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Negotiating with Colonial Modernity: The New Minangkabau Elite in Bukittinggi City Early 20th Century

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Abstract

The emergence of a new elite in Minangkabau, flourishing in the modern milieu of Bukittinggi city at the beginning of the 20th century, represents a pivotal case study in the dynamics of colonial modernity. These individuals distinguished themselves in the economic and intellectual domains, as well as in the authentication of symbolic status through lifestyle emulation of the Dutch. However, their integration into the social circles of both traditional and modern communities in Bukittinggi was met with limited acceptance. This phenomenon underscores a society that embraced novel perspectives on the colonial world without succumbing to colonialist ideologies. This raises pertinent inquiries: who were these new elites? Why did they seek recognition within their modern context in Bukittinggi despite existing within a reality of modernity? And what was the nature of the inclusivity process for these new elites as modernists, without becoming colonialists? This discourse elucidates the process by which the new Minangkabau elite negotiated colonial modernity in Bukittinggi between 1905 and 1942. The findings reveal that the successful negotiation of colonial modernity by the new Minangkabau elite served as a mode of restraint as well as alienation from the social realities of Bukittinggi. Firstly, the negotiation facilitated broader participatory avenues for the new elite of Minangkabau in early 20th-century Bukittinggi. Secondly, it paved the way for them to independently craft mediums of intellectual and inclusive modernity. Thirdly, this negotiation led to the creation of new cultural forms that amalgamated three essential values of early 20th century Bukittinggi: tradition, colonialism, and Islam.

INTRODUCTION

The ordinary people of Minangkabau represented the earliest group to perceive the benefits of Western education in the mid-19th century. They were the initial modernists among the Minangkabau who reaped the advantages of the burgeoning Western education in the hinterlands of West Sumatra. Their engagement in adopting Western education to become modernists is inseparable from the desire to seize various opportunities presented by the evolving colonial environment. The earliest Western education institution established in the principal nagaris (villages) of the Minangkabau hinterland during the mid-19th century was the Nagari School (Graves, [2007](#)).

The Sekolah Nagari Bukitinggi evolved into the premier modern institution in the hinterlands of Minangkabau by the late 19th century. Bukitinggi's status as a center of

government and Western education in Minangkabau at the end of the 19th century positioned it as a destination for the Minangkabau common folk's migration. Primarily, they migrated with economic and intellectual motives through endeavors to become students at the Sekolah Nagari Bukittinggi. In the late 19th century, the school had a relatively large proportion of students from the migrant merchant and artisan classes of Minangkabau. Approximately 28% of the students at Sekolah Nagari Bukittinggi were children of migrants from merchant and artisan families. This figure indicates the relatively high desire of merchant families, artisans, including farmers around Bukittinggi, to enroll their children and nephews in Western schools established by the colonial government (Graves, [2007](#)).

Sekolah Nagari Bukittinggi, along with higher Western educational institutions such as Sekolah Radja, until the early 20th century, became one of the migration destinations for families of merchants, artisans, and farmers from surrounding nagari (villages) like Balingka, Kotogadang, Kamang, and others, to gain modern knowledge and achieve social prestige. The common people of Minangkabau, especially around Bukittinggi, recognized their involvement in Western education as a solution to their marginalization in nagari life, which at the same time did not provide them with opportunities for self-development. As graduates of Sekolah Nagari, common people of Minangkabau would have various options to continue their modernity achievements by pursuing higher education, or working for the colonial government as officials, teachers, school principals, etc. Their status as graduates of Western schools could lead to high-paying jobs with greater responsibilities than becoming a clerk at the Angku Lareh (Lord Laras) office in their own nagari. The choice of the common people of Minangkabau to engage in Western education to become modern continued into the early 20th century. Their conscious choice of the benefits of Western education and becoming modern gave rise to a new social group within the Minangkabau society. They were the new elites with lifestyles and orientations different from the old Minangkabau elites represented by the adat chiefs who strongly held onto tradition (Graves, [2007](#)).

The primary issue of this article initiates from a historical understanding of the new Minangkabau elites in urban areas at the beginning of the 20th century within the context of Indonesian historiography. Generally, Indonesian historiography positions these new elites within the context of nationalist thinkers with anti-colonial sentiments. Another historiographical perspective reveals that the emergence of the new Minangkabau elites in the early 20th century was more driven by their desire to offer an alternative formulation for the concept of Alam Minangkabau and its pillars (custom and Islam), which were weakening due to the colonial state's presence in West Sumatra. According to the aforementioned historiographical model, modernity through Western education is seen as a natural process resulting from the situation faced by the Minangkabau people at the beginning of the 20th century. Hence, Western education is not considered a determinant of the Minangkabau people's progress within the colonial realm of West Sumatra. At the level of the two indicated models of Indonesia-centric historiography, the new urban Minangkabau elites appear to be positioned in opposition to the colonial world, distanced from the modernity growing alongside Western education and the colonial cities in West Sumatra. The framework of Indonesia-centric historiography has closed off the possibility of other historical realities that show the existence of new Minangkabau elites in urban areas, who lived relatively comfortably within the colonial world and embraced Western education as the foundation of their new identity as modern individuals in the early 20th century. They were among the earliest group of Minangkabau people to interact with the colonial world and the modernity of Bukittinggi. They embraced Western education as a means for recognition and securing a place within the modern world reality beyond the colonial objectives of the colonial government. Consequently, the new Minangkabau elites in Bukittinggi sought to be modern without being colonial. Based on

the above, questions arise: who were these new Minangkabau elites? Why did they seek recognition from their modern world in Bukittinggi despite already living within a modern reality? This article aims, first, to explicate the relations and interactions of the new Minangkabau elites, through their modernity ideas, with the colonial world of Bukittinggi. Second, it demonstrates the process of the new Minangkabau elites as modernists who refused to become colonialists or supporters of colonial modernity.

