

Communication practices in the construction of hegemonic masculinity at Phoenam Coffee Shop

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ABSTRACT

Phoenam is a unique coffee shop originating from the city of Makassar, South Sulawesi. This place has become a local public space that has historically evolved beyond simply a place to enjoy coffee; it is also a gathering place for discussion, particularly among men. The purpose of this study is to analyze the representation of hegemonic masculinity at the Phoenam coffee shop and how it is negotiated and reproduced through everyday communication practices. This study employs a qualitative approach that combines Haberman's concept of the Public Sphere, Connell's Theory of Hegemonic Masculinity, and a feminist perspective. The results show that gender negotiations take place through patterns of presence. There is no prohibition against women enjoying the atmosphere and food at the inclusive Phoenam coffee shop, but social norms are what actually limit women's access to the public space there. The marginal representation of female visitors serves as concrete evidence of the operation of symbolic power within this social sphere. This form of symbolic power operates effectively without the need for formal regulations or explicit policies. The Phoenam coffee shop reproduces hegemonic masculinity, which actively produces and negotiates gender boundaries in everyday social life. Furthermore, the presence of women modulates expressions of masculinity. Gender is negotiated not because of the scarcity of women at Phoenam Coffee Shop, but through changes in men's behavior when the gender composition of the space shifts. Gender negotiations at Phoenam Coffee Shop center on discursive participation. Conversations about work, business, political issues, and even soccer games serve as the primary arena for the formation of solidarity and status among men. Masculinity is not merely displayed but gains legitimacy through the practice of everyday interactions. Consequently, Phoenam cannot be understood as a socially and culturally neutral public space

Keywords: *Hegemonic; masculinity; phoenam; public sphere*

INTRODUCTION

The culture of drinking coffee in Indonesia has developed alongside the growth of coffee shops across many regions, which function as localized informal public space. In the context of a multicultural and multi-ethnic society, social and cultural communication practices in Indonesia reflect the persistence of communication patterns rooted in local communities. These social and cultural communication practices differ from one region to another. Traditional media also reflects the diversity, often taking the form of folk arts and oral communication practices within particular social groups. In this context, informal public spaces like coffee shops or traditional gathering place play an important role as arenas for social interaction and the exchange of discourse.

Various forms of traditional communication practices can be found in different regions, such as Jagongan in Central Java (Solo and Yogyakarta), Lapo Tuak in Medan, Muenasah in Aceh, and Phoenam in Makassar, which function as the gathering spaces

from local communities. The interaction occurring in these spaces can be understood as forms of social communication within the context of local public spaces. One prominent example is Phoenam Coffee Shop in Makassar established in 1946 and known as a social gathering space, particularly for men. This phenomenon has also inspired the establishment of Phoenampungan Coffees Shop in Greater Jakarta, which serves as spaces for interaction and discussion among migrants from South Sulawesi, particularly men who occupy strategic positions in various sectors.

Traditional coffee shops in Indonesia, including Phoenam, are public spaces shaped by social practices and power dynamics. Research by Faisal et al. describes Phoenam as a coffee shop in Makassar that straddles the line between public and private spaces. Various public figures—such as government officials, politicians, intellectuals, civil servants, community leaders, businesspeople, merchants, and ordinary citizens—collectively shape the social space within the coffee shop. Even in the post-reform era, the production of space and discourse at Phoenam Coffee Shop has shifted from the sociocultural to the sociopolitical and economic spheres. Every member of the public is present and collectively shapes the social space of Phoenam Coffee Shop, transforming it into both a “space of politics” and the “politics of space.” As for the concept of “third space,” it is no longer relevant when some visitors to Phoenam Coffee Shop utilize this public space as a workspace, a place for socializing, a venue for networking, an art exhibition space, and even a site of political contestation. Nevertheless, Phoenam Coffee Shop continues to have its own distinct public, which places it somewhere between public and private space (Faisal et al., 2019).

Traditional coffee shops in Indonesia, such as Phoenam, frequently function as gender-exclusive domains within a strongly patriarchal cultural context. Within these spaces, repetitive and specialized group communication processes occur, establishing and sustaining specific social values, including gendered power structures. Consequently, it is imperative to analyze how localized public spaces like Phoenam represent and reproduce hegemonic masculinity. According to Raewyn (Demetriou, 2001) theory of hegemonic masculinity, masculinity is not a monolithic entity but a social construct that prioritizes certain masculine forms over others. This construction process is embedded in everyday social interactions, particularly in spaces like Phoenam, where male domination is manifested as a form of symbolic cultural representation. Furthermore, Stuart Hall posits that culture is a contested arena of meanings and ideologies; therefore, social spaces like Phoenam serve as critical sites for the negotiation of gender social identity (Hall, 1997).

