

**The Paternal Side of the Family within a Matrilineal Society:  
An Example of the Minangkabau in Indonesia**

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**ABSTRACT**

*There are numerous publications about the Minangkabau society in West Sumatra. Often the focus of the anthropologists is on the matrilineal social structure. Only very few researchers look at the situation of the father and the male family members. In this article, the researchers want to consider the paternal side of the family. This view is essential as there have been many changes in the past years. The researchers used a qualitative research approach that observed the village life of one community. Various open-ended interviews were conducted. Both the traditional representatives of the matrilineages and the local population were given the opportunity to express their opinions. In addition, the local publications were analysed too. In these books, traditional scholars publish their views. In the past, there were patrilineal elements, like the kingdom, within the Minangkabau society. The historical perspective shows that such patrilineal elements were important in daily life. Furthermore, it was discovered that cognates play a crucial role in certain rites and have become more influential nowadays. Nevertheless, the matrilineal concept still plays an essential role, particularly in the rules of exogamy and inheritance.*

Keywords: *Bako, Cognates, Minangkabau, West Sumatra*

**INTRODUCTION**

Whenever someone talks about the Minangkabau, they usually mention the word ‘matrilineal.’ This is no surprise as the Minangkabau is a huge matrilineal society, and moreover, it is an Islamic culture too. Therefore, numerous researchers describe this unique situation, namely the co-existence of a matrilineal way of life on one side and the respect of Islamic values on the other side.

Interestingly, many researchers neglect that the matrilineage of the father’s family is also involved in many aspects of daily life. In addition, there is an increasing interest of the so-called core family in the last years. However, many anthropologists still concentrate on the matrilineal feature, and they focus on the matrilineage of the mother to which the child automatically belongs. In this article, the researchers want to look at the relatives of the father.

Many rites of passage play a significant role in the way of a Minangkabau individual. It involves rituals that indicate that a person leaves his or her old ‘situation’ and enters a new ‘phase’. Very famous in many societies are rites from childhood to adulthood. The culture in West Sumatra is no exception. It will be checked whether the matrilineage of the father (*bako*) plays a vital role in this respect. Furthermore, it will be analysed in which circumstances the members of the *bako* are of importance for the success of certain rituals.

The objectives of this research include: 1) To explore and describe the role and function of the family side of the father; and 2) To contribute to the field of Minangkabau studies by giving a 'broader' perspective.

There were many changes in the last decade, both economically and politically. Accordingly, these changes had their effects on the life of the family too. It can be assumed that the father's role and his matrilineage (*bako*) increased. However, it must be stated that the *bako* also had a specific function within the traditional society.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the publications about the matrilineal system of the Minangkabau were written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of these books and articles focus on different aspects. One crucial view was provided by Joel S. Kahn (1980). He writes that the matrilineal system, as it is described, is a product of the colonial power. In one of his articles, he mentions:

[...]the role of *adat* in economic and political organisation extent in that period was a direct result of the imposition of colonial role through officials such as the *panghulu* and the so-called *laras* or *lareh*. (Kahn, 1976, p. 80)

The work of Kahn is vital as he describes that the colonial power created certain *adat* positions that could not be found in the pre-colonial period. The term '*adat*' refers to the local customs and matrilineal way of life. In the quotation above, there is the position of the *laras* (*Tuanku Laras*). He was a high ranked government official whom the Dutch colonial administration appointed. This official became very powerful, and this situation is even described in the literature like in the novel *Sengsara membawa nikmat* [Translation: Misery brings favour] by Tulis Sutan Sati (2002). The colonial power introduced two territorial officers. The *nagarihoofd* became the village headman, and the already-mentioned *Tuanku Laras* became the district officer. Both positions were responsible that the people followed all government directives (Kahn, 1976, p. 85). In the pre-colonial time, the village communities were in general autonomous, and the colonial policy changed that.

Other anthropologists focus on different elements of the society in West Sumatra. The position of men is peculiar, and often, they are encouraged to leave their village community and look for a job outside. In traditional society, this is called *merantau*. This specific feature has effects on the family system too. Two well-known social scientists who concentrate their research on this topic are Kato (1982) and Naim (1985).

