



Configurations of Masculinity and Power Relations in the Novels *Kembara Rindu* and *Negeri 5 Menara*: A Perspective from R.W. Connell

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ABSTRACT

This study examines configurations of masculinity and power relations in Habiburrahman El Shirazy's *Kembara Rindu* and A. Fuadi's *Negeri 5 Menara* through R.W. Connell's perspective. The article is a focused derivative of a master's thesis, concentrating on how masculine practices gain legitimacy, occupy relational positions, and are reproduced through pesantren as a social institution. The study employs a qualitative interpretive approach, fiction analysis at the micro level, and hermeneutic reading. The working corpus consists of 50 coded data, 25 from each novel, including dialogue, narration, actions, characterization, conflicts, and relations among characters. Initial coding indicates that complicit masculinity is the most frequent pattern: 16 of 25 data in *Kembara Rindu* and 20 of 25 data in *Negeri 5 Menara*. Hegemonic masculinity appears in 8 and 3 data respectively; marginalized masculinity in 1 and 2 data; while subordinate masculinity does not form a strong pattern. Both novels construct a religious-productive masculinity through religiosity, knowledge, discipline, hard work, responsibility, independence, leadership, solidarity, and usefulness to others. Their orientations differ: *Kembara Rindu* constructs masculinity as protective and responsibility-oriented, whereas *Negeri 5 Menara* constructs it as intellectual and achievement-oriented. The findings indicate that pesantren functions as an agent of masculine socialization and an arena in which power relations are legitimized. Connell's categories, however, must remain relational rather than being reduced to a list of male traits.

Keywords : masculinity, power relations, novels, *Kembara Rindu*, *Negeri 5 Menara*

INTRODUCTION

Masculinity is a social construct shaped through practices and relations, rather than a set of biological traits inherently attached to men. R.W. Connell's perspective is significant because it situates masculinity within the structures of gender relations and power. Under this framework, qualities such as courage, independence, leadership, discipline, religiosity, or hard work are not automatically classified as specific forms of masculinity. Instead, one must examine how such practices gain recognition, who holds authority, who conforms to dominant norms, and how social structures either benefit or constrain the positions of men. Ahmadi's (2022) study on the image of

men in Indonesian literature further suggests that the representation of men in literary works should be understood as a cultural construct, deeply embedded in its surrounding social context and values.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) refined the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" by emphasizing the plurality of masculinities, the existence of hierarchies, the influence of local contexts, and the inherent changes and contradictions within configurations of masculinity. Consequently, the term "hegemonic" is not synonymous with being the most physically powerful man. In any given social space, authority

Submitted
07/10/2026

Accepted
12/10/2026

Published
15/10/2026

Citation	Putro, Y. A., Ahmadi, A., Raharjo, R. P. (2026). Configurations of Masculinity and Power Relations in the Novels <i>Kembara Rindu</i> and <i>Negeri 5 Menara</i> : A Perspective from R.W. Connell. <i>Jurnal Pembelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra</i> , Volume 5, Nomor 5, September 2026, 4849-4860. DOI: https://doi.org/10.55909/jpbs.v5i4.1892
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Publisher
Raja Zulkarnain Education Foundation

can derive legitimacy from knowledge, religion, institutions, achievements, leadership, or other social resources. In more recent scholarship, Ahmadi (2024) demonstrates that configurations of masculinity are fluid and capable of transformation when confronted with different gender representations.

In literary studies, such theoretical frameworks must remain grounded in the text. Nurgiyantoro (2018) identifies elements—such as characters, characterization, plot, conflict, setting, and other foundational components of fiction—as an interconnected network that constitutes the work as a whole. Therefore, this research examines practices of masculinity by first analyzing these fictional elements, and subsequently linking them to the categories proposed by Connell. This approach prevents the research from devolving into the mere application of social theory superimposed onto the novels. Such a text-based methodology aligns with the literary study practices of Raharjo and his colleagues, who prioritize the narrative, characters, and context of a work as the foundation for analysis before drawing broader social implications (Haryanti et al., 2025).