Analyzing Phoenam as a local public space necessitates an engagement with Jürgen Habermas’s concept of public sphere (*Offentlichkeit*). In “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere” (Habermas, 1989), Habermas delineates the historical evolution of bourgeois public sphere in Western Europe amidst socio-political transformation. Habermas argues that the public sphere has undergone significant transformation since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the context of broader social and political changes. Habermas defines the public sphere as an “arena of social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed” (Habermas, 1974). Conceptually, this domain exists at the intersection of the private realm and public authority, establishing a sphere where individuals gather for critical rational discourse concerning public interests. While Habermas (Calhoun, 1992) conceptualizes the public sphere as an inclusive arena for rational deliberation, critics such as (Fraser, 1990; Mouffe, 1999) argue that these spaces is often practically exclusive. They contend that the idealized public sphere frequently overlooks inherent power dynamics and gender inequalities.

Research data shows that the patrons of Phoenam Coffee Shop are predominantly male rather than female. Women are rarely seen gathering in groups at this coffee shop. If women happen to be present in the coffee shop, there is a noticeable change in the men's communication style.

Within the framework of masculinity theory, hegemonic masculinity is distinguished from subordinate forms of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is not normal in a statistical sense—as only a minority may embody it but remains normative as the most socially celebrated configuration of masculinity. This construct compels other men to position themselves accordingly and ideologically legitimate the global subordination of women to men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Recently, more openly inclusive forms of masculinity have begun to emerge, although the influence of hegemonic masculinity remains quite strong in social life (Connor et al., 2021; Prayoga & Indriyany, 2026; Zielke et al., 2023)

Drawing from (Lefebvre, 1991), social space is viewed as a social product, wherein every mode of production reproduces its own distinct spatial spheres. Lefebvre further delineates that these spheres are not merely physical but are produced through social and symbolic practices. Consequently, public spaces like Phoenam Coffee Shop can be understood as forms of “social space” where power relations and identity production intersect. According to Lefebvre, as spatial is never neutral, it is constructed through social practices, discourses and power relations (Elden, 2007).

In the context of this research, Phoenam Coffee Shop transcends its function as a mere beverage provider, evolving into a social construct that establishes social space characterized by masculinity. The phenomenon of coffee shops as spaces of social interaction has been examined in previous studies. (Faisal et al., 2019) used Habermas's Public Sphere theory and an ethnographic approach to analyze coffee shops in Makassar (Mirza Ronda, 2019), in his dissertation, examined the relationship between social communication and democracy in the context of coffee shops. However, these studies do not specifically analyze how the coffee shops like Phoenam establishes and reproduces gender identity, particularly hegemonic masculinity.

This study aims to analyze how Phoenam Coffee Shop functions as a local public space that represents hegemonic masculinity. This research employs a theoretical approach that combines Habermas's concept of the public sphere, Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, and a feminist perspective. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute to academic discussions on public spaces, gender identity, and local culture in Indonesia. Specifically, this study aims to explore how masculinity is constructed and negotiated at the coffee shop. It also aims to analyze the cultural practices that reinforce the dominance of masculinity and to describe the forms of hegemonic masculinity present at Phoenam Coffee Shop.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of the observed social phenomenon under investigation. By prioritizing systematic and holistic analysis, this approach facilitates a comprehensive interpretation of factual data within its natural context. To answer the research questions, this study adopts a critical paradigm using various methods through triangulation. The use of triangulation is intended to enhance data validity and ensure a multidimensional understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

This research focuses on critical cultural analysis to examine cultural practices,

representations and ideologies in local public spaces. The fieldwork was conducted at multiple Phoenam Coffee Shop locations in Makassar, South Sulawesi, particularly specifically in Jampea and Panakukkang branches as well as at Phoenampungan Coffee Shop in Jakarta. The research subjects comprised the coffee shop's regular customers, owners or the management personnel. Furthermore, relevant secondary data were integrated to provide a robust foundation for the critical analysis.

The research employs critical ethnography as its primary methodological framework. As delineated by Creswell, critical ethnography is an approach focused on that describing and critiquing culture, specifically in relation to inequality and relations of domination within a community. This approach seeks to advocate for the emancipation of marginalized groups within a community. Consequently, a critical researchers typically aim to identify and challenge inequality and domination through their researches to promote social advocacy to (Sari et al., 2023).

Data collection was executed through three primary qualitative techniques. Firstly, participative observation was employed to examine daily activities and spatial dynamics; this involved the researcher's immersion as a customer to gain an emic perspective of the coffee shop's social environment during this research process. Secondly, unstructured in-depth interview were conducted to elicit nuanced viewpoints and the subjective meanings ascribed by customers of Phoenam Coffee Shop to masculinity and social role. Thirdly, visual documentations was compiled, including photographs, space sketches and field notes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Short history of the establishment of Phoenam Coffee Shop in Makassar

The establishment of Phoenam Coffee Shop was initiated by Liong Thay Hiong together with his two of his family members and his uncle, Prof. Dr. Tae Pen Liong. They founded the coffee shop in Makassar in 1946, a period when coffee establishments in the city were still scarce, particularly around the Makassar Port area. During this era, coffee consumption had already become an integral component of local social life. Men in Makassar typically congregated to enjoy coffee while engaging informal and relaxed discussion in groups. These discussions were predominantly conducted in the local dialect of Makassar and Bugis.

