>bajidoran</i> arena. These identities, styles, and ideologies serve as distinguishing features of the inhabitants of Karawang, setting them apart from other identities found in West Java.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Masculinity in Bajidoran as a Contemporary Myth

The Masculinity in *bajidoran* Namin Group can be considered a contemporary myth. *Bajidoran* is one of the current cultural products that is popular in West Java. *Bajidoran* is not merely an artistic performance but also serves as a tool for its community's discourse. *Bajidoran* functions as a language/tool of communication to convey the messages of the community through various texts and practices within an arena. These messages encompass words, visuals, audio-visuals, and auditory elements that hold significance corresponding to the era and its context. The author endeavors to grasp the messages conveyed by the *Bajidoran* community to its audience. These messages are abstract in nature, as the study of myths fundamentally does not focus on what is tangible/concrete, but rather, behind these practices/realities lies a





message that seeks to be communicated.

Barthes posits that a characteristic of myth is the transformation of meaning into form. Myth is the theft of language, or stolen language, namely the appropriation of articulated language or the theft of expressive language. Language surrenders itself to myth in another way. It is very rare for language from the outset to be able to articulate a full meaning that cannot be distorted thereafter due to the abstraction in its concept (Barthes, 1972: 131-136). Referring to Barthes' opinion, masculinity in *Bajidoran* is a stolen/borrowed language, the result of theft of the masculine practices of Karawang *jawara* in the past carried out by Bajidoran. The signifiers and full meanings of *jawara* are stolen/borrowed by Bajidoran for present use. Bajidoran, as a myth user, intentionally or unintentionally, has stolen the signifiers and meanings belonging to *jawara* that have long been abandoned. The meaning of masculinity at the first level of interpretation, which is full and inseparable, is stolen by Bajidoran for its survival purposes. Although the interpretation is the same, the signifiers and content become different because they have undergone a long journey of time.

Similarly, a similar phenomenon occurs in the masculine practices of Namin in the musical aspect. Namin, as a myth producer, appropriates/borrows first-level meanings, namely various musical and dance practices existing within *jaipongan*, for the purposes of its masculine practices, resulting in interpretations that differ from the original. The interpretation of *jaipongan* at the first level is appropriated/borrowed by Namin to become signifiers or forms of second-level interpretation for its conceptual purposes, thereby generating meanings different from the original. The signifiers at the second level become empty and are filled by Namin's concepts for various purposes, primarily to enact masculinity in order to fulfill livelihood needs to achieve maximum results.

## 5.2 The Meaning of Masculinity Myth in Bajidoran

The various forms of masculine practices within the Bajidoran arena hold significance as markers of identity, style, and even ideology for the Bajidor community in Karawang. These three meanings are discussed as follows:

*Masculinity as Identity.* The practice of masculinity serves as an identity or hallmark for both Bajidor performers and the people of Karawang, setting them apart from other communities in West Java. The identity of individuals from Karawang is discernible through various indicators reflected in their preferences, beliefs, attitudes, lifestyles, experiences, and engagements in artistic activities, daily routines, historical contexts, as well as in the enduring tales or legends permeating Karawang society. Diverse textual, practical, and narrative expressions of martial prowess and masculinity are



evident in the realms of *pencak silat*, *ketuk tilu*, *topéng banjét*, and indeed, *Bajidoran*. Additionally, Karawang's masculinity finds tangible representation in the Karawang golok, commonly referred to as the golok lubuk. The golok lubuk serves as the distinctive hallmark of masculine identity among Karawang's champions, with contemporary reproductions crafted in oversized dimensions. It is widely acknowledged that possessing a golok is a hallmark of true manhood (Interview with H. Wahab, 07-01-2023). The golok functions as a language, a medium of communication, a vehicle for discourse on masculinity, and as an integral component of Karawang's identity.

*Masculinity as Style.* The spontaneous behaviors, improvisations, natural inclinations, accompanied by competition, rivalry, dominance, and power struggles in the Bajidoran arena gradually evolve into habitual patterns, albeit structurally changing moment by moment to adapt to its context. Due to their natural and continuous repetition over a prolonged period, consciously or unconsciously, the practices of masculinity within the Bajidoran arena develop distinctive characteristics that set them apart from others. Thus emerges the unique style of Karawang Bajidoran masculinity, distinct from masculinity styles prevalent in West Java at large. Masculinity within Bajidoran becomes an individual style, a community style, a subculture style (*kaleran style*), and a mass cultural style.

