

POWER RELATIONS, SYMBOLIC RULES AND THE POSITION OF *BELIS* IN THE HABITUS OF THE NTT SOCIETY'S CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE

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Abstract: This study employs sociological-ethnographic basic method and the cultural studies paradigm as the approach in understanding the habitus within the customary marriage of the East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) society who require *belis* as a bride-price. The conceptual basis underlying the application of habitus theory and symbolic power in the NTT society refers to the Bourdieu's framework. This study is a result of participatory observation on the habitus of a marital system using *belis* observed by the NTT society as a cognitive structure which connects individuals to the social activities of the customary marriage and makes it unquestionable habits. Knowledge of the social world under the pretext of prosperity for the recipients (family) of a bride-price can be a political instrument for the sustainability of power relations. The ritual-mythical system in the society has never been fully present as a neutral habit. The *habitus* reflected in the marital relationship among the NTT society enables the men to obtain and exercise their power relations. The sustainability of power relations can be seen from the representation of the social status of a girl and the properties attached to her. This is what gave birth to a symbolic rule, in which the social rules about bride-price or *belis* eventually will serve the interests of those who occupy a dominant position in the social structure, namely the rich men.

Keywords: *Belis; East Nusa Tenggara; habitus; marital system; power; symbolic.*

INTRODUCTION

Once in a consultation session at one of the private campuses in Kupang city, as a lecturer, the writer was forced to listen to the students' sharing about the *belis* in their respective local communities. In this sense, *belis*, in most English dictionaries is a form of lexicon which, in its meaning, is similar to the word 'bride price', which is practiced throughout the regions of Sumba and East Nusa Tenggara. The word *belis* in the development of vocabulary in the Indonesian language is inflected into the verb form *membelis* (giving *belis*) and *pembelisan* (the giving up things for *belis*). As a lecturer and a transmigrant who has a cultural and customary background from average people of NTT, the author feels that the *belis* issue seems to be very deeply rooted and pivotal to the community adherents. The custom of implementing *belis* (bride price) according to my students has been a burdensome. It is the beginning of the occurrence of socio-individual problems since the *belis* requested by the bride's family to the groom's side is sometimes quite unaffordable. This consequently leads to domestic violence and negative treatment towards the bride, in addition to be a triggering factor for pregnancy out of marriage for whatever the reason. This assumes, even though marriage is considered sacred, but as if only because of the matter of treasures in *belis*, the existence of love in a marriage partner is considered somewhat unimportant.

The intellectual instinct of the students is very sensitive to catch the social and cultural crises that exist in the community. On talking about human rights and local culture relations, the people of NTT are faced directly by a debatable *habitus*. This custom surely invites both pros and cons. They cannot turn a blind eye to a very vivid cultural issue. Young people with such idealism would not easily penetrate the old elite stronghold of tradition and give a distinctive identity for every community group. However, the existence of intellectual awareness and a critical attitude to culture itself is indispensable when we want to advance our own culture in a more qualified, dignified and liberating

direction. This article intends to see the practice of *belis* in NTT patriarchal society as a phenomenon of local community's *habitus* as well as a critical view that can provide scientific enlightenment.

The conceptual framework of *habitus* and Bourdieu's dominations for gender and cultural understanding may serve as an entry point for examining the simple but complex problems that occur around the practice of *belis*. '*Habitus*', as far as the author is concerned, relates to the indigenous behavior of peoples living in NTT that practice the custom of giving and receiving *belis*. This concept was introduced by Bourdieu as a system of "long-lasting and transposable dispositions, and the structured structures as functional structures" [14]. *Habitus* describes the internal state of individuals, which is a reflexive relationship to their external conditions, or 'fields'. Bourdieu [14] wrote that the *habitus* is "in sync" with the field in which one operates, and the self-validating system reflexivity that produces structural commands of "taken for granted", or '*doxa*'.

The author tries to see the customs of *belis* from a wider perspective. First of all, the validity of the *belis* normatively will be examined and the practice with all forms of problems of customs force which continuously produce meaning and symbols attached to *belis* will be discussed. Also, examine the challenges for women's emancipation projects in the face of the collective phenomena that reflect the gap in the practice of the dowry or *belis* culture in NTT. This paper may be just a small boat that moves in contrast to the great patriarchal culture flows. However, this will hopefully be a quite introspective expression of cultural self and form of self-criticism constructed as medium of reflection by the NTT societies.