The name of "Phoenam" was specifically chosen by Liong for his newly established coffee shop. Initially, the name sounded unfamiliar for the local population, as it did not originate from indigenous languages such as Makassar or Bugis. Derived from Mandarin, The term "Pho Nam" —subsequently transliterated as "Phoenam"— literally translates to "terminal" or "a stopover in the south." Over time, the brand "Phoenam" gained significant prominence and eventually became into an integral component of Makassar's cultural identity.

Since its early establishment, Phoenam Coffee Shop in Jampea has evolved into a representation of Makassar's legendary coffee shop. The sphere is widely regarded as a symbol of the authentic coffee-drinking tradition embedded within the local community, with residents often referring to Phoenam Jampea as the 'original' Phoenam. For many residents, Phoenam Jampea transcends its status as a resilient, long-standing coffee shop; it is perceived as an integral component of the city's history and collective memory. Consequently, Phoenam Jampea functions not only as a temporal witness and a cultural heritage within the broader context of Makassar's

distinctive coffee-drinking culture.

For many customers, visiting Phoenam Coffee Shop evokes a profound sense of nostalgia as if revisiting “a fragment of the old Makassar story.” It offers more than just the distinctive aroma of traditional coffee; it provides a minimalist culinary experience accompanied by an atmosphere of communal solidarity among its customers. Consequently, it is not surprising that Phoenam Coffee Shop has become synonymous with its popular tagline of “coffee, toasted bread and discussion”.

The signature offering at Phoenam Coffee Shop is its traditional milk coffee, which can be served either hot or cold. Phoenam’s coffee is distinguished by a unique flavor profile, derived from a traditional brewing method. This process employs a specialized technique that has been passed down through generations within the coffee shop’s management. One defining characteristic of Phoenam’s coffee is its frothy surface which, at first glance, resembles pulled coffee or brewed coffee beverages found in other cities outside Makassar.

In addition to its signature coffee, Phoenam Coffee Shop is renowned for its traditional toasted bread. The bread is prepared using a traditional charcoal-toasting method and served with a rich house-made sarikaya (coconut egg jam) spread, giving the toasted bread its distinctive flavor. This proprietary jam is produced exclusively by the management of Phoenam Coffee Shop, utilizing a recipe passed down through generations. As an inherited culinary legacy, this offering represents a vital component of brand identity and cultural heritage of Phoenam Coffee Shop.

The classic interior, signature coffee offerings, and traditional toasted bread collectively constitute the distinctive characteristic of Phoenam Coffee Shop. Its calm and inclusive atmosphere has enabled Phoenam Coffee Shop to remain relevant across multiple generations, fostering a strong sense of attachment among local residents who continue to frequent the coffee shop to this day. The appeal of Phoenam does not derive from luxury or contemporary amenities, such as instagramable interior. Rather, Phoenam Coffee Shop maintains a simple and traditional concept, both in its main building or in its branches. Nevertheless, Phoenam Coffee Shop has successfully sustained its market presence and maintained its existence amidst the rapid proliferation of modern cafes and coffee shops in Makassar.

The architectural design and services model of Phoenam Coffee Shop, across all its branches, preserve the traditional hallmark that has defined the coffee shop since its inception. By consistently maintaining this vintage aesthetic, Phoenam Coffee Shop exerts a unique appeal, particularly to migrants from Makassar. For these migrants, the coffee shop often evokes a profound sense of the city’s familiar atmosphere, recreated through its characteristic ambiance and the distinctive flavor profile of its coffee milk. Consequently, Phoenam Coffee Shop functions not merely as a transient stopover but as a significant social space that facilitates nostalgic experiences and the preservation of collective memory for visitors. Within this space, visitors frequently reunite with old friends, engaging in informal conversations that reinforces communal bonds over a shared cup of coffee.

Visitors/Customers Characteristics and Gender Inequality

Until 2025, Phoenam Coffee Shop in Makassar remained a popular gathering place for individuals from diverse social backgrounds. Its visitors include office workers, both civil servants and private-sector employees, businesspeople, traders, and individuals from various other occupations. Although the majority of visitors are adult men, a

smaller number of young people, including students, also frequent the coffee shop. From morning until evening, Phoenam Coffee Shop is almost always filled with customers. The practice of drinking coffee at Phoenam Coffee Shop and other coffee shops, particularly in the morning or late afternoon, has developed into a strong social tradition among men in Makassar, including those of Chinese-Makassarese descent.

Based on field observations, visitors to Phoenam Coffee Shop are predominantly male. Repeated site visits indicate that female presence is limited; when women do visit the coffee shop, they are typically accompanied by male companions rather than attending independently. Groups composed exclusively of female friends are rarely observed. In many cases, women appear to attend primarily as companions to male visitors seeking Phoenam's signature coffee and toasted bread. Consequently, the proportion of female visitors at Phoenam Coffee Shop remains relatively small.

These findings are further supported by interview data collected from the owner and baristas of Phoenam Coffee Shop. According to these informants, the coffee shop's visitors are predominantly male, while female attendance remains relatively infrequent. The informants also observed that when women do visit, they usually arrive with male companions and tend to participate less actively in social interactions or conversations within the coffee shop environment.

