

Stealing Women, Stealing Men: Co-creating Cultures of Polygamy in a Pesantren Community in Eastern Indonesia

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Abstract

The article examines how particular elements of Sasak society structurally facilitate a culture of polygamy in a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) which is managed by male Muslim teachers and preachers (*Tuan Guru*) who maintain a paradoxical position in society that implicates women in the co-creation of polygamy. By culturally situating Muslim women's experiences in wider Indonesian and local Sasak discursive contexts, and based on anthropological field research techniques, the article elucidates how Muslim women draw on a range of magical forces and prayers that they learn from their Muslim teachers in the *pesantren* in response to customary marriage laws of 'bride stealing' and orthodox Islam that enable the reproduction of polygamy on the island of Lombok in Eastern Indonesia.

Keywords: Indonesia, polygamy, pesantren

This article² examines how particular elements of Sasak society structurally facilitate a local culture of polygamy³ which Muslim women resist, embrace and co-create in different contexts in their daily lives on the island of Lombok in Eastern Indonesia. Cases of polygamy are high and are complex sites of conflict which structures founded on cultural integrations of Sasak customary law (*adat*) and orthodox Islam cultivate and maintain, particularly through traditional marriage practices of 'stealing' women (*kawin lari*) which in some cases can also translate as 'stealing' men. My data underscore a theory of structuration which evidences that women are born into pre-determined social structures of *adat*, particularly kinship and caste elements that perceivedly disempower them, and that within these structures are a range of Islamic and indigenous discourses, forces and latent powers that women draw on and bring alive as they grapple with their statuses at the intersection of gender, *adat*, and Islam in their society.

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³ The term polygamy refers to 'the practice of multiple marriage' and this broad meaning includes the practice of polyandry (when a woman has more than one husband) and polygyny (when a man has more than one wife). For the purposes of this article, I use the term 'polygamy' rather than 'polygyny' because in my field site locals employed the Indonesian term '*poligami*' (polygamy) to describe the practice and *madu* to refer to co-wives.

I demonstrate how Sasak Muslim women draw on a range of magical forces and prayers that they learn from their Muslim teachers in response to *adat* and orthodox Islam that enable the practice of polygamy as it is played out in a *pesantren*⁴ and its surrounding village community. In this *pesantren* community the reproduction of and resistance to polygamy occurs paradoxically: the Muslim men who manage Islamic discourses and promote polygamy at the same time teach women methods for resistance and self-protection against the troublesome practice. Particularly, Sasak women's lived experiences reflect Sherry Ortner's (2006) claim that the 'ambivalences and ambiguities of resistance ... emerge from the intricate web of articulations and disarticulations that always exist between dominant and dominated' (p. 62), a condition of domination which Pierre Bourdieu (2001) says 'perpetuates itself so easily ... and that the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural' (p. 1).

My analysis takes place in a *pesantren* that belongs to the *Nahdlatul Wathan* (NW) Islamic organisation in East Lombok where I conducted anthropological fieldwork during 2008-09 by using the traditional anthropological technique of participant-observation to collect my data. There is not yet substantial anthropological work on the NW *pesantren* in English, and although Indonesian male scholars continue to dominate research on the NW organisation, female researchers (foreign and Indonesian) to-date are lacking in published work on this. I was able to access with relative ease the personal worlds of Muslim preachers and students at the *pesantren* because my Sasak partner belongs to the NW organisation and his family live in the *pesantren* community.

My ethnography concentrates on the *pesantren* community because my informants were involved to various degrees with religious life there. The article begins by contextualising Islam and polygamy in Indonesia, orthodox Islam and marriage in Lombok, and then moves to an ethnographic description of the *pesantren* field site, before finally turning to my discussion of how women are involved in processes of co-creating polygamy.