***Belis* in Normative Perspective**

Belis in the simplest term is defined as dowry, which is a sum of money, animals, and goods provided by the groom's family to the bride's as a condition of marriage endorsement [1]. The customary party that requires *belis* lays on a reason because the bride will be part of the husband's tribe or clan. The bride literally abandons her parents and abandons her membership in her parent tribe to enter into a part of her husband's tribe. Because of the migration of the tribe, the bridegroom is required to pay some animals or money or goods (ivory, custom fabrics, tools of gold and others) to the bride's family. Each region in NTT has varied forms of *belis*, ranging from money, livestock, to other items deemed worthy of respect for the girl. In the Lamaholot, Sikka, and Lio areas, the agreed form of *belis* is elephant ivories [1]-[3]. In West Sumba island, in addition to livestock (horses, cattle, buffaloes, etc.) there is also *belis* in the form of money, long ivory (*uma leles/ulu leles*), original spear (*nembu*), original knife (*teko*), *marapa* (made out of gold), *tabelo* (gold), *tanghuru ndoka* (golden ring), and *talapia* (original gong or traditional music instrument) [1]. In the Dawan society, Timor, *belis* is described in a term *puamnasi-manumnasi* (betel nut for parents) or *oe mapatu ai malalo* (hot water and flames), it is a reward service for the achievement, pain of the parents raising the girl since birth, educating and rearing her until she becomes a mature. For most societies, *belis* includes silver money, silver bracelets, banknotes, women's clothing for mothers, men's clothes for fathers, then wild animals like cattle, etc. [1]. While today's in Manggarai, *belis* often realized by amounts of money. This is due to the depletion of animal stocks population (horses, cows, goats, etc.) in the regions.

Belis essentially reflects a symbolic value. Its priorities are not the nominal quantities of money, goods and animals given, but family interaction and reciprocal appreciation between the groom's family and the bride and the marriage between the two [4]. In NTT society, marriage is not just a matter of two couples. It's a big family affair (extended family). For that reason, individual's existence is deemed as part of the customs and families and certain tribes. A person is always born and is a member of a tribe or a certain clan. People get their identity by being part of the respected tribe or clan or family. Marriage does not just tie a person's relationship with his/her spouse but also the relationship between one family and tribe to another [5]. In Sikka regional society there is existing a

very clear expression that illustrates the unity between two bridal families, namely, “*Ea Daa Ribang, Nopok, Tinu daa koli tokar*”, which means "the kinship relationship between the two parties will last forever with mutual giving and receiving up to generations" [6]. Thus, *Belis* is a symbol of the unity between two tribes and different families. Not only the union between husband and wife but also between two big families, two tribes or clan. By the handover of giving and receiving for *belis*, both tribal and official families have a kinship relationship.

The symbol of the kinship relationship is increasingly evident with the reimbursement of the bride to the bridegroom. In Lengkosambi-Riung indigenous peoples, for example, the women responded *belis* with *wawi tunun* (pigs to kill), *wawi dhadhang* (pigs to carry), *lipa dhowik* (custom-made flower motif fabric) sufficiently, *dhea* (rice), *nepe-lune* (pillow mats) [4]. In the Sikka custom, the women responded to the *belis* by giving the men some pigs, *moke* (wine) a few tens of liters, and sarong will be given to all carriers of the *belis*, clothes in the sarongs and custom cookies, and other *tuak*/wine [7]. Thus, there is a reciprocal act of giving and receiving.