METHOD

This article employs the critical historical method to systematically reconstruct the past. The initial step involves gathering historical sources or *heuristics* relevant to the topic, focusing on understanding the new Minangkabau elites in Bukittinggi and how they negotiated modernity without becoming colonial. The heuristic process includes identifying and selecting relevant written, oral, and visual sources. The primary sources used in this study include Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe, Berito Minangkabau, Hedangan Koerai, Berita Koerai, Medan Poetri, and Perdamaijan. Subsequently, external criticism is applied to assess the authenticity and validity of the sources, followed by internal criticism to better understand the context and content of the sources. The next step is interpretation or analysis of the collected data to uncover deeper meanings related to the Minangkabau elites' negotiation with modernity. This entire process concludes with historiography, or the rewriting of history, based on the results of criticism and interpretation, producing a comprehensive and objective reconstruction of historical events (Kuntowijoyo, [2003](#)).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The unveiling of Bukittinggi City and the advent of modernity, encompassing Western educational systems, capitalist economies, and the burgeoning intellectual world, have broadened the horizons of progress for the Minangkabau people. They eventually chose to migrate to this city to internalize themselves within the advancements of Bukittinggi City. The outcome of this internalization became a part of the process in forming new Minangkabau elites in the early 20th century. They demonstrated a strong desire to advance as a new social class seeking its place within society. These individuals largely originated from ordinary backgrounds, devoid of traditional titles and bureaucracy, who settled in Bukittinggi due to symbolic orientations (education), economy, and new media (journalism).

Since the late 19th century, the Minangkabau people migrated to Bukittinggi City, bringing with them new motivations and orientations by settling down, and seizing economic, cultural, and Western knowledge opportunities. This change in motivation and orientation has blurred the spatial boundaries of migration, especially as Bukittinggi City began to grow and develop in the early 20th century as a hub for colonial administration, trade, education, and Western culture (modernity). Bukittinggi gradually emerged as a new migration destination, termed as a city migration area (Abdullah, [2009](#)). As a city migration area and a primary destination that excited the surrounding Minangkabau people for various motivations, including women, Bukittinggi offered them promising, advanced, and open life opportunities, including liberation from the constraints of traditional rules. In its presence as a city migration area, the Minangkabau migrants did not perceive Bukittinggi as a representation or part of the colonial state's colonization project (Nas, [1979](#)), but as a space for the growth of new identities, simultaneously becoming advanced individuals through the acceptance of modernity and intellectualism offers (Graves, [2007](#)).

From the beginning, there was a desire among the new Minangkabau elites in Bukittinggi City to settle and form families. They were generally Western school teachers, colonial government employees, merchants, and people from the nagari around Bukittinggi City. In

1905, for the first time, the colonial government conducted a census of the population living in Bukittinggi City. This census for the Minangkabau migrants represented a path to forming a new identity as citizens of Bukittinggi, meaning to become modern individuals. The local census in 1905 showed that there were 2,239 permanent residents in Bukittinggi City. The population composition of Bukittinggi City according to this local census was native inhabitants numbering 1,439 people, 258 Europeans, 347 Chinese, and 195 people from the Middle East (Zulqayyim, [2006](#)). A local census of Bukittinggi City's inhabitants was conducted again in 1920. The second census recorded nearly five thousand residents of Bukittinggi City, and in the national census of 1930, the number of people settling in the city had surged to over 14,000 individuals. The table below provides an overview of the growth in the population of Bukittinggi City from various ethnicities, including Chinese and Middle Easterners, from 1905 to 1930.

Table 1. Bukittinggi Residents

Year	Native		Europe		Chinese		Foreign East		Total
	<i>M + F</i>	%	<i>M + F</i>	%	<i>M + F</i>	%	<i>M + F</i>	%	
1905	1.439	64	258	11	347	15	195	10	2.239
1920	3879	78	339	7	531	11	173	4	4.984
1930	13015	89	507	3	812	6	283	2	14.657

Source: (Abdullah, Haswandi, Zulfikar, & Idris, [1983](#))