*Masculinity as Ideology.* The issue of masculinity ideology within Bajidoran is a daily concern for Namin as myth producers. Namin's interactions, exchanges of services, economic practices, dominance, and power relations all contain ideological elements. Tensions arise in interactions, particularly concerning economics, social class, dominance, and masculinity power within the Bajidoran arena, prompting Namin to contextualize ideology within the framework of reproducing production conditions, namely economics. Economics naturally relates to market interests/commercial elements to ensure the saleability of their products. Masculine products, packaged with musicality, are marketable commodities, perpetuating Namin's economically oriented ideology, which continues to persist and repeat.

Namin holds four life perspectives as ideas and representations dominating their thoughts to ensure survival. These four perspectives include freedom, power, creativity and production, and market orientation.

Namin's first perspective is *Freedom*. As the proprietor of habitus and the *Bajidoran* arena, Namin has traversed the realm of personal entertainment in serving *Bajidor*. Various conventions, patterns, motifs of *kendang* rhythms, and musical elements have become ingrained within them, such that their expressive capacity no longer requires the confines of norms, as they have transcended them. The period of



rote learning, patterns, and conventions has been surpassed in the past, during the internalization of various skills and abilities from their surroundings. Consequently, in externalizing these acquired abilities, Namin endeavors to break free from the constraints of conventions and patterns. The principle of freedom is reflected in various activities: in living life as an artist, in recording sessions, in discussions, and in performances; they always seek the freedom to express themselves in various ways. Namin consistently upholds the spontaneity and improvisation characteristic of Karawang. Based on this principle, Namin is known as an artist who is “ngeyel” (rebellious) and steadfast in upholding their principles.

Namin's second perspective is Power. Regarding this matter, Namin states:

*“Aing emung éléh ku batur, moal ngilu ka batur, tapi batur nu kudu nuturkeun Aing, kumaha carana sangkan batur nuturkeun Aing”* (I refuse to be surpassed by others, I refuse to follow others' lead, and instead, it is others who should follow me. How can I make others follow me?) (Namin, 17-11-2022).

Namin possesses a competitive spirit, refusing to be outdone, always striving for victory and power. Namin endeavors to make others follow their lead. They always aim to be the first and stand out from other groups. Their creative output introduces innovations in Bajidoran production, leaving fellow artists amazed by their mischievous creativity, prompting many to emulate them. Namin's work, particularly in music composition and kendang rhythms, serves as a reference point for other artists to imitate and incorporate into their own performances, even to this day. Namin avoids monotony in their productions, making changes to keep the audience engaged. In another instance, Namin states: *“Kumaha carana sangkan musik tradisi jadi modern”* (How to transform traditional music into modern music) (Interview with Namin, 11-12-2022).

Namin's third perspective regarding Creativity and Production: Namin states: *“Mun teu ngakal moal ngakeul”* (If one does not use their intellect, they will not create, they will not have creativity, they will not eat rice, they will not earn income to eat/sustain their livelihood). “Ngakal” is interpreted as using intellect, creativity, being creative, utilizing mental faculties to achieve desired outcomes. “Ngakal” is seen as steps/efforts taken to produce works (creativity), while “ngakeul” can be understood as obtaining rice, acquiring food, earning income. This implies that creativity and effort will yield a sufficient income to cover one's needs.

Namin's fourth perspective is *Market Orientation*. Namin states:

*“Kajeun teuing dirawutan ari teu laku, rametek tapi laku. Saeutik oge ari beukian mah. Saeutik tapi antik. Nu susah ditarimana.”* (In creating, even if meticulously



crafted, if it doesn't sell, what's the point? Worthless but sells, then pursue it. Create something meaningful even if it's small, because the challenge lies in the acceptance of our work by others. Just present what they like).

This is Namin, who thinks practically and pragmatically regarding the functional value of art for success in the entertainment market. Namin's orientation is market-oriented; what sells in the market, what the market desires, what the market needs, is what is prepared and sold to be bought. This life principle is evident in how Namin serves both Bajidoran clients (hirers) and *Bajidoran* enthusiasts (*bajidor*). Namin always provides what they request and what they enjoy. For example, if Bajidoran prefers dangdut songs, then dangdut songs are provided to be performed within traditional patterns. If Bajidoran requests a song change, it is promptly accommodated. Many instances occur where the gong is struck offbeat due to adjusting to the Bajidoran's preferences.