The co-existence of opposing elements intrigued many anthropologists. Interestingly only a few authors answer the question of how such opposing elements can co-exist side-by-side without major conflict. Two scientists try to answer this question, namely the historian Taufik Abdullah (1966) and the anthropologist Frederick Errington (1984). Taufik Abdullah stresses that there are dualistic concepts and that the conflict is institutionalised:

In Minangkabau, the conflict is not only recognised but institutionalised within the social system itself. Conflict is seen dialectically as essential to achieving the integration of society. (Abdullah, 1966, p. 3)

Taufik Abdullah uses in the citation an explanation that is similar to structural approaches like Stark (2013) or Munir (2015). However, Abdullah's approach (1985) comprises other elements too. In another publication, he writes that the upcoming of Islam was something new, and he calls it 'anti-structure'. So, he uses a well-known anthropological concept, namely the ritual theory of Victor Turner (1989). There is a specific situation: In this case, it is a society that is formed by *adat* (customary law) regulations (this is the structure). A new element appears (in this case: Islam) as a kind of anti-structure (the term 'anti-structure' refers to a structure opposed to the old structure), and finally, a new situation emerges which contains both elements. A new motto arises: "*Adat* is based on *syarak* (shariah), *syarak* is based on *kitabullah* (Qur'an)" (Abdullah, 1985, p. 145). The situation mentioned in the citation of Taufik Abdullah describes a time in Minangkabau history when un-Islamic practices were widespread and the Islamic *Padri* movement at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century became more powerful and tried to change the conditions. As a consequence, there was a civil war (Sjarifoedin, 2020). Finally, a 'new situation' arose, and interdependency between *adat* and Islam appeared that last until today.

Frederick Errington is an anthropologist who looks at continuity and change amongst the Minangkabau. He states that some parts of the *adat* (in Minangkabau language: *adaik*) are allowed to change whilst other elements cannot be 'touched'. The reason is that there are core elements and peripheral elements:

The Minang thus balance continuity and change through decisions made by the local community, which specify what sorts of change are both possible and desirable. The community can solve this general and conceptual problem in part through distinguishing between the peripheral and core elements of *adaik*. The peripheral elements can usually be allowed to change as long as the core elements remain fundamentally the same. (Errington, 1984, p. 37)

One element that does not change is the matrilineal family structure. Therefore, some researchers look at the location of matrilineal features, namely the traditional houses (Ng, 2006). Parts of one matrilineage reside in such a house (*rumah adat*).

The Minangkabau would call their society a matriarchal society, and this term is quite controversial. Therefore, it is no wonder that many authors focus on gender-specific topics (Göttner-Abendroth, 1991; Sanday, 2002). Sanday (2002) makes a significant contribution to the field of Minangkabau studies. She concludes that anthropologists should not just use their own categories but respect the view of the people that the Minangkabau consider themselves to be a matriarchal society:

I prefer to retain the term *matriarchy* out of courtesy and respect for Minangkabau usage. As an anthropologist, I see my task as one of understanding what the Minangkabau mean. (Sanday, 2002, p. xi)

Other anthropologists follow the ideas of Sanday (2002). Prima Aswirna and Fahmi Reza (n.d.) propose that the term 'matriarchy' should be refurbished (Aswirna & Reza, n.d., p. 8). By doing that, the discussion about 'matriarchy' can deliver an essential contribution to the field of gender studies. Moreover, it can also check whether gender equality prevails. According to Nasir et al. (2021) there is still no gender equality in West Sumatra.

All the before-mentioned peculiar features have consequences on the emotional situation of the people. Karl Heider (2006; 2011) is one of the few anthropologists who investigates the ethno-

psychological constitution. Indeed, some features show that the Minangkabau society 'controls' psychological outbursts.

Some researchers focus on drastic changes in the society in West Sumatra. There were always changes (Maretin, 1961). Maretin (1961) describes a fact that is essential for this research:

In order not to incur the displeasure of his kinsfolk, a man sometimes built a house for his son, under matriclan laws belonging to his wife's family, and gave him in marriage to his sister's daughter. In this tendency to conclude marriage with the father's sister's daughter, we clearly observe the increasing part played by the father's *parui'*, in other words, gradual transition from matrilinearity to patrilinearity. (Maretin 1961, p. 193)

Maretin describes these developments in the 1960s. However, it must be considered that the Indonesian government stressed a policy of regional autonomy after the government of President Suharto. Therefore, several political acts were implemented that tried to support the traditional way of life. For example, the *nagari* (traditional village unit) became the administrative unit in West Sumatra.