Through the population table of Bukittinggi City mentioned above, it can be elucidated that the indigenous population's total growth increased by several hundred percent over a span of 25 years. However, what is particularly intriguing, based on the local census of 1905, is the percentage of foreigners residing in Bukittinggi City. The number of foreigners such as Europeans, Chinese, and other Easterners residing accounted for about 36% of the total population of Bukittinggi City. This proportion of foreigners was notably high at the beginning of Bukittinggi City's administrative establishment, considering its geographical location in the hinterlands. Although the percentage of foreigners continued to decline in total, according to the local census in 1920 and the national census in 1930—to about 11%, the number of inhabitants in Bukittinggi City saw an increase, including among women. The European population experienced an increase in their numbers residing since 1905 by about 31.3% in 1920, and continued to rise to 49.5% by 1930. The number of Chinese in Bukittinggi City also increased since 1905, about 53% in the local census of 1920, and the national census of 1930. Yet, an interesting note from the local and national censuses of Bukittinggi City over this twenty-five-year period includes the relatively small political role of the Dutch compared to the indigenous group as the majority, in terms of being the main political force. As the administrative center of colonial government in the Minangkabau region, the relatively minority Dutch in the society of Bukittinggi City were able to establish political stability and maintain relatively long-lasting rule as the governing authority. The success of the colonial government in ruling through the roles of a resident, assistant resident, controller, and several European colonial officials underscores a subordinate power structure they applied to support their authority in the Minangkabau society in general, and in Bukittinggi City in particular. The success of this subordinate political strategy is attributed to the old Minangkabau elite such as the penghulus (traditional leaders), as supporters of the colonial bureaucracy. Within the limited domain, in Bukittinggi City, the traditional leader elites of Nagari Kurai played a role in this subordinate politics, allowing the power to operate effectively without endangering the existence of the Colonial State in West Sumatra.

Nonetheless, in the initial phase of the establishment of colonial state power, another essential element that also cannot be detached as a contribution to the continuity of the colonial

state involves the emergence of a new class growing and developing within the Minangkabau society in Bukittinggi City at the end of the 19th century. This new class, named by some researchers as the urban middle class, but referred to in this writing as the new elite, did not harbor political objectives. Their identity was formed in Bukittinggi City due to their acceptance of modernity or new culture and advanced lifestyle (Nordholt, [2011](#)). However, distinct from the new urban middle class as mentioned by (Nordholt, [2011](#)), Sutherland, ([1983](#)), and (Niel, [1984](#)), the new Minangkabau elite in Bukittinggi City showed their interest in modernity not because they wanted to work in the colonial government and thus become bureaucratic elite, and many did not originate from the old elite class. A portion of them includes ordinary people who were attracted to the modern lifestyle. They emerged as a new middle class due to success in Western education. Most of them came from Nagari Kurai, and neighboring villages around Bukittinggi City such as Banuhampu, Ampekkoto, Kamang, and other villages outside Luhak Agam. They began arriving in Bukittinggi City around the end of the 19th century, and decided to settle down as city residents in the early 20th century. They became influential teachers, successful and respected merchants, as well as esteemed intellectuals.

The Elite: Nawawi gelar Soetan Ma'moer

Nawawi, awarded the title Soetan Ma'moer, represents a portrait of the new elite in Minangkabau, emerging from the common folk. He was the first and longest-serving indigenous teacher at the prestigious Radja School (Kweekschool), earning him the moniker "Father of Modernity" among the new Minangkabau elite residing in Bukittinggi City, as well as in West Sumatra at large. A modernist, he broke free from the old chains of tradition concerning Western education for women and successfully navigated the modernity of Bukittinggi City through his life in the Rumah Gadang (traditional communal house) in the early 20th century. Despite his influential role as a teacher at the Radja School, his profession did not confine him within the colonial interests, such as social segregation.

Nawawi, bearing the title Soetan Ma'moer, was born in Padangpanjang in 1859 (Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe, Th. VIII, No. 12, and Th. IX, No. 9, September 1929). From the beginning, he was a student and teacher produced by modernity through the means of modern education that had commenced in the mid-19th century in West Sumatra. He completed his Western education at the Second Class School in Supayang. After graduating from this primary school, Nawawi, holding the title Soetan Ma'moer, ventured to Bukittinggi City in 1873. He then enrolled as a first-generation student at the Radja School (kweekschool) and graduated in 1877 (Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe, Th. VIII, No. 12, December 1928; 237). Initially, after graduating from Radja School, he worked as a teacher at a Malay school with a salary of f 20 per month. Two years later, he began teaching at the Radja School as a Malay language teacher with a salary of f 75. In 1883, Nawawi sought to improve his status as a teacher at the Radja School by passing the hulpacte examination and was appointed as Hulponderwijzer van den eersten (assistant teacher) with a salary ranging from f 150 to eventually f 400 (Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe, Th. IX, No. 9, September 1929; 182). Nawawi, bearing the title Soetan Ma'moer, retired as a teacher at the Radja School in 1916, but continued to teach and engage in community activities as a member of the Gemeenteraad Bukittinggi.

Throughout his life until his death on 11 November 1928, Nawawi, awarded the title Soetan Ma'moer, was a respected city dweller in Bukittinggi. He held numerous professional and social positions at the Radja School and in Bukittinggi City. He often served as the deputy director at the Radja School, although there were several Dutch nationals deemed suitable for the position. As a professional from the modernist teacher community, Nawawi, bearing the title Soetan Ma'moer, was once appointed as a member of the Dutch school commission in

Bukittinggi. In the socio-political life of Bukittinggi City, Nawawi, awarded the title Soetan Ma'moer, was a member of the Dewan Kotaparaja in the socio-economic sector (Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe, YTh. VIII, No. 12, December 1928). This modernist teacher, a second-generation migrant to the city and not of the traditional chieftain lineage, was well-connected among the upper class but also maintained close relationships with the indigenous Minangkabau and Chinese communities.