A prominent characteristic of Phoenam Jampea Coffee Shop in Makassar and its various branches is its role as a primary gathering space for men. In this sense, the coffee shop can be viewed as the relatively exclusive social arena for men in Makassar. This phenomenon is closely intertwined linked to the deeply rooted patriarchal culture of South Sulawesi society. Within this setting, recurring patterns of group culture emerges, reinforcing social norms and values that sustain the structure of existing gender relations. Consequently, it becomes important to examine how local public spaces, such as Phoenam function as sites where forms of hegemonic masculinity are represented and reproduced within the broader social fabric of Makassar society.



Source: Researchers' Documentation

Figure 1 Male-dominated visitor groups of Phoenam Coffee Shop

Furthermore, interviews were conducted with several loyal visitors of Phoenam Coffee Shop to obtain deeper insights into visitor patterns. One informant emphasized the limited presence of female visitors, stating, "Women rarely visit the coffee shop. When they do, they are usually accompanied or invited by friends, and they do not stay long" (Informant 3). Another regular informant also expressed a similar observation, "This coffee shop often serves as a gathering space for men. Women may feel uncomfortable staying here" (Informant 4).

Based on the interview results, it is evident that Makassar or Chinese-Makassarese women demonstrate a considerably lower tendency to frequent Phoenam Coffee Shop. This phenomenon may be linked to the predominantly masculine atmosphere of the coffee shop, which seems to offer limited social space for women to participate in interaction that are largely dominated by male groups. Consequently, when women do visit Phoenam Coffee Shop to drink coffee, they generally do not remain for extended period, unlike their male counterparts.

The presence of women at Phoenam Coffee Shop is generally transient, as they rarely remain in the coffee shop for extended periods. Instead, women in Makassar tend to prefer modern coffee shops that provide a more comfortable environment for relaxation and peer discussion. Contemporary cafes, with their aesthetically pleasing and instagramable interior design are favored over traditional coffee shops like Phoenam Coffee Shop. This preference reflects the broader proliferation of modern coffee shops in Makassar City and other urban areas in South Sulawesi. These coffee shops cultivate a contemporary atmosphere that align more closely with the lifestyle preference and spatial expectation of modern urban women.

However, there are no formal provisions or explicit regulations designating Phoenam Coffee Shop as an exclusively male domain. Based on both field observations and interview data, the gender exclusivity observed at Phoenam Coffee Shop does not stem from official mandates, but rather collective perceptions and deeply ingrained social norms that have evolved over time. These findings underscore that local public spaces are not inherently inclusive; in certain context, social spheres such as coffee shops can reproduce gender inequalities that are culturally embedded and actively practiced within contemporary society.

Beyond gender-based observations, the visitors of Phoenam Coffee Shop represent a diverse range of social backgrounds. Data from field observations and interviews with informants indicate that the visitor base spans from various social strata, ranging from members of the general public to high-ranking government officials. Although Phoenam Coffee Shop was originally founded by Chinese-ethnic businessmen, it has gradually evolved into an integral component of Makassar's collective social identity.

Currently Phoenam Coffee Shop functions as a transient social space for coffee consumption that reflects the local culture of Makassar. At first glance, no visible restrictions based on ethnicity or social status are apparent within the coffee shop. Visitors of Chinese-Makassarese descents or local people from South Sulawesi interact without noticeable social barriers. To date, there have been no documented reports of inter-group conflict among visitors at Phoenam Coffee Shop. Most male visitors socialize within their respective groups, whereas those who arrive alone often engage in solitary activities, such as drinking coffee, smoking or using their handphones. In some cases, solitary visitors eventually encounter acquaintances or initiate new conversations with other visitors.

The atmosphere of Phoenam Coffee Shop remains closely aligned with its founding philosophy as "a transit terminal." This core philosophy partly explains why the owners of Phoenam Coffee Shop have refrained from making significant changes in response to the modernization of coffee shop culture. Instead, Phoenam Coffee Shop continues to uphold its traditional coffee-brewing methods, modest ambience and distinctive Makassar-style services. This consistent commitment to maintaining its original character has become a key factor that encourages visitors to return repeatedly to Phoenam Coffee Shop in Makassar.

Themes of Discussion and Discursive Practices at Phoenam Coffee Shop

Communication behavior within Phoenam Coffee Shop encompasses both verbal and non-verbal forms of interaction. Verbal communication is predominantly conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, often infused with Makassar dialect, although the use of local regional languages remains prevalent among certain visitors. Notably, this linguistic diversity does not engender conflict, nor does the heterogeneity of visitors in terms of ethnicity, religion, education background or economic status. This social cohesion is largely attributed to the shared objective among visitors, i.e. enjoying Phoenam's signature coffee and toasted bread while engaging in social discourse during their leisure time.

Visitors to Phoenam Coffee Shop engage with the space for a variety of multifaceted purposes. While some frequent the coffee shop primarily for coffee consumption and leisure, others utilize the vanue for reunions with long standing acquaintances or conducting professional meetings and substantive business discussion. Consequently, the themes of these conversations typically shifts in accordance with the specific situational context and the social dynamics of the individuals groups involved. While leisure-oriented visitors often initiate conversations on a light or informal topics, these interactions evolve into more rigorous and profound discussions as the social engagement deepens.