In addition to the symbols of husband and wife relationship and ethnic or family kinship, *belis* is also positioned as a symbol of appreciation for the noble values of a marriage. Marriage is institutionalized and sacralized. *Belis* is one of the customary stages that demonstrates institutionalization and sacralization of marriage hereditary practiced by society in the East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). After marriage, someone will get a new social status, as a husband and wife and as a father and mother. Marriage is not solely about the intimate relationship and the family life of a man and a woman, but also concerning a person's socially and individually changing status. Families are institutions that are valued appropriately because their functions are pro-creative, as well as regenerative and educational, in addition to being a basic community for tribal communities. Marriage and family institutions also have a sacred element. Both are not merely human-social affairs, but also something that must be accountable to the transcendent [3]. *Belis* aims to institutionalize marriage and avoid sex outside of the marriage. No marriage without *belis*. The intimate relationship of a woman and a man is only socially permitted through formal marriage. In Sikka society, common expressions ideologically colored their perspectives, such as: *gou wua mai beta wain* ‘to pick betel for proposing a wife’ *bata taa mai heron men* ‘to collect betel for mentioning a child’

This expression is more or less meaningful: "to obtain the sexual right of the wife, one must go through the process of paying for the *belis* or dowry which begins with the marriage ceremony by bringing *wua*/ pinang (male sexual symbol) to meet with “*taa*”/ betel (female sexual symbol) in order to obtain offspring” [2].

These phrases affirm the extent of extramarital intimacy. Extramarital intimacy is considered a disgraceful act, which can bring havoc to all villagers and all tribal members. To do so means to be conclusively willing to accept customary punishment, in the form of certain penalties that are worth it. In a more primitive society, people who have sex outside of marriage may even be subject to capital punishment.

Additionally, *belis* aims to avoid divorce and polygamy. By conducting receiving and giving for *belis* ceremony, a man and a woman are declared husband and wife for the whole life. The burden of paying *belis* is believed to be able to avoid divorce and polygamy from polygyny (more than one wife) and polyandry (more than one husband). Traditional people's mindset puts *belis* as a proof of the couple's attachment relationship. They see *belis* as a real bond to the separation and unity of a male and a female relation. Through *belis*, a man feels that his wife is a part of his life forever after. Men will feel the magnitude of sacrifice when they have to marry their wives. Similarly, women will realize that the man who became her husband has sacrificed something to live together for the rest of her life [4].

Instead of the existing demands for *belis*, people are not too easy marrying more than one wife or husband. In traditional custom of NTT society, polygamy (especially polygyny) is commonly happening. The influence of Catholicism and Protestant Christians is slowly obliterating this

polygamy culture. Nevertheless, *belis* actually indirectly has become a customary mechanism to suppress the number of polygamy. It is not surprising that (in traditional societies), polygynous men generally come from nobles or landowners, i.e. with large tracts of land, animals and property and other resources [13].

Patriarchal Culture Products

The natives of South Belu, Ngadha and Tana Ai (Sikka) are the three indigenous groups in NTT who hold the matriarchy structure. In addition, the residences of NTT share similarity to common societies within the line circle of patriarchal culture. Patriarchal culture is the mindset, system and cultural order and custom that establishes men as the dominant members or those who cultivate women. All members of society categorize themselves within the tribe of their father or a man, and not the mother's tribe. The father or man becomes a family's leader and has full authority over his wife and children. In a more primitive culture, the dominance of the man even comes to the assumption that men are masters of women. The tendency to regard men as masters and rulers is called *kiriocentrism*. *Kiriocentrism* is a derivative form of the word *kyriarki* from the Greek word *kyrios*: master, and the word *arche* equals to power. *Kyriarchy* means mastering the master. In the past, a father was not only viewed as a husband, but also as the master. *Kyriarchy* is thus matched by patriarchy, except that it emphasizes the authority and gender inequalities caused by male dominance. *Kiriocentrism* is a center on the power of fathers as masters (Ibid. p.59).

The structure of patriarchal culture places women as a creature as though naturally second. Women are regarded as weak, powerless, subtle, delicate, sensitive, resigned, emotional, and so on, and therefore should be protected. While men are strong, courageous, brave, and rational, and therefore, must protect women. For centuries, these views were firmly entrenched in the minds of every human, and so it is regarded as something natural and undisputed. Indeed, such assumptions and distinctions are cultural constructions. This distinction is what people call gender differentiation, namely the differentiation of men and women by socio-cultural constructions and the pattern of relationships that result from that distinction [4].