### 5.3 The Relationship between Masculinity Practices and Gender Equality

Despite the fluid and inclusive gender arrangement within the *Bajidoran* community, in practice, the *Bajidoran* arena is perpetuating language of gender inequality and/or patriarchy that is continuously reproduced and reiterated by its members. There exists gender disparity and discrimination by masculine men in participation, competition, symbolism, power legitimacy, and dominance. Domination manifests in various aspects: the overwhelming presence of men, competition occurring between men, male *Bajidor* exploiting dancers' bodies, the presence of women seemingly as mere complements, the kendang (drum) symbolizing masculine men, and even women being objectified by men through various practices. In reality, women's status remains secondary in various practices, such as in *nyawer* (tipping), *ibing mencug* (leading the dance), playing the kendang, or when controlling the selendang (scarf). Even feminine men are subordinated or marginalized, as they may lack or possess limited agency. In summary, practices within the *Bajidoran* arena are presenting performances of gender inequality in social interactions and relations among its members.

The occurrence of gender inequality in the arena of *bajidoran* is attributable to several factors, including insufficient economic capital for women to sustain prolonged engagement in the *bajidoran* context, women's compliance with cultural and religious norms that position men as leaders, the perceived normativity of male domination and authority over women, social norms that restrict women's mobility (such as the taboo for some Sundanese women to wander at night), lack of awareness from the *Bajidoran* Cultural Preservation (KPB) regarding gender disparities in the *bajidoran* arena, and the structural arrangement within the *bajidoran* arena that



places male *bajidoran* performers in a dominant position. The structures, discourses, and knowledge constructed within the *bajidoran* arena by Namin Group prioritize the interests of men over women. The imbalance of gender in the *bajidoran* arena results in various practices that have the potential to marginalize either party, including domination, exploitation, fear, symbolic violence that may escalate to physical violence, and even the suffering of masculinity and femininity. Efforts from the feminine side are required to achieve gender equality in the *bajidoran* arena, particularly for women entering the public sphere, who must struggle to have their authority recognized by becoming respected, resilient, or gaining credibility (R. Connell, 2009: 75).

Based on the various phenomena outlined above, it is imperative to reconstruct the practices of masculinity within the *bajidoran* arena to foster practices that are sensitive to issues of gender equality. There is a need to reconstruct the structure of *bajidoran* so that feminine individuals have avenues to express themselves or their bodies within the *bajidoran* arena. The objective is to prevent domination, exploitation, fear, violence, and the suffering of feminine individuals due to the dominance of masculine gender roles. The enactment of masculinity in the *bajidoran* arena needs to be reconsidered to uphold gender equality in accordance with the Sundanese philosophy of Tri Silas: "silih asah silih asih silih asuh" (mutual learning, mutual love, mutual care/harmony) (Rosala et al., 2021: 1973-1986); (Sumardjo, 2006: 337-342). *Bajidoran* is challenged not only to function as a tool of resistance for Namin in responding to social changes within society as part of its ideology but also as a tool for negotiating feminine and masculine identities that result in justice, both for men and women/gender equality (Fakih, 2013: 165-166). The outcome of this reconstruction is expected to foster reciprocal relationships for mutual understanding and respect, thereby becoming a culturally synergistic platform (Febriani, 2021: 61).

## 6. Conclusion

This study yields three findings. Firstly, Namin Group's *bajidoran* is not merely an artistic performance but serves as a manifestation of masculinity wherein a 'duel' for power and masculine domination occurs among the subjects involved in the arena. Secondly, the fundamental concept of *bajidoran* revolves around economic motives, thus its ideology leans towards market economics principles. This ideology operates on the premise that Sundanese men must exhibit masculinity to fulfill their obligations as household leaders. Thirdly, the enactment of masculinity in the *bajidoran* arena perpetuates language of gender inequality constructed continuously and repetitively. This is evident in the dominance of masculine male roles in various texts and practices,





resulting in men's positions being dominant while women become subdominant.

This research makes a scholarly contribution to the development of arts and sciences, particularly within the realm of Sundanese performing arts. An unprecedented contribution provided is the exploration of *bajidoran* from a different perspective than usual, not only analyzing the aesthetics of dance and *karawitan* but also examining it contextually, especially regarding masculine domination within the arena. It is possible that masculine domination exists in other performance contexts as well, thus this research could serve as a reference or comparison in those cases. *bajidoran*.

The sample in this study only involves one case, namely the Namin Group in Karawang, thus the collected data is still limited. In the future, data from several other *bajidor* communities or groups will be necessary to enhance the accuracy of the analysis regarding the practice of masculinity within the *bajidoran* arena in Karawang and its surrounding areas.

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