The data gathered from informants indicate a recurring set of themes in the discussion among male visitors. Conversely, establishing a thematic categorization for female visitors proven problematic due to significant methodological constraints. During the observation period, female presence was exceptionally rare, with the exception of the researchers themselves. On the few occasion when female visitors were present, their numbers remained relatively limited.

When visitors interact with colleagues, their discourse predominantly revolves around professional and employment-related issues. Conversely, when interactions among friends who are not coworkers tend to focus on business ventures and commercial activities. These patterns are substantiated by statement from several informants: "I frequently visit Phoenam Jampea to meet my friends and enjoy coffee together. As a man, the most common topics discussed here usually relate to employment and business" (Informant 1). This sentiment was echoed by Informant 2, "Phoenam serves a strategic meeting point with friends. The most frequent discussion topics include employment, business and politics with sessions often extending beyond one hour" (Informant 2).

Discourse concerning employment is a recurring theme among visitors, primarily because the majority of Phoenam's visitors consist of white-collar employees and businesspeople. Observations during morning hours reveal particular habitual patterns, especially among civil servants. They frequently visit Phoenam Coffee Shop for breakfast prior to commencing their official duties. Their professional identity is readily recognizable through the official uniforms they wear.

The majority of Phoenam's visitors are businesspeople or traders, a fact that reflects the historical social character of Makassar society as a prominent mercantile community. The trading profession remains a primary interest for most men in Makassar, often serving as a form of cultural inheritance passed down through generations. Furthermore, maritime and migratory activities—particularly among Bugis, Makassar and Mandar communities—constitute integral social characteristics of the people of South Sulawesi. These values has been sustained for centuries, shaped

by both geographical condition and local cultural tradition. Since the era of the local sultanates and the expansion of the spice trade routes, Bugis and Makassar people have been recognized as prolific inter-island traders, possessing a longstanding reputation for identifying economic opportunities and demonstrating resilience in business-risk taking.

Furthermore, the prevalence of traders and businesspeople among Phoenam's visitors reflects the historical social ethos of South Sulawesi, a region long recognized as a prominent mercantile society. Maritime activities, trade, and a culture of migration constitute defining characteristics of South Sulawesi's people, particularly Bugis, Makassar, and Mandar ethnic groups. These values have been entrenched for centuries, shaped by the region's strategic geographical position and its deeply rooted cultural traditions. Since the era of the local sultanates and the expansion of the spice trade routes, Bugis and Makassar people have established a legacy as prolific inter-island traders. Their historical reputation rests on a keen ability to identify economic opportunities and a cultural propensity for calculated risk-taking in commercial ventures.

During the football season—particularly during national competitions and major international tournaments such as the FIFA World Cup—discourses among visitors frequently pivot toward football. These discussions typically center on favorite clubs, prominent players, and match outcomes. Such conversations are characterized by high level of sociability, often punctuated by humor, friendly banter, and lighthearted contestation among visitors.

The atmosphere within Phoenam coffee shop intensifies significantly during matches involving PSM Makassar, the beloved South Sulawesi football club. The coffee shop serves as a primary venue for collective viewing, where visitors gather to experience the game's emotional peaks with their peers. This communal enthusiasm was highlighted by Informant 4 and 5, who noted, "When the football season commences, the atmosphere becomes consistently vibrant as everyone passionately supports their respective team".

The discourse surrounding football at Phoenam coffee shop functions as a social medium that constructs and reinforces masculine solidarity. Football is predominantly perceived as a component of masculine identity, despite the increasing participation of women in both the professional and fan spheres of the sport, including roles such as football commentators. During these conversations, nonverbal communication particularly paralanguage is distinctly observable, manifested through elevated vocal intonations, heightened emotional expressions, and vigorous open debates. Consequently, these sporting discussions transcend mere entertainment; they operate as a discursive social practice that fortifies communal solidarity and foster a sense of collective belonging among the male visitors.

This empirical situation aligns with the theoretical framework of (Elden, 2007), which posits that space is not merely physical but is actively produced through social and symbolic practices. In this context, public spaces like Phoenam coffee shop can be conceptualized as social spaces where power relations and identity formation particularly masculine identities are continuously negotiated.

Therefore, Phoenam Coffee Shop cannot be regarded as a neutral or passive environment; rather, it functions as a dynamic arena where social practices and discourses surrounding masculinity intersect, inadvertently cultivating internal power relations its visitors.

Discussion surrounding political issues constitute a recurring theme among

visitors from diverse social background, extending beyond those professionally affiliated with politics. Common topics of conversation include critiques of government policies, socioeconomic inequality and high-profile corruption cases. These political discussions are often characterized by elevated vocal volumes and high intonation, reflecting the distinctive communicative style of Makassar community. While visitors from different cultural backgrounds might perceive this style as a sign of rigorous or hostile debate, within the local context it is regarded as a normative element of everyday conversation.