The novels *Kembara Rindu* and *Negeri 5 Menara* were selected because both position the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) as a crucial space for the formation of male character, yet they reveal distinct orientations. The research data indicates that the character of Ridho in *Kembara Rindu* is shaped through family responsibility, protection, self-reliance, religiosity, labor, and service. In contrast, Alif and the Sahibul Menara (the protagonists) in *Negeri 5 Menara* are forged through the discipline of Pondok Madani, the pursuit of knowledge, hard work, friendship, achievement, and personal aspirations. A comparative analysis of the two novels highlights a divergence: *Kembara Rindu* emphasizes an orientation toward amanah (trust/duty), while *Negeri 5 Menara* focuses on an orientation toward achievement.

Previous research on *Kembara Rindu* has identified leadership, strength, rationality,

resilience, self-reliance, courage, toughness, and aggression as elements of Ridho's masculinity. That research—which utilized the framework of David and Brannon rather than Connell—is not being replicated here; instead, this article re-examines the data through the lens of Connell's concepts of configuration and power relations.

Meanwhile, in *Negeri 5 Menara*, Kiai Rais and Tyson emerge as two hegemonic figures, each deriving legitimacy from different sources: Kiai Rais through knowledge, religion, morality, and leadership, and Tyson through the body, discipline, punishment, and control. Alif and the *Sahibul Menara* are best understood as men who have internalized the institutional norms of masculinity and derive benefits from that established order.

The research gap lies in the scarcity of comparative readings that examine these two novels through the lens of Connell's concept of the configuration of masculinity. The novelty of this research is threefold: (1) shifting the focus of analysis from attributes to relations and legitimacy; (2) interpreting the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) as an agent of masculinity socialization; and (3) identifying two orientations of pesantren-based masculinity: the "protective-trustworthy" (protektif-amanah) and the "intellectual-achievement-oriented" (intelektual-prestatif). Comparative data reveal a point of convergence between the two, characterized as a "religious-productive" masculinity. The relevance of a gender-based reading of literary works is also underscored by the study of Raharjo et al. (2025) on gender dynamics in East Javanese folklore, which demonstrates that gender constructs must be understood through the relationships between characters and their cultural context.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach. The primary data sources are the novels *Kembara Rindu* by Habiburrahman El Shirazy and *Negeri 5 Menara* by A. Fuadi. The research data are derived from three working documents provided by the researcher: data from *Kembara*



Rindu, data from *Negeri 5 Menara*, and a matrix of similarities and differences. The working corpus consists of 50 data points—25 for each novel—comprising short excerpts, events, actions, characterizations, scene contexts, Connell’s categories, power relations, and interpretations.

The analytical techniques include: (1) reading, observing, and noting; (2) data coding; (3) analysis of fictional elements; (4) identification of masculinity practices; (5) determination of relational positioning based on legitimacy and power; (6) hermeneutic interpretation; and (7) a comparison of the two novels. The attached coding indicates that *Kembara Rindu* contains 8 hegemonic masculinity, 16 of complicit masculinity, 1 of marginalized masculinity, and 0 of subordinate masculinity. Meanwhile, *Negeri 5 Menara* contains 3 hegemonic, 20 complicit, 2 marginalized, and 0 subordinate instances. These figures should be understood as the distribution of 50 selected data points, rather than the total count of all instances of masculinity within the novel.

Data validity is maintained through accurate quoting, ensuring page numbers correspond to the specific edition used, contextual analysis, consistent coding, the documentation of contradictory data, and cross-referencing against Connell’s categories. It should be noted that pagination varies between editions; therefore, all final page numbers must be verified against the specific book or PDF serving as the primary corpus.

RESULTS

1. Distribution of Masculinity Configurations

The 50 selected data units reveal an imbalanced distribution. In the current coding, *Kembara Rindu* contains 8 hegemonic, 16 complicit, 1 marginalized, and 0 subordinate instances; *Negeri 5 Menara* contains 3 hegemonic, 20 complicit, 2 marginalized, and 0 subordinate instances. These figures represent the results of coding the selected data units, not the total statistics for every occurrence of masculinity throughout the novels.

Table 1
Distribution of Masculinity Configurations

Connell Category	<i>Kembara Rindu</i> (25)	<i>Negeri 5 Menara</i> (25)	Tendencies
Hegemonic	8	3	More prominent through a protective/ leadership figure (as seen in <i>Kembara Rindu</i>); in <i>Negeri 5 Menara</i> , it manifests through moral-intellectual authority as well as physical/ disciplinary authority.
Complete	16	20	Most dominant; <i>santri</i> (students) internalize the institution’s ideal norms.
Marginalized	1	2	Emerges through social or material limitations.
Subordinate	0	0	No strong pattern identified in the available data.