Some notes on Islam, polygamy and formal discourse in Indonesia

In order to understand the choices Muslim Sasak women in the NW *pesantren* make about polygamy it is necessary to provide background knowledge of the wider discourses and historical forces that shape women's lived experiences in Indonesia. The Indonesian archipelago is situated in Southeast Asia. It is the largest Islamic nation in the world and although it is not an Islamic state, its population of approximately 220 million claims an Islamic majority of 90% (Blackburn *et al*, 2008). The majority of Indonesian Muslims follow the Shafi'i *mazhab* (school of Islamic thought) and can be described as 'moderate.' The ways in which Indonesian Muslims practise Islam differs across its numerous islands and ethnic groups, and is intricately enmeshed in local cultural and personal conditions (*ibid.*). There are around 300 ethnic groups in Indonesia and thus many varieties of Islam, each unique and specific to its local context. During the 1900s Indonesian Islam was practised as varieties of Sufism until the state institutionalisation of religion in the 1950s, and the 'Islamic revival' of the Muslim world in the 1970s consolidated Islamic orthodoxy in Indonesia when it became socially fashionable because

⁴ A *pesantren* is a traditional Islamic school and boarding house for the study of the Qur'an and classical Islamic texts. It is a traditional school in which students (usually) sit on the floor, along with the teacher, and wear an identifiably Islamic school uniform.

of its construction as a symbol of modernity, progression and development (Howell, 2001; Mulder, 1996).

Studies have shown that Muslim women in Indonesia enjoy relatively high levels of social and personal freedom in contrast to women in Middle Eastern countries (Bennett, 2005; Blackburn *et al*, 2008; Lev, 2001). The case of Indonesia's first female president, Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001-04), confirms the 'moderate' nature of Indonesian Islam and exemplifies that the majority of Indonesian Muslims do not problematise women's leadership in Islam, despite efforts by some Islamic parties to prevent Megawati achieving presidency based on claims that women cannot lead men (Blackburn *et al*, 2008, van Wichelen, 2006). The highly specific nature of Islamic cultural practice is central in determining the gendered experiences women have across Indonesia as they manoeuvre within their changing, 'modernizing' societies.

Feminist scholars have well documented the range of dominant formal gender discourses that Indonesian women have access to, most prominently those from the state, Islam, *adat*, and various alternative Western and Arabic as well as sexual discourses presented in and accessed through the media, especially the internet, television and film, radio and print media (Adeney, 2003; Bennett, 2005; Blackburn *et al*, 2008; Grace, 2004; Hatley, 1990; Murray, 2001; Sullivan, 2004; Suryakusuma, 1996). Dominant state, Islamic, and *adat* gender discourses construct women as mothers, wives and educators of children, and female sexuality is constructed in terms of reproductive function (Bennett, 2005). It is precisely these prescriptions that structure women's lived experiences as members of communal societies who are expected to prioritise marriage and motherhood (see Bennett 2005, Sullivan 1994).

State family planning and development programs have penetrated society to the village level, as have Islamic discourses, and it is at these localized junctures that women come into contact with dominant prescriptions for ideal femininity (as refined, shy, obedient, chaste) as they are reproduced through communal-based social formation. The force of these traditional gender discourses is most strongly applied to women in village societies where social surveillance remains part of the order of village life, particularly so in pious Islamic villages where social regulation of female behaviour and sexuality is anchored by Islamic frames of reference, such as the communities I examine in this article.

Processes of social and structural change as well as national development are ongoing processes that contribute to the changing patterns of women's lives. Linda Bennett's (2005) work on young women in Lombok has shown that as Indonesia modernizes and prioritizes higher education and a gender-balanced workforce, marriage is delayed therefore enabling women to have multiple partners. In response to this young women's lives and sexual identities change, noticeably so for those who move from village to city spaces for education or work purposes. This means that a woman's geographical location, family and work environment and level of education play roles in determining the extent to which discourses she has access to in her community.