Although the environment of Phoenam Coffee Shop ostensibly permits the free expression of opinions, certain individuals tend to dominate the discussion. While many visitors remain focused on expressing their personal viewpoints, others—particularly public figures recognized at both local and national levels—exert a significant influence over the conversation. The phenomenon reflects the paternalistic characteristics embedded within the social practices of Makassar community. Furthermore, such dominance is not solely reserved for individuals with formal status; it can also be exercised by those who employ elevated vocal volumes and project a high degree of self confidence. Such paralinguistic display often lead others to perceive these individuals as more authoritative.

This communicative dominance underscores how the discursive space within Phoenam Coffee Shop reproduces an informal social hierarchy among its male visitors. Opinions articulated with a firm and confident voice tend to garner greater legitimacy, effectively marginalizing more subdued voices. Such practice reinforces hegemonic masculinity, an ideological construct that equate male identity with rationality, assertiveness, and leadership.

From a critical ethnographic perspective, this communicative dominance represents a form of discursive power that reinforces the ideological construct of men as naturally more rational and qualified to lead public discourse, particularly regarding politics and government. Conversely, these dynamics implicitly marginalize, who are often stereotypically perceived as lacking the requisite capacity or knowledge in these domains.

Another significant finding is the emergence of gendered humor among groups of visitors, frequently revolving around sexuality or the objectification of women. While such humor is regarded normal within informal and relaxed communication, the humor—typically delivered in the Makassar dialect—functions as communication practice through which men position themselves in a dominant position within the interactional setting of Makassar community.

Nonetheless, such discursive behavior is not exclusively confined to male visitors; in certain contexts, women may engage in similar interactions within their own segregated social circles. Culturally, however, these practices are predominantly legitimized as a masculine prerogative. Informant 4 reinforced this sentiment, stating, "As men, our jokes often gravitate toward sexual themes; otherwise, it feels atypical, as these 'sexy' topics are inherently tied to our masculine identity". Furthermore, Informant 5 highlighted the restrictive impact of a mixed-gender environment, noting "When women are present, we cannot speak with the same level of freedom. Men's conversations are usually unstructured and highly fluid—transitioning abruptly from politics to business, punctuated by vulgar humor and boisterous laughter" (Informant 5).

The statements of the research informants regarding vulgarity suggest that the presence of women significantly modulates masculine communication style within these social spheres. While this behavioral shift may be conceptualized as a form of

sociolinguistic hesitation or 'spatial caution,' it can be interpreted as symbolic mechanism that indirectly marginalizes women from the male-dominated conversational space. Furthermore, the preference for exclusively male company suggests that the perceived social ease of these gatherings is contingent upon the absence of women.

Within the framework of hegemonic masculinity, the social environment at Phoenam Coffee Shop represent a profound expression of symbolic masculinity. From the perspective of critical ethnography, sexualized humor functions as a marker of masculinity, effectively consolidating the identity of male groups.

Nonetheless, the discussion surrounding sexuality within social spheres like Phoenam Coffee Shop should not be prematurely categorized as a singular form of domination that explicitly marginalizes women or renders the spaces inherently hostile toward them. Consequently, these preliminary findings necessitate further longitudinal or more granular research to fully decode the intricate social and gender dynamics occurring within the public space.

Representations of Hegemonic Masculinity in social activities at Phoenam Coffee Shop

Based on the results of the empirical data analysis gathered from field observations and in-depth interviews, it can be concluded that the vast majority of visitors and customers at Phoenam Coffee Shop are men particularly adult men. While female visitors are present, their representation number remains significantly marginal, both in terms of total numbers and the frequency of visit. Furthermore, women rarely frequent Phoenam Coffee Shop independently and in all-female groups, as they are usually accompanied by male friends or family members.

In the observed groups of visitors, researchers almost never see that women never participate actively in the discussions or conversations within the sphere. Instead, the female visitors typically adopt a passive stance, focusing on consuming the special menu of Phoenam Coffee Shop while engaging only in limited, private conversations. Notably, field observation revealed a stark contrast between Phoenam Coffee Shop and modern cafes; while women are often seen leading or actively participating in vibrant discussions in contemporary coffee shops, such active communicative engagement by women is virtually absent in Phoenam.

When evaluated through the conceptualization of the public sphere proposed by Jürgen Habermas, Phoenam Coffee Shop fulfills the fundamental criteria of a social discourse arena. However, when examined through a more critical regarding the inherent exclusivity of such public spaces, Phoenam Coffee Shop appears to functions as a public sphere characterized by significant gender exclusivity. In practice, it is a domain dominated by a specific demographic-namely, adult men within the social environment of Makassar.

Research data shows that certain themes emerge in conversations among visitors, particularly men, such as sociopolitical issues covered by the media, business discussions, and sports matches (soccer and badminton). Meanwhile, female visitors cannot be grouped by theme due to the small number of women who visit and engage in discussions with male visitors, except with friends who accompany them for coffee. "I most often stop by Phoenam Jampea to meet friends and have coffee together. Well, being men, the topics we talk about most often are either work or business. Political issues in Makassar and across the country are also frequently discussed," (informant 2).

“When it’s soccer season, it gets really rowdy. Everyone has their own favorite team,” (informants 4 and 5).