This finding represents a significant juncture in the research. If masculinity were understood solely as domination, then the hegemonic figure would necessarily be the focal point of the analysis. However, the distribution of the data suggests that the masculine order operates more broadly through the internalization of norms. The data you provided identify the norms in *Kembara Rindu* as encompassing amanah (trust/duty), hard work, self-reliance, protection, and responsibility; meanwhile, in *Negeri 5 Menara*, the norms include discipline, study, achievement, courage, solidarity, and the pursuit of aspirations.

2. *Kembara Rindu*: Protective-Trust-Based Masculinity

In *Kembara Rindu*, Ridho serves as the central figure in the configuration of masculinity. Data points KR-01 through KR-05 reveal that economic responsibility, adherence to amanah, concern for safety, and decision-making are recurring practices. In KR-06 and KR-07, Ridho's actions—taking control of a situation and managing circumstances when Diana is at risk—can be coded as "hegemonic masculinity," as he assumes a protective stance and exercises situational authority. This demonstrates that power does not always manifest as coercion; it can also appear as protective authority.

Nevertheless, Ridho cannot be characterized as hegemonic in every scene. Data points KR-02 and KR-04, for instance, illustrate his role as a recipient of authority—specifically, that of Gus Najib. Thus, Ridho's position shifts according to the relational configuration: when interacting with a senior or a kiai (religious teacher), he acts as a recipient of norms, whereas when dealing with those in need of protection, he assumes the role of a decision-maker. This fluidity in positioning aligns more closely with the relational nature of Connell's theory than the rigid labeling of a character. These data are documented in the *Kembara Rindu* working matrix, which encompasses the santri-kiai (student-teacher)

relationship, the Ridho-Diana dynamic, and the context of amanah.

Data points KR-17 and KR-18 further reinforce the dimension of moral leadership. Ridho defends the rights of two orphans, presenting a will in relation to an inheritance dispute. The data categorizes his actions as "hegemonic," as he employs both courage and moral authority to advocate for those who are more vulnerable.

Thus, Ridho's orientation toward masculinity can be framed as follows: responsibility protection self-reliance leadership service. Your comparative data identifies this orientation as amanah (a sacred trust/responsibility), characterized by strong ties between Ridho and his family, the pesantren (Islamic boarding school), the mosque, and the broader community.

3. *Negeri 5 Menara*: Intellectual-Achievement-Oriented Masculinity

Unlike *Kembara Rindu*, *Negeri 5 Menara* constructs masculinity through an educational institution. Data points NM-01 through NM-10 depict Alif, Dulmajid, Raja, Said, and Baso—students (santri)—as they learn to adapt to the social system of Pondok Madani. Alif is portrayed as accepting the authority of his family; Dulmajid demonstrates self-reliance and a zeal for learning; Raja gains status through intellectual pursuits; Said secures an informal position of influence through his maturity; and Baso links his masculinity to his religious aspirations.

Kiai Rais and Ustad Salman represent different forms of authority. Kiai Rais is coded as "hegemonic" due to his role as a role model and a source of moral-religious legitimacy, whereas Ustad Salman derives his authority from his pedagogical knowledge. Data points NM-11 through NM-15 illustrate that knowledge, the capacity to educate, and the act of setting an example serve as sources of masculine power.

Tyson, meanwhile, embodies a form of hegemonic masculinity distinct from that of Kiai Rais; his authority is exercised through physical presence, firmness, the provision of security, the



administration of discipline, and the exercise of control. In *Negeri 5 Menara*, Kiai Rais is positioned as a moral-intellectual authority, while Tyson serves as a physical-disciplinary authority. Thus, a single institution can encompass multiple forms of masculine hegemony, depending on the source of legitimacy being invoked.

Meanwhile, the majority of santri (Islamic boarding school students) fall into the "complicit" category. While they do not control the institution, they internalize the norms established by it—such as discipline, hard work, language proficiency, achievement, courage, solidarity, and responsibility. Data points NM-19, NM-20, NM-22, and NM-23 highlight traits like continuous learning, informal leadership, keeping one's word, and assisting the group.