Although the wider formal discourses with which women interact are the same across the Indonesian archipelago, the degree to which women understand, internalise, and interact with the discourses in their daily lives is anchored in their local conditions. The women with whom I lived in the orthodox Islamic *pesantren* in regional Lombok are situated in very different social conditions to those of Bennett's (2005) young female

Sasak informants in Lombok's modernizing capital city, Mataram. Young women with whom I lived in the *pesantren* experience tight social regulation of daily life and have limited access to competing discourses as a result of a combination of the force of Islam and *adat* in village social organization, poor economies, and inadequate infrastructure and telecommunications networks. Full-time *pesantren* students live a life dedicated to the study of the Qur'an and Islamic texts characterized by full-time study between *subuh* prayers at sunrise and *isya* prayers after sunset, sometimes finishing study with evening sermons at 10pm.⁵ By contrast, young women who live in modernizing city environments, like Bennett's informants, have access to competing influxes of knowledge and information with reasonable degrees of social autonomy and easier access to competing gender discourses.

Yet in both settings, and indeed across Indonesia and Muslim cultures worldwide, as Bennett has shown, young women's (and men's) behaviour and sexuality is constantly under social surveillance, but the degree to which this occurs is situational. The significant differences between Bennett's and my ethnographic locations suggest that our arguments will differ and yet will also be similar in particular contexts given that the wider social forces that shape female identity and behaviour are national.

Bennett (2005) explains that competing gender discourses on alternative expressions of female sexuality and desire that media and television programmes present are creating mixed messages about how to behave for young women in Mataram. The power of Islamic and *adat* discourses has translated into cultural practice through historical processes (as the next section details), making competing gender discourses sites of contestation. Sex practices outside of marriage in Indonesia are referred to as *seks bebas* (free sex) (for more on this see Bennett 2005; Murray 2001), and although *seks bebas* tends to be associated with perceived Western discourses about sex, it is explicitly constructed as Islamic *zina* (illicit or forbidden sex practices outside of marriage). The implications of committing *zina* in both village and city environments in Lombok are severely negative, most definitely damaging one's social image sometimes with violent punishment. Young women who transgress ideal notions of femininity by expressing alternative sexualities (or by committing *zina*) are dangerously constructed as 'nakal' (naughty) and 'kurang normal' (not normal) and acquire negative images in their village societies. The implications for men who commit *zina* are not nearly as severe as they are for women.

In pious *pesantren* villages in Lombok competing media discourses that present non-Islamic gender ideologies and alternative notions of female sexuality are constructed as 'other.' These discourses are acceptable for non-Muslim (*kafir*) 'others,' and although young women have degrees of access to such competing gender discourses this does not mean that all young women choose to accept them or are interested in understanding or exploring them. It is important that ('western') feminist analyses of Muslim women are not presumptuous and assume that all young Muslim women *want* to engage with competing gender discourses that provide them with alternative ways to express themselves and their sexualities.

These women are agentic and are capable of interpreting discourses in-line with their construction of self and community. Women with whom I lived in the *pesantren*

⁵ Not all *pesantren* students study full-time. A significant number attend on a part-time basis in combination with university or other higher education study.

did not have regular access to the internet and were exposed to alternative discourses through television and radio programs and through stories of returned migrant workers who bring in new discourses from other areas of Indonesia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations. They are aware of competing gender discourses and to varying degrees in response to these they consciously choose to live Muslim lives based on their understanding and practice of Islam.

Therefore it is clear that Islamic and *adat* discourses integrate most forcefully to shape feminine identities and statuses of women I present in this article, and a significant part of this gender discourse is the practice of polygamy, which is practised at a higher rate in Lombok and its eastern island neighbours compared to other areas in Indonesia (Nurmila, 2008). Although polygamy is not a popular practice in Indonesia compared to other Islamic countries (Nurmila, 2008), as it has a lower incidence than that of divorce, it remains a sensitive and well-debated issue due to the lingering threat of possibility that it has for Muslim women and it is a source of tension between state and Islamic law (Grace, 2004; Nurmila, 2008).