The custom of giving-receiving for *belis* or bride price literally constructs the customary marriage phenomenon. In this case, the East Nusa Tenggara culture views women as the belongings of men (father, brother, uncle), and therefore, women can be exchanged. The existence of women, in the custom of *belis*, is positioned as the weak element and transferable from the tribe of her parents to that of her husband's, the exchange for such caretaking compensation is the so called *belis*. *Belis* implies a price for the NTT women. In Sikka customs, there is an expression of respect for women, i.e.: *Dua naha nora ling, nora weling* (every woman is valuable, has a price), *Loning dua utang ling labu welin* (while the sarongs and clothes also have a value and price), *Dadi ata lai naha letto –wotter* (therefore, every man has to pay) [6].

The patriarchal mindset views girls as a payable thing, the girls will further be claimed to belong to her husband's clan. Likewise, the children born to these women must identify themselves not as belonging to their mother's tribe, but as members of the father's tribe. *Belis* is a product of patriarchal culture. It is a medium by which men can exercise power over women in their customary society. Bourdieu's perspective on *habitus* and dominance is still contextually used to discuss gender issues in society. Haryatmoko (2006) explains that *habitus* is the result of a skill that continuously becomes a practical (not always realized) action, which then translates into a seemingly natural and evolving capability in a particular social environment [8]. This *habitus*, in the life of a society, can be an ordinary obedience to the collective rhythm for organizing individuals in social life. In the tradition of NTT society, *belis* can be positioned as a *habitus* that manifests in the form of marriage-related customs. As hereditary *habitus*, giving *belis* is burdensome, however, for some, it may be considered

to be commonplace, and the consensus is that if it is not conducted that such action will be perceived as ignoring customary laws.

The Oppressive Social Structure

The custom of *belis* implies discriminatory against women. Structurally, women have been placed as human beings, transferred from her father/ brother/ uncle to the husband and his family. Normatively, these three people occupy a central position in the custom of marital contract with *belis*. The women receive *belis* from the male's family; however, it is not intended for the bride, but instead for her family. When people talk about culture, they are talking about cultural structures or systems and cultural practices. Oppression against women is not a new phenomenon at the level of cultural practice; however, since the culture is in the domain of values or normative systems, the patriarchal cultural structure within itself is a discriminatory structure. It centers on the power of the husband, father and of the common man. This kind of structure departs from dichotomous and dominative mindsets. Men and women are naturally distinguished. The distinction is hierarchical; male dominant and female subordinate. The oppressive mindset is socially implanted from the day members of that society are born.

The practice of *belis* leads to a social view which pushes women's existence into their social boundary and the cultural need to see women as a true liberated element of society. In Manggarai culture i.e., at the moment a child is born, the father, grandfather or an uncle waiting outside the room, one of them would usually call a question: "*ata peang ko ata one?*" which means "outsider or insider?" If the child is male, then the women in the room, usually a midwife or other women assisting with the birth, will answer "*ata one*" (the insider(s)); while, if the child is a girl, the response is "*ata peang*" (the outsider).

From birth, men and women have been culturally segregated as insiders (belonging to tribes, family heirs, hereditary successors) and as outsiders (those who in time will move to tribes and other families for a fee some money, animals and goods, which is the so called *belis*). And since being present in the world anyway, women are already positioned as outsiders, people who will follow her husband's clan. This is the reality of our culture that has somehow been firmly embedded and gives a distinctive identity in every individual in our society.

Such oppression is also greatly felt when we realize the lack of space for women in determining themselves and expressing their thoughts and feelings. Traditionally, a woman's place was literally in the kitchen. Only those men, who are entitled to be present, engage in the customary talks in bargaining for *belis*. Women have no right to speak about it official custom forums; they only serve and are obliged to agree [3].

BELIS in The Practical Reality

After briefly describing the normative side of the customs practicing *belis*, how the norm of *belis* appears to be born in the contemporary situation of NTT society will be presented. As times change and society's consciousness progresses, we ask: Do traditional practice need to be reformed in terms of its practice in the society? In fact, we acknowledge that there were underlying distortions within the indigenous customs of practicing bride price under the virtue of noble values and meanings. The discriminatory side seems even more radical. The "theory" confirms that *belis* is a form of respect for women and of familial relationships and nobility of marriage values; however, in its practical application, the reality occurs different. It indirectly implies men's contestation of self-esteem and women's arena of commodification. Consequently, women and their rights in the new established family experienced a multi-level harassment.