Discussions about soccer at the Phoenam coffee shop, for example, seem to serve as the primary medium for fostering masculine solidarity. Soccer has become a symbol of masculinity, even though many women also enjoy the sport and some have even become soccer commentators. In these discussions, nonverbal communication—such as paralanguage—is clearly evident; debates and taunts, delivered with loud voices and sharp intonations, are distinctive features. Conversations about soccer are no longer viewed merely as entertainment but have become a cultural ritual that fosters solidarity and a sense of camaraderie among men.

This atmosphere creates discomfort for female patrons at Phoenam Café; it is understood not merely as an individual issue, but as a consequence of the creation of a space steeped in the culture and values of masculinity. The small number of female patrons serves as concrete evidence of symbolic power, which does not require formal policies.

The research findings demonstrate that Phoenam Coffee Shop functions as a localized public sphere. While nominally inclusive and accessible to the general public, its socio-spatial dynamics are profoundly shaped by the distinct patriarchal culture of South Sulawesi. This regional patriarchy possesses unique characteristics that distinguish it from similar social structures in other regions of Indonesia. Therefore, Phoenam Coffee Shop transcends its primary function as a venue for relaxation, discussion and the consumption of traditional Makassar coffee; it operates as a dynamic social arena where interaction, discussion and everyday communication intersect. In the process, Phoenam Coffee Shop serves as a critical space for reproduction of hegemonic masculinity, effectively sustaining the patriarchal values that have remained deeply embedded in Makassar society for generations.

This is clearly evident in the fact that male patrons consistently dominate Phoenam Coffee Shop, while women are rarely seen there and never actively participate in group conversations at the shop. Another finding that reinforces this is that men hold the authority in conversations. During political discussions, for example, the individuals most often heard are those with specific identities, such as government officials, the educated (intellectuals), or those with greater economic means (businesspeople). They often speak loudly and dominate the conversation. This is what is known as a paternalistic social practice. A paternalistic culture is one that uses a vertical hierarchy as the fundamental basis for interpersonal relationships. People are expected to behave in accordance with their status and position in society (Firiyani & DR. Supartiningsih, 2017).

To this day, the public space of Phoenam Coffee Shop has successfully sustained its original character and atmosphere, resisting the pressure of modern commercialization. Despite the proliferation of contemporary coffee shops across South Sulawesi, Phoenam Coffee Shop remains resilient; its existence is not significantly threatened by modern competitors. This resilience can be attributed to the profound historical and cultural dimension embedded within Phoenam Coffee Shop, which has become an integral part of the collective memory of Makassar society. It is therefore not surprising that Phoenam Coffee Shop inspire several figures in Jakarta to recreate a similar social space through the establishment of Phoenampungan in Jakarta Pusat. This Jakarta-based vanue serves as a vital diasporic hub for Bugis and Makassar migrants, functioning as a communal gathering room, particularly for migrant community from South Sulawesi.

The Dynamics of gender-based power relations at Phoenam Coffee Shop

This section synthesizes the research findings derived from field observations and interviews with a multidimensional theoretical framework. The analysis is anchored in the theory of hegemonic masculinity proposed Raewyn Connell, the conceptualization of the public sphere proposed by Jürgen Habermas, and the theory of space production articulated by Henri Lefebvre. The study's findings indicate that the predominance of men as patrons at Phoenam coffee shops should not be viewed in terms of sheer numbers, but rather in terms of the patterns of interaction that have taken place there. They do not merely drink coffee, but also engage in other activities, such as smoking, exchanging ideas, negotiating the sale of goods or services, and so on. Men are more active in discussing politics, business, and soccer. They often use sexual humor as part of group interactions. Men with a certain status and position in South Sulawesi society tend to speak louder.

Communication practices such as these suggest that masculinity at Phoenam Coffee Shop is often demonstrated through the courage to speak up, the authority to set the topics of conversation, and efforts to gain recognition from other groups. Male individuals who are able to participate in these patterns will gain acceptance and a stronger position within the group. Within the framework of hegemonic masculinity theory, the norms that emerge actually function as social standards that determine how men are expected to behave in society (Bowie et al., 2022; Connor et al., 2021; Prayoga & Indriyany, 2026; River & Flood, 2021; Vickery, 2021).

These practices are not merely activities that take place within a space, but continuously imbue that space with a specific meaning. And when the same practices are repeated over time, they are eventually accepted by group members and passed down as customs. The Phoenam coffee shop is thus understood as a gathering place for men to express themselves, and this is considered a normal sight. From the perspective of Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, this situation indicates that the Phoenam space is not merely a location where social practices take place. Phoenam also becomes a space for the production of social practices. In other words, Phoenam becomes "masculine" because certain social practices are carried out, accepted, and ultimately normalized there.

These conditions make women feel uncomfortable staying for long periods at Phoenam Coffee Shop. Women in Makassar prefer the modern coffee shops or cafes that have been popping up all over the city. At Phoenam Coffee Shop, women feel they cannot speak freely or linger with their groups. Even when they do visit, it's often with male friends simply to enjoy Phoenam's signature coffee with its unique flavor. It's rare for women to visit Phoenam Coffee Shop alone.