One of the few scientists who consider the cognates in Minangkabau society is T. Fischer (1964). His article is impressive as he offers a 'new' perspective by looking into the position of the cognates in the family system of West Sumatra. However, he neglects some elements, like the function of cognates in rituals.

P.E. de Josselin de Jong (1980) is another author who mentions patrilineal elements within the Minangkabau social structure. He writes:

We are inclined to think that patrilineal descent in Minangkabau was formerly of greater importance than it is present, for now, it has been thoroughly forced into the background. (Josselin de Jong, 1980, p. 93)

The work of Josselin de Jong (1980) is detailed and considers also patrilineal elements of the Minangkabau society.

Some local experts about the traditional social structure write not only about the matrilineal features of the Minangkabau society but about the role of the *bako* too. Muhammad Radjab (1969) made a case study about the family system in one village community around Padang Panjang. He stresses that the oldest brother of the mother (called *mamak*) and not the father of the household is responsible for the education of the members of the matrilineage (Radjab, 1969). For Muhammad Radjab (1969), this is not according to the psychological disposition. In the Minangkabau society, the man must consider his role as a *mamak* and his role as a father. Therefore, he might 'escape' from the matrilineal inheritance system by giving his children a kind of gift. Radjab's book is quite brief, but it is exciting to read as he tries to describe the inner conflict of a father too (1969).

Other local authors are Amir (2007) and Navis (1986). Both writers describe the *adat* of the Minangkabau from many perspectives. Particularly the marriage is of some interest for the topic of this article as the matrilineage of the father plays some role in the wedding ceremony itself. It is an affair that involves both matrilineages, namely the matrilineage of the husband and the matrilineage of the wife. The book of Navis is intriguing and describes the reciprocal situation in more detail.

In the 1990s, the local government of West Sumatra decided to introduce the subject 'Minangkabau cultures' in schools. One of the first textbooks was written by Zulkarnaini (1995). Another edition was written by Azrial (n.d.). In these schoolbooks, he describes important ceremonies for the Minangkabau life. Sometimes the *bako* plays a significant role within these rituals. Azrial makes a fascinating and lively description of these rites.

In the literature review, it became apparent that there are many types of research about the social structure of the Minangkabau. Most of the researchers focus on matrilineal descendants. Yet there are also elements from the family side of the father that must be considered. This article tries to fill the gap and investigates that field.

### RESEARCH METHOD

This research about the role of the family side of the father was conducted in one village community in the interior of West Sumatra. In the traditional understanding, there is a differentiation between the districts which are in the highlands of West Sumatra and the surrounding area. The traditional scholars call the interior of West Sumatra *darek*. It comprises the districts of Tanah Datar, Agam and Limapuluh Koto, and the outer regions are usually called *rantau*.

The researchers conducted their research in the surroundings of the city of Payakumbuh. Different heads of matrilineages were asked to get a general picture. These heads are the so-called *panghulu* and can use the title *Datuak* (short form Dt.). However, to detect the role of the family of the father, it is necessary to look at the 'ordinary' way of life of the people and talk to them. Therefore, the researchers decided not only to contact the *panghulu* but other locals too.

The research was conducted in one village community over a period of many years from 2012 until 2019. However, this does not mean that the researchers were all the time in the village. The research was comparable to a hermeneutic circle that diminished the knowledge gap between the villagers and the researchers. At the first field stay, the researchers just got a first impression and when they returned home, they had to analyse the data and check the literature. The search for literature became crucial as many *panghulu* referred to books written by local experts of *adat*. That kind of action was already observed by Errington (1984). In the second field stay, more detailed questions could be asked, and more data was collected. After that, there was another analysis and so on. Step-by-step, the researchers got a deeper understanding.

Amongst the major informants were Datuak T. He is around 80 years old and one of the most respected Islamic scholars in the village. He is also the *panghulu* of one of the researchers. Therefore, the access was easy, and Dt. T. was willing to share his opinions. Another primary informant was Dt. S. He is in his mid-40s, and he is not only a *panghulu* but also in charge of one *surau* in a hamlet. This fact is interesting as some unmarried men of that hamlet stay in the *surau*. It was possible to talk with these men. There were also other influential informants. Y was a man in his 40s and the author of many books about Minangkabau *adat*. He was contacted and could explain matters regarding the situation of men.