The Market of Self-Esteem

If we contemplate at the moment on the practice of *belis*, often time we will find that the majority of patriarchal cultures embraced by the East Nusa Tenggara society see women and *belis* as an absolute contestation objects for men's self-esteem. The real substance is the mindset and mentality which have been inculcated for so long: it creates a consequential feeling that if one unable to pay with the amount of materials as a *belis* then they will socially feel their pride down and at a certain level of practice could be customary excommunicated. Families will instead feel less dignified when the *belis* for their daughter, sister or nephew is not in accordance with the expected or determined by the groom's family. The standard is not merely about the dignity of the women, but of the family. Then, if *belis* is considered as a symbol of respect for the women's dignity, however, current trend may have been shifted as an instrument to maintain the prestige of men (father, brother or uncle).

On the case of giving and receiving for *belis*, the NTT societies are usually very sensitive. If the bride's family, i.e., does not show humility during negotiations, *belis* worth tens or even hundreds of millions would not go down. *Belis* as if becomes compulsory which must be met by a man and his family. The higher the social status of a woman's family, the paid *belis* must be more expensive too [8]. However, as expensive as the price for a *belis*, the groom's family will be willingly provide it (even somehow they have to owe) to presence it for the bride's family [7]. The custom of *belis* in its habitus is no doubt has become a field of prestige which is uneasily understood.

Indigenous Commodities

The empirical facts that turn the existence of *belis* as an economic commodity is undeniable. The custom of *belis* also reflects much inedible economic motivation. This is evident in at least three of the following phenomena. First, *belis* economically is very expensive and unrealistic. In many cases, the amount of *belis* to be paid often turns people into difficulties. It is, indeed, quite difficult to understand when the price for a *belis* reaches tens to hundreds of millions of rupiah or tens of livestock for the majority of people who are still backward, and constantly receiving help by the government, many citizens fate to become laborers in the country, years of food insecurity, malnutrition and drought that devastated many victims. Not easy to find the noble values behind the practices of *belis* which are not commensurate with the real situation of the societies.

Second, the payment of *belis* is adjusted to the level of education and work of the proposed girls. The higher the level of education and work of a girl, the higher the required bride price that the groom needs to pay. This trend clearly indicates the existence of indigenous commodification practices. Custom is seen and made in such a way as an economic commodity. This results in high economic considerations being preferred over the nobility of the value of a marriage. Even the consideration is all the expenses that have been spent to finance the school girls. Thus, the higher the school level or the greater the cost spent by the girls' parents to educate, the greater the number of *belis* which should be paid by the men. This consideration is often well-documented under the courtesy of traditional bargain negotiations, but will be very easily visible when we are examining the general tendency of establishing *belis* in the majority of NTT societies. More fundamentally, the social perspective towards *belis* would be a good example of the entry for modern capitalism in the indigenous local customary law. To some extent, local customs and mindsets also provide conditions that nourish the growth of capitalism.

Third, the practice of *belis* is majorly felt by society as an uncompromising phenomenon. Another tendency leading the economic goal, the practice of *belis* is often found without compromising the real (family) situation of the bridegroom. To establish a *belis*, there is usually negotiation. Very often, the demand of the bride's family is not much concerned with the real situation of the bridegroom

family. Here we find irony. When married, many daughters are destitute, because much of the husband's property had been drained to pay for his *belis* and to finance the wedding party.

Discrimination at Stages and Octopus Issues

Given the customs of *belis*, both at the level of the system and in the realm of practice, we will come to the conclusion of the existence of double and even stratified discrimination against women. There is no marriage without a paid *belis*. That is, the norm of patriarchal culture practiced by NTT societies. Practically, *belis* experienced a very visible of distorted value. *Belis* does not manifest a problem in itself. The burden of practicing *belis*, in fact, brings a lot of problems for further. The resulting problems are often closely related to the burden felt of paying for *belis*, i.e., many women are unable to marry at an old age, *samen leven* and domestic violence. Of course the custom of giving and receiving bride price '*belis*', raises significant issues and needs to be reformed. However, the facts show that many women find it difficult to marry when they are perceived to getting older. It is part of a social consequence for making *belis* as a high standard to be fulfilled. Similarly, there are many cases of *samen leven* or living in a relationship out of marriage and the resulting problems such as pregnancy, then for that reason, the case of *belis* can be further negotiated.