The 1974 marriage law restricted polygamy and instead promoted the production of nuclear families. In 1983 a new law brought about significant changes when the state regulated civil servants' relationships by requiring them to acquire permission from seniors for matters relating to marriage, polygamy and divorce (*ibid.*). Research showed that men and women continued to engage in polygamy placing further strain on the delicate relationship between state and Islamic law (Grace, 2004; Suryakusuma, 1996). In the post-Suharto era state gender ideologies and the prohibition of polygamy inactively enter the fields of discourse for young women with whom I lived at the *pesantren* (except for women married to state employees).⁶ The regulation of such discourse at the village level is overpowered by local custom whereby *adat* performs a far greater role in the social order and discourses of daily life.

If we look more closely at the role of *adat* (class and caste) in traditional pre-Islamic Javanese and Balinese Hindu aristocratic societies we find restrictions on women and the practice of polygamy among elites (Blackburn, 2004; Jennaway, 2000). The former ruling *bangsawan* aristocrats of Lombok also practised polygamy before the coming of Islam and like Indonesians more generally Sasak have a joke about women and polygamy: "There are some women who like polygamy: a second wife has no problem with it at all." Proportions of men consider it a status-building exercise to have more than one wife and even impoverished men can and do practise polygamy as ways to improve their economy.

This tells us that polygamy is not solely an Islamic practice but rather a cultural practice that plays a role in the functioning of particular patriarchal and paternalistic societies. As we shall see, the practice of polygamy and methods for its resistance is highly contextual and different cultural situations respond to state and religious discourses in particularised ways. It will become clear that women who transgress ideal female behaviour by committing *zina* are considered 'dangerous' and there is a link between *zina* and polygamy in the *pesantren* community because polygamy provides a way for married men to avoid *berzina* (committing *zina*) and in some case enables reconciliation of status for women who have transgressed sexual boundaries (and men

⁶ During the New Order regime the NW organization actively disseminated state gender ideologies and supported/implemented government family planning programs.

and women who commit *zina* can reconcile their status through monogamous marriage as well). The Lombok case illuminates a culture of polygamy that women co-create with their polygamist counterparts as they manoeuvre within village structures that perpetuate perceived male domination.

The intersection of status, Islam and *adat* in Sasak culture

The small island of Lombok lies to the east of the popular tourist haven Bali, but administratively it belongs to the *Nusa Tenggara Barat* (NTB) province together with the island of Sumbawa to its east. NTB is one of the poorer regions in Indonesia not only in terms of economy and infrastructure, but education and health too, which hinders access to alternative, competing discourses and therefore increasing the social regulation and consolidation of Islam in village communities. The Sasak are the dominant ethnic group in Lombok constituting approximately 95% of the population, almost all of whom are Muslim, and around 80% are agricultural farmers.⁷ Balinese Hindus, Chinese, Bugis, Arabs and other ethnic groups from the eastern islands make up the remainder of the population. There are many national Islamic organisations in Lombok but the majority of the Muslim population in Lombok belongs to NW and follows the Shafi'i *mazhab*.

The shaping of female identities and statuses in Lombok is part of an historical process that is central to the social formation of gender relations in the pious village societies that I examine in this article. Historical forces enmeshed with local culture contribute to the creation of structures which allocate a person's status in the social order, and are also ongoing manifestations of the discourses discussed in the previous section. Status in Lombok is relative, gender-neutral, and not-fixed in certain contexts. This is also the case in Java and other Southeast Asian cultures where a woman of high social status outranks a man of a lower social standing (Brenner 1998, Errington, 1990). In modernizing Lombok social indicators of status include traditional caste ranking, Islamic and spiritual piety, class, and lineage. Sub-variables that cut across these main indicators include level of education and notions of beauty and youth for women. These categories are not fixed or cemented truths but rather are fluid and can change and integrate depending on person, context and cultural content/relativity, yet in each encounter elements of Islam and *adat* are pertinent to social negotiations of status.