Figure 1. Nawawi title Soetan Ma'moer

Source: (Amran, [1985](#))

From the perspective of the colonial government, Nawawi, bearing the title Soetan Ma'moer, exemplifies a model of success in the Westernization or civilization (civilizing process) among the indigenous people of West Sumatra. He received numerous commendations for his achievements in modernity, particularly in the field of education. His appointment as a member of the Dutch school commission in Bukittinggi served as evidence of the colonial government's acknowledgment. Indeed, he was recognized for his special relationships with high-ranking colonial officials, thereby earning recognition from the government for his dedication as a teacher and educator at the Sekolah Radja. As a form of recognition by the colonial government for their success in transforming and shaping a modernist Minangkabau role model in Bukittinggi, Nawawi, bearing the title Soetan Ma'moer, was awarded gold and silver stars by the government of the Dutch East Indies, culminating when he was bestowed the Oranje Nassau Order by the Queen of the Netherlands (Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe, Th. VIII, No. 12 December 1928). To them, Nawawi, bearing the title Soetan Ma'moer, symbolized a “colonial modernity hero,” hence upon his demise, hundreds from Bukittinggi, including the assistant resident, the controller of Agam, colonial military dignitaries, indigenous officials, and the Chinese community, came to pay their respects at his home (Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe, Th. IX No. 9 September 1929).

To the residents of Bukittinggi and the educated circles of the Minangkabau, Nawawi, bearing the title Soetan Ma'moer, was a socialite, a respected individual who enjoyed mingling with other social groups, known for his amiability, philanthropy, and exemplary character. His social circle extended beyond the members of the Sekolah Radja to include traditional groups through the Vereeniging Studiefonds Minangkabau (VSM), established in 1920 in Bukittinggi. The VSM was a modern, cross-racial organization, including Chinese members. Nawawi Soetan Ma'moer played a pivotal role in the establishment of the HIS in Bukittinggi alongside Liem Tjio Hien, and Liem Keng Goan, who served as the secretary (Pandji Poestaka, Year 1923). Nawawi, bearing the title Soetan Ma'moer, was also regarded as a “gentle and sweet-

talking” advisor to all members of the Societet Madjoe in Bukittinggi. His home was a meeting place for the intellectual socialites of Bukittinggi. He was even referred to as *inyik* (elder) by many of his students who went on to become colonial officials or teachers like himself. A certain editor of *Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe*, possibly one of his former students at Sekolah Radja, wrote a memorial for the modernist teacher with profound emotion and high regard.

“The demise of thee, Nawawi, bearing the title Soetan Ma’moer, signifies a great loss for West Sumatra, even the island of Sumatra itself, losing an individual of immense merit, who always championed the advancement and civilization of the land of Sumatra. With tears written here and a profound prediction of soul, let us, the sons and daughters of Minangkabau, pray for him in the name of Sumatera Raja, that his soul may find peace in the eternal realm.”

“Meninggalnja engkoe Nawawi gelar Soetan Ma’moer berarti Soematera Barat, bahkan poelaoe Soematera, kehilangan seorang jang sangat berdjasa, jang senantiasa mentjintakan kemadjoean dan kema’moeran tanah Soematera. Dengan tinta air mata jang ditoeliskan disini dan peramalan lahir batin, marilah kita poetera dan poeteri Minangkabau, mendo’akan beliau atas nama Soematera Raja, moga-moga arwah beliau dinegeri jang baka itoe, beroleh kesentosaan.” (*Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe*, Th. VIII, No. 12 Desember 1928; 239).

Nawawi, bearing the title Soetan Ma’moer, was a forward-thinking modernist educator within the context of viewing colonial modernity. He navigated new and traditional values in spaces of negotiation, particularly concerning the education of his children, lifestyle, and as an urban family in the City of Bukittinggi. He enrolled his daughter, Syarifah, at the Sekolah Radja. Syarifah became the first indigenous woman to be both a student and alumna of this prestigious school (*Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe*, Th. VIII, No. 12 Desember 1928; 238). Furthermore, Nawawi sent Syarifah to Betawi to enhance her knowledge of the Dutch language at the Christian Salemba Boarding School. Fearing that the Dutch would struggle to pronounce her name, he changed her name to Mien (Sastroamidjojo, 1994). This behavior of Nawawi, titled Soetan Ma’moer, represented a significant leap within the Minangkabau society when he assumed the role of *mamak* in Minangkabau, who is responsible for his nephews and nieces. Nawawi, bearing the title Soetan Ma’moer, even went as far as marrying Syarifah to a foreigner, RAAM Wiranatakoesoemah, a Sundanese who was the Regent of Cianjur, later of Bandung, West Java, without involving the maternal uncles in his daughter’s marriage (Sastroamidjojo, 1994). As a modern thinker, granting freedom to his children, especially his daughter Syarifah, Nawawi, bearing the title Soetan Ma’moer, and his wife jointly managed their household without the involvement of his wife’s extended family or following the rules of the *Rumah Gadang* in their native village. Both played the role of parents responsible for their nine children.