In addition, the domestic violence among East Nusa Tenggara society is mostly related to the practice of *belis*. In NTT, the rate of violence against women, including domestic violence is still very high. The data obtained from the Bureau Police Partners of NTT show that between years 2006 to 2009 there were 1,580 reported cases of violence against women. The chief of the Sub-division Bureau and Counseling Bureau of the East Nusa Tenggara Police Partners, Kompol Anthonia Pah explained that based on the investigation conducted by East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Police, most cases of violence against women in the region are generally covered by social construction and the social hierarchy prevailing within the society. The culture of *belis*, alcohol addiction, economic pressure and poverty, in addition to psychological factors such as temperamental nature of society, are among the triggering factors to violence against women [10]. However, *belis* came into existence as one of the socio-cultural constructions that help women to confront the exercising patriarchal structure within their society. Many cases of domestic violence have been difficult to process by law. When a husband commits violence against his wife due to such matters it is often considered an internal family affair; besides the situation where a husband would find excuses to commit an offense because he has paid *belis* to his wife's family in the amount of money and properties.

BELIS in the Habitus of NTT Society

The description of the concept and practice of *belis* in NTT society leads us to the conclusion that *belis* is a crucial matter as a form of the community's *habitus*. In its development, the concept of habitus in the practice of *belis* is strengthened to borrow from some of the most recent thoughts related to habitus, some of which are the opinions of Swartz [15], who states that the habitus "produces perceptions, aspirations and practices that match the nature of previous socialization arrangements". Reay (2004) describes the habitus consisting of four interrelated aspects. The first is the embodiment, in which "the body is in the social world and the social world is in the body" [16]. The second view of habitus is that it is capable of generating various possible actions, although it is possible in an individual body, it also impacts the individual ways of behaving [16]. The third aspect views the habitus as a compilation of collective and individual trajectories. The fourth view sees it as a complex interaction between past and present. Habitus is seen as responsive to the current environment: "...the current state is not only to be followed up, but it is internalized and becomes another layer to be added to the previous socialization" [16]. Habitus can be replicated by 'facing a

field that reproduces its disposition' or 'can be transformed,' 'enabling conditions of life that can be very different from before or at first' [16].

Every child born in NTT, from childhood to adulthood, lives in customary habitus, he/ she becomes an agent whose life role is not entirely free and is neither a passive product of a social structure nor just accepting his/ her destiny as it is. A customary marriage ceremony requiring the groom to pay *belis* implies a sense of capitalism which accomplished three underlying elements of field, arena, and domain. All three are at once as a serious challenge in upholding and in the effort of women's emancipation both at conceptual and actual levels. Those three things are: (1) the fact that the culture of *belis* is already rooted and well established, (2) the view that *belis* is a cultural distinction, and (3) the legitimacy of sacred elements in the customs of *belis*.

Deeply Rooted Problems

The first challenge is the fact that people's mindset is too established and difficult to change due to customs. In a patriarchal cultural structure, women do not have the same rights as men. Everyone is aware of it. Women also accept it as a natural and proper truth (*taken for granted*). Similarly, in regard of *belis* culture, no matter how hard and problematical, it remains a part of a distinctive and irresistible identity rooted in every member of society. In line with Roland Barthes' thought, *belis* has become a myth which is hard to resist [11]. A myth can be both seen as a symbolic and fictional story. Barthes views a myth as primarily a fictitious story considered as if it is true, false thinking as if it were true, a belief that has no and needs no rational reasoning, or to borrow Bathesian's definition, it is a magic which reverses historical reality to be as if it were true, and thus will be at last natural. The feature of a myth as 'an untrue but true story' and its function as 'the instrument that society needs to understand itself and the environment and for social integration', is theorized by Barthes using its semiotic approach, the theory of the Barthesian myth. The object of the study of the myth theory is the myths that develop in the modern capitalist-French society. For Barthes, not just primitive societies are mythical. Modern French people interact with many myths or false images of reality. "A magic has taken place; this magic has reversed reality; he took the history out of reality and filled it with nature..." (Barthes, 2009, p.208). In our culture, beliefs can also be seen as myths. Both myth and culture are historically constructed; however, they are often defined by society as a virtue of the prevailing custom which is natural and undesirable.