Islam and *adat* are dialectically integrated sets of belief systems, discourses, laws and social regulations that translate into lived experiences for those who live in societies that implement these systems. It is not feasible to isolate the two in an ethnographic study such as this (of a *pesantren*) as opposites or conflicting systems. Depending on particular social situations the two can be analysed differently (Karim, 1992; Setyawati, 2008), and it must be kept in mind that like Indonesian state law, Islam and *adat* also provide laws that regulate personal and social life. Therefore, there are three main social regulators in the lives of Sasak and at times these may clash, integrate or not relate (*ibid.*). The integration of these transpires into Sasak cultural praxis which enables access to a variety of discourses and practices in the formation of status.

The Islam and *adat* dynamic is informed by a history of evolution and change that continues to shape the reproduction of Sasak culture. The variation in women's lived experiences in Lombok reflects the heterogeneity of culture where Sasak *adat* traditions and languages differ across the island, largely due to Lombok's history of occupation and

⁷ NTB Census Statistics 2008

colonisation by Javanese, Bugis, Balinese, Japanese and the Dutch which impacted on culture in different ways in different areas through history. Islam plays a critical role in processes of cultural change, a process which Sasak have actively engaged in since the onset of orthodox Islam in the 1500s (Budiwanti, 2000; Lukman, 2002). Doctrinally, Islam is not compatible with the traditional Sasak caste system and played a crucial role in transforming Sasak society, gender relations and negotiations of status.

Processes of Islamisation contributed to the variation within cultural practice in different areas, most notably with the formation of two dominant Muslim groups: the *wetu telu* and the orthodox *waktu lima*, the former more visible in the north and central parts of Lombok (Cederroth 1996). *Wetu telu* practise a local Sasak Islam anchored by indigenous Sasak religion whereby praying occurs three times a day rather than *waktu lima* (five times) as stipulated by orthodox Islam (Avonius, 2006; Cederroth 1996). I do not discuss this here because my focus in this article is on the NW *pesantren* in East Lombok, where orthodox Islam became a strong and dominating force in the 1930s-40s with the formation of the NW organisation by locally hailed Sufi Saint, *Tuan Guru* Kiai Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid, popularly known as Maulana Syekh, who continued to lead the organisation until his death in 1997 (Hamdi & Smith, 2009; Mugni 2005).

Although Islam re-formed the social strata of society it created a new form of social hierarchy with the charismatic *Tuan Guru* replacing the prestige of the aristocratic *bangsawan* (Budiwanti, 2000). Muslim religious leaders in Lombok are called *Tuan Guru* and they wield massive social power in their communities (Cederroth 1996). Since achieving Independence from the Dutch they visibly turned to politics, and the current Governor of NTB is a *Tuan Guru*. *Tuan Guru* are highly prized in society for their knowledge of Islam which they acquire at Islamic schools in Mecca or other Arab nations where they study for several years. Lengthy education in Arab nations consolidates a *Tuan Guru*'s superior status in the *pesantren* therefore reforming meanings of status by attributing more value to notions of piety over caste and class. Lineage plays an important role in the shaping of status where children of important social figures (especially *Tuan Guru*) acquire higher social status, particularly so for daughters of *Tuan Guru* who possess a prized status and are intensely sought after by potential male suitors for forging kin alliances through marriage.

It becomes apparent that organised Islam in Lombok replaced the traditional caste system with another patriarchal system based on religious leadership, thus changing the way status is acquired and assessed. Traditional Sasak society was ruled by nobility/aristocrats who descended from the king and was ordered by a caste system, which also varies significantly across the island due to the effects of occupation and colonisation as stated earlier (Budiwanti 2000). The number of caste levels and sub-levels varies from area to area, but it is clear however that there are two main castes, that of the aristocrats (*menak* or *bangsawan*) and that of the commoners (*jajar karang*) (Lukman, 2002; Syakur, 2006). Since the Islamisation of Sasak culture the caste system no longer entirely determines social order or function and is thus ineffective in a broad social sense, but it still plays a role to varying degrees in cultural and personal life in contexts of ritual, especially marriage and language use during social interaction. We can therefore see that women have access to a range of historically situated discourses and practices to draw on as they negotiate their statuses. A woman's status determines the

kinds of life experiences she is exposed to and the choices she is able to make about her destiny.