Regrettably, Nawawi, bearing the title Soetan Ma’moer, as a modernist educator, did not leave behind extensive writings to further understand his modernist thoughts. He is recorded to have translated a book commemorating the 35th anniversary of Sekolah Radja, written in both Dutch and Malay (*Kitab Peringatan Terkarang Waktoe telah 35 tahoen ‘oemoer Sekolah-Radja Oentoek Goeroe Melajoe di Boekit-Tinggi*, 1908). According to records in *Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe*, Nawawi, bearing the title Soetan Ma’moer, besides being a teacher, had indeed copied several books from Dutch into Malay, compiled a Minangkabau language dictionary, and wrote the poem *Ratap Tangis Kuda Sado* (*Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe*, Th. VIII, No. 12 Desember 1928; 237). However, these works are currently difficult to access.

The Negotiation: Urban Family and Rumah Gadang

One of the renowned colonial photographs from the early 20th century features a family portrait of Tuanku Laras Sungai Puar, a region not far from the city of Bukittinggi. The photograph depicts Tuanku Laras Sungai Puar alongside his spouse and children. Rusli Amran, in his work

"Sumatera Barat Plakat Panjang" (1981), elucidates the role of Tuanku Laras Sungai Puar within the context of his relations with the colonial government.



Figure 2. Tuanku Laras Sungai Puar's Families

Source: Kerncollectie Fotografie, Museum Volkenkunde, collection number A76-75.; also see (Amran, [1985](#))

The photograph in question captures the extensive family of Laras Sungai Puar, showcasing himself, his wife, and their children. Laras Sungai Puar is observed standing in the rearmost position, carrying his youngest child. It is noteworthy that Laras has a considerable number of offspring, approximately fourteen in total, a fact that, given his status as a ruler, suggests he would not casually include other people's children in the photograph, including the women in front who are likely his wives. In that era, it was customary within the Minangkabau aristocracy for a nobleman to have multiple wives. Thus, it is not surprising that Minangkabau nobles had many children. In the photograph, the family of Tuanku Laras Sungai Puar is positioned at or near the stone stairs of their traditional large house.

Another colonial photograph of significance depicts a family of a village chief in Payakumbuh, dated 1900. This photograph presents a small family unit consisting of a wife and a daughter, a notable contrast to the extensive family portrait of Tuanku Laras Sungai Puar. The impression conveyed by the photographer seems to suggest a model of a nuclear family within the Minangkabau society, a concept that would have been relatively improbable in the daily life of the matrilineal Minangkabau community. Furthermore, the setting for the photograph appears to have been meticulously arranged, as do the poses of the individuals captured, indicating they were likely directed by the photographer.



Figure 3. A Family of Penghulu in Payakumbuh

Source: Kerncollectie Fotografie, museum Volkenkunde, collection number A72-98

The photograph in question depicts a family of a traditional leader adorned in customary attire, complete with baju kurung, a long scarf, and tingkuluk for the women. Meanwhile, the male leader is seen wearing a deta on his head, a long-sleeved shirt, a keris tucked in front, and seated in a chair. This seating arrangement appears contrived, as it is unconventional for a leader to be seated in an elevated chair. Traditionally, a leader should sit at a lower level, embodying the proverbial wisdom that emphasizes equality in stature regardless of one's standing, encapsulated by the adage "sit as low, stand as tall." In addition to the family portrait of the Minangkabau, the Rumah Gadang has been a subject of considerable interest among colonial photographers in West Sumatra during the early 20th century. The Rumah Gadang, typically owned by affluent families or nobility of the Minangkabau engaged in leadership or judicial roles, showcases a unique architectural design. Characterized by roofs made of palm fibers, intricate carvings surrounding the walls, and accommodating a large number of occupants, these grand houses are not merely residential structures but serve as symbolic entities that unify and shape identity along lineage lines.

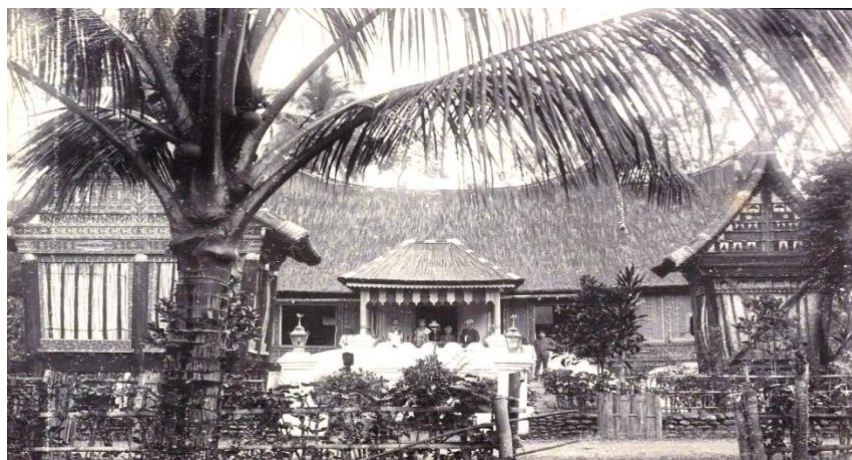


Figure 4. Rumah Gadang of Tuanku Laras Sungai Puar

Source: Kerncollectie Fotografie, Museum Volkenkunde, number A78-67

In the photograph of Tuanku Laras' residence discussed above, it features a traditional Minangkabau Rumah Gadang, marked by its distinctive gonjong, or horn-like roofs, at each end. This Rumah Gadang is equipped with two rangkiang, signifying the prosperity of the owner's family. The main entrance of this Rumah Gadang is centrally located, with a stone staircase that introduces a touch of modernity as the pathway into the residence. It appears that the Rumah Gadang of Tuanku Laras serves not only as a workplace but also as a dwelling that contravenes the traditional Minangkabau norms, where males do not possess the right to occupy a Rumah Gadang (Navis, [1984](#)).