The research would be one-sided if there were only male contact persons. Therefore, the researchers talked to female persons too. Ibu N is around 60 years old and talked about her way of life. She is a farmer and could share her experiences about the importance of 'managing' the ancestral land, which consists of rice fields and ponds. Other women like Nenek L shared their views regarding the responsibilities of the *bako*.

The researchers followed the ethnographic approach. Two research strategies constitute such a methodology, namely non-participant and participant observation (Gobo, 2008, p. 5). Regarding the topic, the researchers participated as far as possible in the daily life of the locals. It was possible to see how the people live and to ask them in unstructured interviews about the role of the father and the *bako*. On the other side, the researchers were not always able to participate actively: For example, if there were meetings amongst elders and *penghulu*, then the task of the researchers was to be observers.

### FINDINGS: THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY SIDE OF THE FATHER

In this chapter, the researchers look at the role of the paternal family side from different perspectives. In the beginning, the Minangkabau kinship system will be explained. This description is necessary to understand the most important terms and to use consistent terminology. After that, the researchers describe the role of the *bako* in different *rites de passage*. The members of the *bako* play a significant part in these rites of transition. One of the most important events in the life of a Minangkabau is marriage. Subsequently, the researchers describe the growing importance of the nuclear family.

The final part of this chapter discusses the royal family system, which is detached from the previous chapters as it is not connected to the *bako*. However, the royal family system is crucial as it was not matrilineally organised.

#### *A Brief Look at the Traditional Minangkabau Kinship System*

In the ethnographic part, many specific terms denote parts of the Minangkabau kinship system. For further discussion, it is essential to understand this specific terminology. However, there is some confusion about the usage of certain terms. The reason is that some regions prefer a specific terminology. By looking at the traditional houses (see Plate 1), a lot can be stated about the traditional social structure. In general, the offspring of a female family member stay in such a house. The daughters have their rooms where they live alone or if already married together with their husbands.

Plate 1: Some traditional Houses (*rumah adat*) in West Sumatra (Photo: Alexander Stark)



In general, the inhabitants of a traditional house form a matrilineal unit called *paruik* (stomach). If this unit becomes too big, then other houses will be built on the land of the matrilineage. A group of houses is still a *paruik*, yet if this unit becomes big, then it is often called *kampueng*. However, the whole matrilineage is called *suku*. Nowadays, there are many *suku*. Some authors assume that there are more than 22 *suku* (Soelaiman, 1995, p. 39). Nevertheless, it must be stressed that there are four original

*suku*: *Bodi-Caniago* and *Koto-Piliang*. They have two different *adat* regulations, and *Koto-Piliang* is more hierarchically organised whilst *Bodi-Caniago* is more egalitarian.

The property of the matrilineage is considered to be communal property (*harato pusako*). However, there is also individually acquired property (*harato pancaharian*). This type of property can be passed down differently.

The brother of the mother is called *mamak*. In the traditional Minangkabau society, he is responsible for the upbringing and education of his nieces and nephews. Normally, there are different generations. Consequently, a male person is both *mamak* and *kamanakan* (nephew in the matrilineage).

The Minangkabau society is exogamous. In such a society, the people must marry a person who is not from the same *suku* (or in some places from the same *paruik*). In a simplified way, the matrilineal system and its genealogical units look like in Table 1. However, the whole system might differ from place to place as the village community (*nagari*) forms an autonomous unit.

Table 1: The matrilineal System of the Minangkabau

Name of the Genealogical Unit	Head of the Genealogical Unit
<i>Suku</i> (the complete matrilineage that can be traced back to one female ancestor)	<i>Panghulu suku</i>
<i>Kampueng</i> (a group of matrilineal subsegments – some authors prefer the term <i>payuang</i> )	<i>Panghulu Kuampueng</i>
<i>Paruik</i> (a matrilineal subsegment that goes back to one female ancestor)	<i>Kapalo Paruik (Sometimes panghulu)</i>
<i>Rumah gadang (rumah adat)</i>	<i>Tungganai</i>

In the literature review, it became evident that many anthropologists focus their research on the matrilineage of the mother. Nevertheless, some of them stress that in some parts of daily life, for example, in marriage ceremonies, the paternal family side is important. In this chapter, the authors want to look at the ethnographic data.