Phoenam Coffee Shop serves not only as a reflection of local culture but also as a cultural instrument that unconsciously perpetuate patriarchal culture. The social space produced within the coffee shop illustrates how mundane, everyday interactions can cultivate values, norms, and gender hierarchies within society. Consequently, the ideal of a neutral public sphere proposed by Jürgen Habermas becomes contested when confronted with social realities deeply entrenched in cultural structures and power relations. In this regard, Phoenam Coffee Shop is best understood as localized public space, where local culture actively shapes gendered discourse and normalizes specific gender identities through daily social performance. Within the context of this research, this dynamic results in the symbolic exclusion of women in the social environment of Makassar.

Critical ethnographic research typically reveals systematic gender-based presence inequalities within social spheres, a phenomenon clearly evidenced in the visitor patterns at Phoenam Coffee Shop. Field observation results confirm a significant disparity in the number of female visitors with women's presence at the space remaining notably infrequent. Furthermore, women's engagement within this setting rarely occur independently; their presence is almost exclusively contingent upon the company of men. These male counterparts typically acting as friends, relatives, or immediately family members effectively serve as social conduits through which female gain access to the space in the social environment of Makassar.

This inequality is not explicitly articulated through formal regulations but rather manifests as a socially acceptable absence. Within this condition, women often feels uncomfortable visiting Phoenam Coffee Shop alone, particularly when their intention is merely to consume consume coffee and enjoy the signature served at Phoenam Coffee Shop. From a critical ethnographic perspective, women's discomfort at Phoenam Coffee Shop should not be interpreted as individual issues; rather, it reflects the broader impact of a socially produced space imbued with masculine culture and values.

The marginal representation of female visitors serves as concrete evidence of the operation of symbolic power within this social sphere. This form of symbolic power operates effectively without the need for formal regulations or explicit policies. Informants indicated that the scope and nature of discussions are often 'bordered' or self-censored in the presence of women, suggesting an implicit mechanism of social control. Within this framework, female presence is perceived as a restrictive factor that limits the freedom of masculine expression, particularly during moments of informal relaxation. Consequently, the relative absence of women is not merely coincidental outcome but is produced and gradually naturalized as the "ideal" social condition for this specific public sphere in Makassar.

Table 1 summary of research results

Discussion Themes	Description of discursive practices	Meaning	Theoretical Analysis in Cultural Study
Employment	Discussion about occupation, employment or position individuals hold in society.	Employment functions as a market of power and achieving social status.	Employment represents social status and serves as a means of gaining recognition and respect within masculine social structure
Football	Debates about football clubs, including joking and mocking each other, particularly during competition seasons	The production of solidarity and group affiliation among men	Football functions as a masculine ritual and symbolic arena of competition which hegemonic masculinity is expressed and negotiated
Politics	Open discussions often dominated by the loudest voices and the most self	The assertion of authority and rationality as	Public space is not neutral (Fraser); discursive

	confident participants	masculine traits	leadership is closely associated to masculinity
Economy and daily life	Discussions about on-going businesses, prices, business opportunities and everyday life experiences	The production of masculine identity as a wage earner and economic provider	Masculinity is constructed through economic responsibility, reflecting the norms of hegemonic masculinity
Jokes/sexuality	Vulgar humor, sexual jokes and the use of masculine body language in conversations.	A marker of masculinity and a means of reinforcing solidarity among men.	Humor functions as a technology of masculinity and a mechanism of symbolic exclusion towards women
Gender-based relations	Women are often discussed as objects and only rarely as subjects in conversations	Women are positioned as a “disturbance” within masculine spaces	The absence or marginalization of women strengthens patriarchal character of public space

Source: Author, 2025

CONCLUSION

Phoenam, as a local public space of massive scale and inclusivity, is closely embedded within the patriarchal cultural context that shapes social life in Makassar. Within this framework, Phoenam functions as an arena for the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. Through everyday social practice, this space actively produces, reproduces and negotiates the gender boundaries that operate within society. Consequently, Phoenam cannot be understood as a socially and culturally neutral public space. Rather, it is a social space that is continuously produced through gendered power relations embedded in the dynamics of social interaction.

The absence of women in Phoenam does not stem from formal regulations; rather, it operates through symbolic mechanism of exclusion manifested in language, humor and interactional norms. Women who are present in Phoenam tend to occupy marginal position —either as companion to male visitors or as a subjects whose presence is perceived as constraining the freedom of masculine expression. In this context, Phoenam functions as a public space that implicitly produces and sustains gender inequality.

As an ethnographic study conducted by a female researcher, this research positions the researcher as a constitutive element of knowledge production. Limited access, experience of embodied discomfort, and the positioning of the researcher as the “other” within a masculine space did not function as methodological obstacles; rather, they became an integral ethnographic data. The reflexivity reveals how patriarchal power relations operates substantively in shaping participation and defining the boundaries of authority within a local public space.

Phoenam represents a concrete arena for production, negotiation and normalization of hegemonic masculinity within everyday public space. It operates

through seemingly ordinary interaction practices while simultaneously generating and sustaining persistent ideological meanings.

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