The concept of family and the Rumah Gadang are subjects and themes frequently captured in photographs produced in West Sumatra during the colonial era. Typically, the subjects and themes of these photographs originate from the inland areas of Minangkabau, not far from the city of Bukittinggi. This region is considered to still strongly adhere to old traditions and values as part of the Minangkabau community's entrenched identity. The family, in the context of matrilineality in Minangkabau, is formed through the female lineage. The Minangkabau matrilineal lineage includes the grandmother, mother, and their daughters. Families without daughters consider themselves as having no lineage continuation, meaning their communal lands and Rumah Gadang would eventually vanish or be destroyed over time due to the absence of heirs and occupants. The Rumah Gadang serves as both a symbol of identity and a unifier of lineage in Minangkabau. Although the Rumah Gadang is managed on a daily basis by the oldest woman of the family, politically, it falls under the authority of the

mamak. The mamak determines permissible actions within the Rumah Gadang, including matters regarding weddings or funerals. Fathers or sons-in-law, who are spouses to the mamak's nieces, hold no authority in the Rumah Gadang.

According to tradition, they are likened to ashes on a stove; when the wind blows, they can be dispersed (divorce/depart), leaving no trace in the Rumah Gadang. These three aspects the family (matrilinealism), the physical Rumah Gadang, and the community concept of the Rumah Gadang share a circular relationship and function as a defense against external pressures for change. The nature and function of these three as a form of defense have long been a core cultural aspect deeply rooted in Minangkabau society. Targeting these aspects means seeking opportunities for fundamental cultural change within the entire Minangkabau community. Therefore, when these become subjects or themes in the context of progress or modernity through photographic technology, it is then that colonial practices backed by anthropological research, which at that time served as one of the pathways to legitimizing control (Pels, 1997) become integral, indeed inseparable, from the efforts to socially reconstruct the Colonial State in West Sumatra.



Figure 5. A Rumah Gadang of Native bestuur in hinterland of Minangkabau

Source: Collection of Tropen Museum groepsportret voor een minangkabau huis met bestuursambtenaar J. Jongejans tmnr 60046734, circa 1915-1929

Photographs featuring large family groups standing in front of a Rumah Gadang, as depicted above, are part of the modern colonial reconstruction of domestic or family value systems, as well as the culture of the Minangkabau society. Through such photographs, there is a message and impression that the colonial era wished to convey about the idea of a family, which refers to the concept of a nuclear family, along with the central role of a father and husband. Through the photograph capturing the large family of Laras Sungai Puar, the colonial construction attempted to negate the central role of a maternal uncle in the Rumah Gadang, although in Minangkabau culture, the father or husband does not hold authority in his wife's or parents' house. However, these photographs instead strongly suggest that the husband and father are the caretakers of a large family. Additionally, the selection of a family photograph of a laras, a powerful and influential person at the time, was also intended to serve as an ideal model, ultimately inspiring the traditional family life in the nagaris (villages) that exist.

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Photography, as a product of modernity through photographic technology, always reveals an idea. The idea contained in the objects and themes of the photographs produced, through institutions, and academic studies related to colonialism, reveals an effort to reconstruct the social order of the Minangkabau society. The aforementioned photographs are part of the colonial effort, represented by its elements, to press colonial modernity onto the nagaris in West Sumatra at the beginning of the 20th century. However, altering the identity of the Minangkabau society drastically, even in the name of progress, was not easy. For the Minangkabau people, this idea of social reconstruction touches the most fundamental philosophical foundation of their identity, especially among the upper layers, the chiefs, who, despite being part of the colonial system's support, refused to mediate such intentions. Nonetheless, the effort was not entirely unsuccessful. The reconstruction of the family structure, Rumah Gadang, and its communal concept still influenced the new Minangkabau elites in Bukittinggi at the beginning of the 20th century, as they embarked on their new lives as modern individuals. The new Minangkabau elites in Bukittinggi practiced the principles of the modern family, consisting of father, mother, and children, but in other practices, they negotiated these modernity values to shape their own advanced world through the social construction of the urban Rumah Gadang. The construction of the urban Rumah Gadang by the new elites combined principles of the modern family on one hand, and old communalism on the other. This will be clearly seen in the family life of Iljas Bagindo Marah or Iljas Bagindo Marah, and the family of Nawawi Soetan Ma'moer or Nawawi Soetan Ma'moer in Bukittinggi at the beginning of the 20th century.