For further elaborations, it is necessary to look at the term *bako* in greater detail. The term *bako* is used to denote the matrilineal relatives of the father (Josselin de Jong, 1980). In a more detailed view, it comprises of the “father’s mother, father’s sister, father’s brother, father’s mother’s brother and father’s mother’s sister” (Fischer, 1964, p. 102). The members of the *bako* (in this case, mostly the women) call the descendants of the male members of their matrilineal group *anak pisang*.

### ***The Role of the Bako in Rites de Passage***

The term *rite de passage* is a well-known anthropological term and was already described by Arnold van Gennep (1960). It denotes a rite used for a change from one status to another, like from a child to adulthood and similar events. In the Minangkabau society, some rites indicate the transition from one status to another. Interestingly, the *bako* plays a crucial role in some of these ritualised ceremonies. Therefore, it is helpful to look at them.

#### ***(a) Turun Mandi***

When a new baby is born, it becomes part of the *suku* of the mother. Some rituals are closely related to the 'new person'. Shortly after birth, the placenta (which is considered as a kind of twin of the baby) will be buried on the land of the mother.

The young baby should take a bath. The *bako* is responsible for this ritual (Azrial, n.d., p. 61). The food that must be provided should contain certain ingredients like a slaughtered goat, *nasi kunyit*, and other side dishes. Usually, the ritual is prepared on the evening before Friday. The *induk bako* (the sisters of the father) visit the new mother and her baby. They bring baskets with special ingredients like four coconuts, one chicken and others (Azrial, n.d., p. 62). On Friday morning, the *induk bako* take the baby. It is held over the smoke of white benzoin. Then a certain invocation will be recited. The baby will be brought to the place of taking a bath: This can be the nearby river. In the research location, it was a pond. The *induk bako* will shower and wash the baby. After Friday prayer, the guests visit the parents and the baby. Generally, they will give a small amount of money.

Some restrictions are related to the ritual of *turun mandi*: First, the baby is not allowed to leave the house until the ceremony begins. Second, the mother should not step over a broom, and it is not allowed to carry firewood out of the house (Azrial, n.d., p. 62). Third, in many Islamic places, it is customary to use words that describe the baby in an 'unattractive' way, like the utterance of a sentence 'Oh, what an ugly child'. This should prevent that childless couples get sad or that the evil eye will disturb mother and child.

By looking at the ceremony of *turun mandi* it becomes evident that the first persons outside the own matrilineage with whom the baby comes into contact are the family side of the father. It symbolises that the *bako* still plays a role in his or her future life. Interestingly, the baby is washed by the women of the father's matrilineage. The involvement of female persons shows that women are responsible for the upbringing of children. Furthermore, they bring the baby into contact with the element of nature. Some anthropologists stress that women are more related to the element of nature (Ortner, 1974). However, the recitation of invocations indicates that the baby also 'learns' elements that are related to culture. In short, it can be concluded that the ceremony of *turun mandi* exposes the baby to the two elements of nature and culture, and the baby experiences that these aspects will play an important part in its life.

#### (b) *The Circumcision*

Every Muslim boy is expected to get circumcised. For the society in West Sumatra, it is a significant event too. Not only the parents but also the grandparents participate. After the *subuh* prayer in the early morning, the boy takes a shower and is brought to the matrilineage of the father (Azrial, n.d., p. 68). In that place, the child gets the clothes that are required for the ceremony. After that, a procession will start, which also carries various dishes. In the child's place, the *mamak*, the Islamic scholars and the matrilineage of the mother wait for the child. Then the boy will wear the *sarong* that was brought by the *bako*. The child sits on a banana stem and gets circumcised. An invocation will be read, and the boy is brought back home, where the parents wait for the guests.

Certain taboos should be observed by the child that gets circumcised (Azrial, n.d., p. 69): The child should not step on the excrements of chicken, the food should be dry, the child is not allowed to eat fish and eggs, and the child should not sleep on the side. However, it must be stressed that the researchers witnessed that many boys get circumcised in the nearby clinic.