Belis manifests as a patriarchal myth sustaining men's superiority which has been going on for centuries in the history of human civilization. The historical identity of *belis* disappears from the collective memory of NTT society and is being accepted as natural by the majority of its community adherents. The inculcation of *belis* ideologically leaves the society with no more critical space, because as a myth, it fills the consciousness space of every citizen. *Belis* also seemed to have no history and is not a matter of contingent anymore; it is considered to be so. This is similar to what French sociologist Émile Durkheim expressed in his Social Fact theory. According to Durkheim, habits, rules, norms, laws, and other cultural elements, which are human creations, will develop into an objective reality or social fact that is outside the individual. Social facts can force individuals to act in accordance with their "wishes". This coercive nature is not only for an individual, but for all members of society [12]. The custom of *belis* is part of the cultural construction which has become the deciding social fact. In its simplification, the custom of *belis* is applied to remove the distorted elements in the self for the sake of dynamics and the development of the way of thinking of its adherents. It is certainly not as easy as turning a person's palm.

The Legitimacy of Sacred Elements

Closely related to both previous challenges, the customs which legitimize *belis*, and many other customary elements, experience uneasy transformation since the sacred elements are rooted from a strongly enacted tradition. *Belis* and the various stages accompanying the marriage ceremony are part of the ancestral sacred relic [3]. Those stages additionally need to be carried out with intention and deliberation. In this way, those adhering to the traditions are considered to be upholding the virtue of believing everything handed down from their ancestors. Our society is strongly bound by such kinds of beliefs. People feel very guilty and are gripped with a deep fear if they choose to ignore just one of the predefined custom criteria. Every stage in the marriage ceremony, including the stage of negotiation and payment of *belis*, is not a mere human sociological interaction [9]; traditionally, they are sacred moments, which are also attended by the transcendent powers and the deceased ancestral spirits. There is a solemn prayer to present the divine power in every stage of the ceremony.

In Sumbanese society, this sacred element is very visible in the distinction of *belis* type; *belis* for humans and *belis* for ancestors (Marapu). People distinguish material *belis* into two major parts, namely *Ladi dita* (upper hall) and *Ladi wawa* (bottom hall). *Ladi dita*, or one that can be called the *kura la hindi* (the part that is in the attic), which means the *belis* part of Marapu (ancestors). The material of this *belis* is always kept in the attic. While *ladi wawa*, which is often called *tunggu la kaheli* (part of which is in *balai-balai*), which reflects the human family, both for the bride's uncle and her parents (Waingapu, 1976, p.132-133).

The legitimacy of this sacred element also includes the mindset and conceptual distinction that lies behind such customary rites and provisions. For that reason, every woman deserves to be rewarded with a bride price or *belis*, it is a sacred thing. Men who wish to marry East Nusa Tenggara community girls are required to pay the bride price. The tradition of giving *belis* is a hereditary heritage that has been passed down and has become socio and religious virtue. In other words, patriarchal thought encompassing the inevitability of providing *belis* goes hand in hand with subordination against women and social perception on the sacredness of *belis*.

CONCLUSION

In a patriarchal cultural structure, women do not have the same rights as men; everyone is aware of it. Women also accept it as a natural and proper truth (taken for granted). Similarly, by the customary marriage requiring the payment of *belis*, no matter how heavy and problematical, it remains a part of a distinctive and irresistible identity rooted in every member of society. *Habitus* in the life of a devout customary society establishes a collective rhythm or symphony to organize individuals in their social life. In the tradition of the NTT community, *belis* is positioned as a *habitus* that manifests itself in the form of marriage-related customs. As a hereditary *habitus*, paying *belis* is considered burdensome, but for some, it may be considered to be commonplace, and thus, the consensus is that if it is not fulfilled, it is considered being disobedient to the customs. Through *belis*, consciously or unconsciously, there has been a conflict of interest over women as subjects. Women with all the qualifications they possess, including their educational background, become the object of a conflict of interest.

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