Iljas Bagindo Marah was one of the new Minangkabau elites in Bukittinggi at the beginning of the 20th century. He became an important model among the modern merchant class who successfully leveraged colonial modernity in the economic field and used it as a pathway for the formation of his own advanced world that transcended colonial modernity and tradition. As a successful entrepreneur, Iljas Bagindo Marah built his own nuclear family with an infusion between modern values and Minangkabau traditions. This blend of family values can be understood in the urban Rumah Gadang of Iljas Bagindo Marah, which encompasses both patrilineal and matrilineal lineages.



Figure 6. Rumah Gadang of Iljas Bagindo Marah in the Early Twentieth Century

Source: (Hatta, [2011](#))

Iljas Bagindo Marah established his urban Rumah Gadang in one of the areas of Bukittinggi, in Aur Tajungkang, at the beginning of the 20th century. In his autobiography, Bung Hatta talks about the condition of his grandfather's house. The urban Rumah Gadang owned by Iljas Bagindo Marah was a two-story building, with wooden walls and a zinc roof as seen in photo 6 (Hatta, [2011](#)). This house had a veranda, and the rooms were arranged in a "U" shape on the side, leaving the middle space as a living room. The kitchen of this house was located at the back of the house, aligned with the stables owned by Iljas Bagindo Marah.

In the recollection of Mohammad Hatta, he reminisces about the inhabitants of the Rumah Gadang in the city of Iljas Bagindo Marah, his grandfather, stating,

“Before the birth of my siblings, our household consisted of my great-grandmother, whom I called grandmother, Pak Gaek (Iljas Bagindo Marah) and my grandmother, my father who only stayed at home on weekends due to his work in Padang, my mother, my uncle whom I called Mak Alieh and his wife, my younger uncle Idris, who was still single, my sister Rafiah, and myself. The multi-storied house was spacious enough for us and still had room for servants and domestic helpers who lived in. The servants at that time were not like the usual servants found today. They were mostly children from distant places who were entrusted to us to be educated in household management and were treated as family members.”

“Sebelum lahir adik-adikku, kami seisi rumah terdiri atas buyutku, yang kupanggil nenek, Pak Gaek (Iljas Bagindo Marah) dan nenekku, bapakku yang hanya tinggal di rumah pada akhir minggu karena pusat kerjanya di Padang, ibuku, pamanku yang kupanggil Mak Alieh dan istrinya, pamanku yang muda Idris, yang masih bujangan, kakakku perempuan Rafiah, dan aku sendiri. Rumah yang bertingkat itu cukup luas bagi kami dan masih ada tempat bagi pelayan dan pembantu rumah tangga yang tinggal di dalam. Pelayan pada waktu itu bukanlah pelayan yang biasa didapati sekarang. Mereka kebanyakan anak-anak orang dari tempat yang jauh-jauh yang diserahkan kepada kami untuk dididik dalam mengurus rumah tangga dan diperlakukan sebagai anggota keluarga.” (Hatta, [1982](#)).

From Mohammad Hatta's memory, the Rumah Gadang in the city of Iljas Bagindo Marah housed three families under two familial systems. The house contained matrilineal descendants from the line of his wife Aminah, and patrilineal descendants from Iljas Bagindo Marah himself, including his daughter and married son who lived together. Besides the nuclear family and their descendants, there were also others, namely the domestic helpers who were considered part of their own family, thus completing the extended family of Iljas Bagindo Marah in the Rumah Gadang of his city. According to Mohammad Hatta, his grandfather Iljas Bagindo Marah was the family's caretaker, not the mamak as per Minangkabau tradition. Hatta's own mamak was under the care of his grandmother, Iljas Bagindo Marah's wife Aminah. Meanwhile, his mother's mamak is not mentioned in Mohammad Hatta's autobiography, indicating a disconnection of his mother's matrilineal line with her people outside the City of Bukittinggi. However, similar to the concept of managing the Rumah Gadang outside the City of Bukittinggi, Aminah as a wife and mother had a strong influence on the family's economy, apart from her husband. Aminah, in her grandson Hatta's memory, was a dominant woman over her children, including determining their life orientations. She is described by her grandson as a strict, meticulous, and cautious person in her role as the head of the household (Hatta, [1982](#)). Iljas Bagindo Marah, who likely originated from the western coastal region of Minangkabau judging by his title, seemingly aimed to establish a modernist family culture based on the nuclear family with his distinctive Rumah Gadang of the city. The physical and communal nature of his Rumah Gadang in the city indicated Iljas Bagindo Marah's negotiation process with colonial modernity reconstructed through various mediums by the Colonial State. The model of the city's Rumah Gadang as a form of negotiation by the new Minangkabau elites towards colonial modernity is also seen in the life of Nawawi titled Soetan Ma'moer.