Usually, the father is the *wali* (guardian) during the solemnization. In this particular marriage solemnisation (which is called *nikah*), the father is of importance. However, during the research, it was witnessed that the matrilineage must agree in matters regarding marriage. Even the local representative of the religious department asked whether the matrilineage agreed. So, it can be said that there must be a mutual understanding of the nuclear family and the *suku*.

The local customs (*adat-istiadat*) are different from village to village. Moreover, there are different types of marriage celebrations. It depends on the money that different parties spend. There are smaller and bigger celebrations. However, the *nikah* is prescribed by religion, and it is a must. Some couples just make a gathering after the *nikah*. Others prefer a celebration that involves the two *suku*. In the area of the research, the bride changes the clothes at the place of the *bako*. After that, the female family members of the *bako* accompany the bride in a procession to her house. On the other side, the bridegroom is changing the clothes in the house of his *paruik*. Then, the matrilineage of the wife picks up the bridegroom, and they will walk together to the house of the bride. In the following part, a concrete marriage ceremony is illustrated to see the process.

Ani (Pseudonym) and Budi (Pseudonym) were in their 20s and decided to marry. Before the marriage could take place, the parents and the matrilineage must agree. Therefore, in each house, there was an assembly that discussed the way the marriage should be organised. After both parties agreed, Budi and Ani could marry (*nikah*) on a Friday in the office of the department of religious affairs (in other cases, the *nikah* took place in the house of the bride). After the Friday prayer, the two families announced that Ani and Budi had married and invited the congregation to have a meal together. However, Budi still stayed in the house of his family.

Around one week later, it was time for the so-called *pesta* (party). During the whole week both parties were busy with the preparations. They had to rent the clothes, build up the place where the newlyweds would sit (*basandiang*) and so on. In the village where the marriage took place, there was a peculiarity. The matrilineage of the man had to buy furniture for the room where the newlyweds would reside; this means a room in the house of the bride. After the new furniture was delivered, the room was decorated.

One day before the *pesta*, the *bako* of the wife went to her place and helped to dress up the wife. This included a shower and the transport of the traditional dress to the place of the *bako*. In this case, there was no decoration with henna (*inai*), nonetheless the event used the term *malam bainai*. The other family members were busy cooking the meals and preparing the place of *basandiang*.

On the marriage day, the bride left in the early morning to the house of the *bako* and the bride was dressed up with the traditional wedding clothes. The place of the *bako* was in the neighbouring village, and there was a procession of the wife and her *bako* to her house. Meanwhile, some members of the matrilineage of the wife went to the house of the groom and invited him to go to the home of his wife. He followed a procession with the members of his matrilineage and the matrilineage of his wife. The two processions arrive nearly at the same time at the house of the wife, where her parents and other members of her *suku* waited. Before the bride and groom entered the house, there was the performance of a traditional dance. Finally, the couple could sit in their place, and they could receive the guests. This lasted until evening. The final event was the performance of the dance theatre *randai*.

Every village has its own customs (*adat istiadat*), and so it is not surprising that the way how the wedding party is organized differs. There are often wedding planners who organise the event. However, the *bako* must be involved, and this shows the importance of the paternal family side in this *rite de passage*.

### ***The Nuclear Family Nowadays***

Many changes appeared during the last decades. The Minangkabau became part of an independent state, and new government positions were integrated after independence. For example, the government introduced village mayors (*kepala desa*) with their administrative units. However, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Indonesian government promoted local autonomy. Consequently, the 'older' *nagari* system was implemented again. The researchers could witness these changes during the last years. The former village (*desa*) was renamed to become a *nagari*.

In the schools, the culture of the Minangkabau became a subject the pupils must study in West Sumatra. Furthermore, traditional architecture was promoted, and many government buildings used the form of traditional houses. Nonetheless, the number of such houses in villages decreased. In the 1980s, only 12 to 13 per cent of all houses were traditional houses (Gura, 1983, p. 207). It can be assumed that this number decreased further. The village community in which the researchers conducted the research consists of two main parts. In one part, there is no traditional house anymore. In the other part, there are around 15 traditional houses, yet the number decreases, and this fact can be clearly seen. Some of these houses are empty and disappear in time. Noviarti et al. (2013) report that from all traditional houses in Limapuluh Koto, 74.17 per cent are still maintained (Noviarti et al., 2013, p. 754). However, this number also shows that more than 25 per cent are not preserved.