4. Baso and Marginalized Masculinity

Baso serves as the most compelling case for examining "marginalized masculinity." Although he possesses a high level of intellectual and religious competence, his family circumstances force him to leave Pondok Madani. Data points NM-24 and NM-25 demonstrate that limited institutional access does not erase his masculine identity; rather, his familial responsibilities become a source of masculine meaning. It is important to distinguish between marginalization and subordination. Baso is not positioned as inferior due to a perceived lack of masculinity or an association with femininity; instead, his obstacles are rooted in material access and family obligations. Consequently, the category of "marginalized" is more appropriate as an analytical hypothesis. Comparative data also reveals that while Ridho faces economic constraints, he manages to transform his position through knowledge, labor, effort, and leadership.

5. The Absence of a "Subordinate Masculinity" Pattern

The research data does not reveal a strong pattern of "subordinate masculinity" in either novel. This should not be viewed as a shortcoming;

rather, the lack of such evidence suggests that relationships among men in these novels are primarily structured through seniority, education, leadership, competitive achievement, solidarity, and religious authority—rather than through the subordination of men via feminization or sexual orientation. The research findings explicitly advise against forcing this category onto the analysis.

6. The Pesantren as an Agent of Masculinity Socialization

The most significant finding from the comparison of these two novels is the role of the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) as an agent for the socialization of masculinity. The pesantren is far more than just a setting. It imparts practices, discipline, values, the distribution of authority, and the standards of an ideal man. In *Kembara Rindu*, pesantren (Islamic boarding school) education is oriented toward service to one's family and community. In *Negeri 5 Menara*, pesantren education is oriented toward achievement, intellectual mobility, and the wider world.

This conceptual framework ensures that the article does not merely rest on the claim that pesantren shape religious men." More importantly, it uncovers the mechanisms behind this formation. Obedience to the kiai (Islamic scholar/teacher), time discipline, labor, mastery of knowledge, leadership capacity, solidarity, and an orientation toward being useful to others are all practices that garner social recognition. Thus, the pesantren functions as an arena for both the production and the legitimation of masculinity.

7. Religious-Productive Masculinity as a Comparative Synthesis

Both novels illustrate a shift from a model of manhood defined by physical strength and dominance toward a model characterized by knowledge, religiosity, discipline, productivity, responsibility, and utility. The comparative data define this synthesis as "religious-productive masculinity." This construction does not eliminate

hierarchy; authority remains legitimized through leadership, knowledge, the role of a teacher/kiai, personal success, and the ability to manage resources.

The concept of "religious-productive" used in this study is not a new category within Connell's framework. Rather, it is a synthetic term employed to describe the patterns observed in the findings. Similarly, "protective-amanah" and "intellectual-achievement-oriented" are interpretive terms that summarize the respective orientations of each novel; they are not theoretical categories intended to replace Connell's four established configurations.

8. Comparison of the Two Novels

The table below contains a comparison of two novels.

Table 2
Comparison of the Two Novels

Aspect	Kembara Rindu	Negeri 5 Menara
Central figure	Ridho	Alif and the "Masters of the Minarets" (Sahibul Menara)
Space of formation	Islamic boarding school (<i>pesantren</i>) >> family >> society	Islamic boarding school (<i>pesantren</i>) >> education >> the wider world/society
Primary orientation	Trust (<i>amanah</i>) and service	Achievement and social mobility
Ideal model	Protector, leader, bearer of a trust	Learners, high achievers, disciplined, knowledgeable
Source of legitimacy	Religion, responsibility, work, moral leadership	Institutions, knowledge, discipline, achievement, solidarity
Primary hegemony	Protective-paternal/moral	Moral-intellectual and physical-disciplinary aspects
Complicit	Ridho occupies the position of one who receives and adopts norms;	Alif, Raja, Said, Dulmajid, Atang, Baso
Marginalization	Economic/social conditions	Baso and the limitations in accessing education
Subordination	Lacks detail regarding professional/work-related aspects	Lacking in terms of employment-related data
Utilitarian orientation	Family and society	Engaging with society through knowledge, achievement, and aspirations



A comparison reveals that while the two novels share certain similarities, this does not imply an identical form of masculinity. Both works frame hardship as an arena for the formation of manhood, hard work as a source of legitimacy, religion as a foundation for values, the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) as an institution for character development, and utility—being of benefit to others—as an ultimate goal. The distinction lies in the intended outcome of this formative process: Ridho is steered toward becoming a bearer of a sacred trust (amanah), whereas Alif and the Sahibul Menara (the protagonists of *Negeri 5 Menara*) are directed toward becoming knowledgeable and high-achieving individuals. This synthesis is supported by the matrix of similarities and differences you have provided.