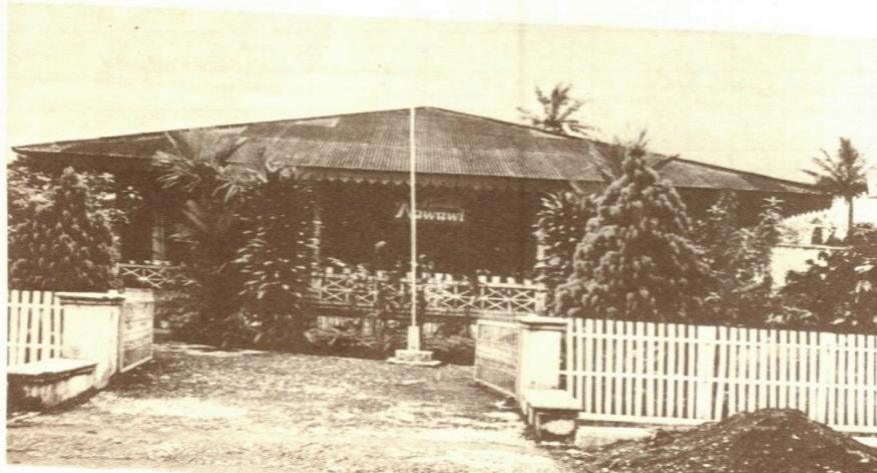


Figure 7. Rumah Gadang's Nawawi Soetan Ma'moer in Bukittinggi

Source: (Soedarpo, [1994](#))

School where he taught, physically resembles the Rumah Gadang of Iljas Bagindo Marah in terms of both form and its communal nature. Within the familial life, Nawawi Soetan Ma'moer also accommodated extended family members, including his nephews and nieces through matrilineal lines. In his daily life at the Rumah Gadang, Nawawi Soetan Ma'moer endeavored to fulfill the roles of both a father and a maternal uncle. However, influenced by his modernist thinking, he diverged from the traditional Minangkabau custom of bequeathing property to maternal nephews. Instead, Nawawi Soetan Ma'moer bequeathed his estates, including the physical structure of his Rumah Gadang, to his daughters. Among them was Sjarifah, a prominent figure in the women's movement in Bukittinggi in the early 20th century (Sastroamidjojo, [1994](#)). Conversely, he encouraged his sons to venture beyond West Sumatra and establish their own families.



Figure 8. Nawawi Soetan Ma'moer's familie

Source: (Soedarpo, [1994](#))

The photograph above captures the extended family of Nawawi Soetan Ma'moer, comprising his wife, children of both genders, and grandchildren. Nawawi Soetan Ma'moer is seen seated on a chair, while his wife also sits, cradling a grandchild. The family photo was taken in front of their Rumah Gadang in Bukittinggi. The presence of the Rumah Gadang of Iljas Bagindo Marah and Nawawi Soetan Ma'moer in early 20th century Bukittinggi embodies a symbolic negotiation process with the incursion of colonial modernity on one hand, and the

preservation of tradition in its development process on the other. This also led to the formation of new domestic functions within its manifestation.

CONCLUSION

The study on the new Minangkabau elite reveals the success of a new social group in living as a modern community without being fettered by the demands of the colonial world. They successfully emerged from the exclusivity of the colonial world, which was supported by both traditional society and the West in the city of Bukittinggi, through the concept of inclusive modernity. Inclusive modernity is the way of thinking of the new Minangkabau elite, understanding ideas of progress and creating a new orientation through their symbolic, economic, and cultural capitals, to secure a place in the modern realm without supporting the hegemony of colonial power. The success of the inclusive modernity mindset of the new Minangkabau elite also brought success to their method of acting beyond the demands of the colonial world in early 20th century Bukittinggi. The method of becoming modernists without being colonial was successful through the negotiation practices of the new Minangkabau elite against colonial modernity as a mode that restrained and alienated them from the social reality of Bukittinggi.

The negotiation of the new Minangkabau elite is a practice of accepting colonial modernity through Western education, yet they use this symbolic capital for their own personal, community, and traditional purposes. There are three forms of successful negotiation practices of the new elite in becoming modernists without being colonial. First, negotiation has provided a more expansive participatory space for the new Minangkabau elite in early 20th century Bukittinggi. Second, negotiation has opened opportunities for them to create their own media for articulating inclusive modernity of an intellectual nature. Third, negotiation has resulted in the creation of new cultural forms that assemble three important values of early 20th century Bukittinggi, encompassing tradition, colonialism, and Islam.

The findings on the new Minangkabau elite in Bukittinggi have shown the reality of new social groups that view the colonial world as a comfortable space for the growth of new identities and orientations. They do not have to be anti-colonial in their effort to construct their own modern reality as a new world. Historiographically, this reality demonstrates the failure of an Indonesia-centric perspective that, conversely, views the situation differently (Purwanto, 2006). The reality of the new Minangkabau elite affirms the presence of a new Indonesian Historiography paradigm as a necessity to explain in a more balanced, open, and comprehensive manner how the indigenous people lived in a colonial society that offered them opportunities for advancement.

The conception of inclusive modernity and the negotiation practices of the new indigenous elite in the colonial world represent an important perspective for composing the future historiography of Indonesia. This conception and practice could broaden the possibilities for the influence of the colonial world on the construction and identity of Indonesian-ness. Therefore, there is an opportunity for further study to compare this with the new elites in cities outside of West Sumatra. Even at the regional level, Southeast Asia, it would be interesting if there were comparative studies on inclusive modernity and the negotiation practices of the indigenous people in cities influenced by different colonial worlds (Dutch, British, and French) who became modernists, without being colonial.

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