Even if the number of traditional houses decreases, it does not necessarily mean that the matrilineal situation changes. Many of the houses are built on the land of the *paruik*, and the inner arrangement is comparable to a traditional house. A vast living room forms in many houses the entrance area and the small rooms on the 'side' belong to the girls and women of the house. Sometimes the living room can be very long and on the side are up to four rooms. In many cases, the situation these days, is still very similar to the situation in a traditional Minangkabau society as the father is often outside the house during daytime.

The nuclear family and the position of the father changed during the time. Nowadays, the father is responsible for the education of his children. However, the researcher observed that some male adults feel a traditional duty and support their nephews financially (with a small amount). Nonetheless, there is also evidence that shows that changes took place. Fanany & Fanany (2019) show in their research results that elderly Minangkabau women must endure a more complex situation. Many children move to cities in order to find work. Sometimes they neglect the elderly ladies of the matrilineage. Such behaviour shows a tendency that indicates that some parts of the traditional society cannot take care of all its members.

### ***The Royal Family System***

The royal kingdom was organised in a patrilineal way. There were three kings: the *rajo alam* (the king of the world), the *rajo adat* (the king of the *adat*), and the *rajo ibadat* (the king of the religion) (Josselin de Jong, 1980, p. 103). The seat of the king was Pagarruyung in the district of Tanah Datar. The succession of these kings was organised from father to son (i.e., in a patrilineal way).

For the people, the king was a mystical figure with extraordinary powers. Nonetheless, the power of the three kings was quite limited. The king had to go to the villages as they formed entirely autonomous units.

The three districts (*luhak*) in the interior of West Sumatra form the centre of the Minangkabau culture. The districts are Agam, Tanah Datar and Limapuluh Koto. There are two main *adat* traditions: a more hierarchical tradition of the *Koto-Piliang* and a more democratic tradition of the *Bodi-Caniago*. According to Josselin de Jong, Agam follows mainly the *Bodi-Caniago* tradition, Limapuluh Koto follows mainly the *Koto-Piliang* way, and Tanah Datar is mixed (Josselin de Jong 1980, p. 108). Interestingly, the kingdom was located in the diverse district of Tanah Datar, which represents a kind of unity. Nevertheless, the kingdom was more related to the *Koto-Piliang adat*.

There is an opposition pair in the royal system, namely male versus female. This dichotomy becomes evident by looking at the three kings. The *rajo adat* stands for the female feature. He (or she) got the title *Tuan Gadih* (lady) which could mean that the *rajo adat* was probably female.

The kingdom was an element in the highlands with a patrilineal organisation and was different from the matrilineal way of life in the village. Nonetheless, it shows that the people were aware that a patrilineal social structure existed.

### CONCLUSION

In this article, the researchers offer a 'different' perspective. In many publications about the Minangkabau society, the focus is on the matrilineage of the female population. Therefore, the role of the father and his family (*bako*) is neglected. However, in many *rites de passage*, the *bako* occupies an important place and is crucial for the procedure of the rites. There is an interdependency between the mother's family side and the family side of the father. This balance of mutual respect should signify that the children will remember both family sides.

The researchers described the rites of passage of *turun mandi*, circumcision, *tamat kaji*, and the wedding. These rites are performed to indicate the change from one status to a new status. For example, after *tamat kaji*, the boy or girl is a full-fledged member of the Islamic community. After the wedding, the bride and groom are adult members of the village community who can express their opinions and take over responsibility.

The importance of the *bako* shows that society wants to maintain harmony. Even though the descendants of a male family do not belong to the matrilineage, the contact and good relationship are still upheld. The institution of the *bako* wants to ensure that the family keeps in touch even after the family members leave the house.

The royal family system was different from the 'normal' family system, and it incorporated many paternal elements. In so far, it was considered peculiar and offers the opportunity for further research as there are royal descendants in the area of Indrapura. It should also be mentioned that there is a Minangkabau royal family in the Malaysian state of Negeri Sembilan.

Today there is a growing tendency towards living in a nuclear family. However, the researchers discovered that the traditional way of life is still prevalent. In the region where this research was conducted, the husband moves to the wife's household (matrilocal). The role of the father becomes more influential than before for the decision-finding. Nonetheless, many men also accept their function as *mamak* and take care of the nephews' education.

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