DISCUSSION

The finding that "complicit masculinity" is the most dominant form carries significant implications. Hegemony persists not merely because of a dominant figure in control, but also because other men internalize the prevailing norms and derive benefits from them. In both novels, santri (students) do not need to become kiai (Islamic scholars/leaders) or administrators to be part of this masculine order; rather, they learn to embody the "ideal man" through obedience, discipline, labor, achievement, responsibility, and solidarity.

A second finding is that hegemony can be prosocial in nature. Figures such as Kiai Rais, Kiai Nawir, and Ridho—among others—may exercise their authority for the purposes of education, protection, service, and the promotion of the common good. This does not mean that the underlying power structure has vanished; instead, it is essential to distinguish between the prosocial intent of an action and the position of power that enables such an action to be taken.

A third finding highlights the importance of local context. Hegemonic masculinity does not take a single, universal form. In *Kembara Rindu*, legitimacy is primarily derived from the fulfillment of a sacred trust (amanah), religious devotion, the provision of protection, and the assumption of family responsibilities. In *Negeri 5 Menara*, legitimacy is more strongly rooted in discipline, knowledge, formal education, personal achievement, and the pursuit of high aspirations. This reinforces the perspective of Connell and Messerschmidt, who argue that any configuration of masculinity must be interpreted within its specific social context. This aligns with Ahmadi (2022), who situates the representation of men in Indonesian literature within specific cultural and social contexts.

This study offers three contributions. First, conceptually, it shifts the reading of literary masculinity from a focus on attributes toward a configuration of practices and power relations. Second, contextually, the article demonstrates that the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) in both novels functions as an agent of masculinity socialization, rather than merely serving as a narrative setting. Third, comparatively, the study identifies two distinct orientations within "religious-productive" masculinity: a "protective-trustee" (protektif-amanah) orientation in *Kembara Rindu* and an "intellectual-achievement" (intelektual-prestatif) orientation in *Negeri 5 Menara*.

These contributions expand upon previous research on *Kembara Rindu*, which had primarily emphasized categories such as appearance, leadership, strength, and courage. The data presented by the researcher suggest that a re-examination through the lens of Connell's framework offers a more significant contribution, as the focus shifts toward legitimacy and social relations.

CONCLUSION

Both the novels *Kembara Rindu* and *Negeri 5 Menara* construct masculinity within the setting of an Islamic boarding school (pesantren), yet they yield different orientations. *Kembara Rindu* highlights a "protective-trustee" (protektif-amanah) masculinity, which gains legitimacy through responsibility, protection, religiosity, self-reliance, labor, and service. In contrast, *Negeri 5 Menara* emphasizes an "intellectual-achievement-oriented" (intelektual-prestatif) masculinity, shaped by discipline, knowledge, hard work, solidarity, accomplishment, and high aspirations.

Based on an analysis of 50 data points, "complicit masculinity" emerges as the most dominant pattern. This indicates that the reproduction of masculinity does not occur solely through figures at the pinnacle of power, but also through men who internalize institutional norms and derive benefits from the existing order. "Hegemonic masculinity" remains significant, particularly embodied by figures who serve as moral-intellectual authorities, enforcers of physical discipline, or protectors. "Marginalized masculinity" appears when social-material access constrains a man's position, while "subordinate masculinity" does not manifest as a strong pattern within the data.

Overall, both novels present a "religious-productive" form of masculinity: the ideal man is not merely strong, but also knowledgeable, religious, disciplined, responsible, self-reliant, capable of leadership, possessed of a sense of solidarity, and socially useful. Nevertheless, this construct retains a hierarchical structure, as male authority derives its legitimacy from institutions, knowledge, achievements, and social standing. These findings demonstrate that R.W. Connell's theory is a productive framework for the literary criticism of Indonesian fiction, provided it is applied relationally and remains firmly grounded in the specific elements of the fictional texts.

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