Merarik/Metikah: Marriage Practices in East Lombok

Wider *adat* structures and Islamic discourses influence women's lives in different ways in specific places due to historical forces that have culturally formed the plurality of Sasak culture. In order to understand how these cultural elements structure women's experiences it is important to locate their social meanings in context. Here I contextualise the cultural integration of Islam and *adat* in the ongoing formulation of marriage practices. Marriage is a critical life-stage for Sasak in its formation of the family as the basic unit of social life and through marriage Sasak become appropriate members of a functioning and productive society. A woman's status as a fully-fledged member of society is first and foremost determined by marriage and motherhood. A mother maintains the highest status among women and a woman who never marries is considered abnormal (Bennett 2005, p.27, Hunter 1996), but within the wider society a woman's status is further consolidated by her caste rank, degree of piety, class position and kin relations (lineage). These variables negate a woman's social status as a member of the community and are anchored in a systemic integration of *adat* and Islam.

Caste continues to determine marriage patterns in rural and regional (and some) city areas, as inter-caste marriage is expensive for a man marrying a woman from a higher caste, and is detrimental for a woman's status because the act results in her disownment (*dibuang*) by her family for marrying into a lower caste. If she divorces her husband her family will reunite with her allowing her to re-claim her former status. A *bangsawan* male, however, is permitted to marry across castes but his ranking will decrease by one degree should he marry a woman from a lower caste (Syakur, 2006). Although Islam provided some relief from high bride-price payments and caste-level marriage restrictions based on the teaching that one should marry to enlighten oneself rather than to burden one's family (Budiwanti, 2000; Syakur, 2006), caste issues still play a role in pre-arranged marriages and exemplify the power of the family unit and kinship in controlling women's lives. The fluidity of status within the caste system allows for status-shifting and changing of identities which benefit and disadvantage women in particular contexts.

Status is rendered obsolete in cases where women transgress sexual boundaries ascribed by *adat* and Islam. In orthodox village communities such as the one this article examines sexual relations between unmarried men and women (*zina*) are banned. Punishment is severe and a woman's reputation is destroyed if caught, regardless of her caste ranking. My findings fit with Ruth Krulfeld's (1986) which suggest that women from orthodox mosque-based villages had more restrictions placed on them than in orthodox villages which were more 'market-oriented.' Jocelyn Grace's (2004) research showed that women from high caste families were more restricted in choosing marriage partners and that low caste women experienced more social freedoms generally, yet nowadays most Sasak women are free to choose their own husbands.

In traditional Sasak society endogamous marriage was preferred, usually pre-arranged between patri-parallel cousins (Budiwanti, 2000; Grace, 2004) and child marriage was common. Since the 1960s the force of these practices has lessened (Grace, 2004), and as a result of social change society now accepts exogamous marriages based

on the concepts of love and mutual attraction. Divorce is common and socially acceptable, as is polygamy; however the divorce rate is far higher than that of polygamy: serial marriage-divorce (*kawin-cerai*) has become a socially accepted practice.

The high rates of divorce in Lombok both advantage and disadvantage women, as in some cases a woman can be left destitute but unlike in other parts of Indonesia, her reputation and status is not entirely destroyed, as it is highly likely she will remarry because the culture encourages remarriage and polygamy.⁸ Unlike in other areas of Lombok, the villages in which I lived do not have *adat* fines for divorce. Marriage rituals are complex in Lombok and customs differ from area to area. In the villages I researched the marriage process begins with the traditional practice of *kawin lari* (*kawin curi* /*merarik memaling*), both for family-arranged and exogamous non-kin marriages.

Kawin lari

The Sasak are famous for the *adat* practice of *kawin lari*, which in anthropological accounts has been translated as ‘elopement’ or ‘runaway marriage’ which is marked by a man’s ‘theft’ of the woman he plans to marry (Bennett 2005; Budiwanti, 2000; Cederroth, 1983; Grace, 2004). *Kawin lari* practices are also performed in Bali and Sumbawa in culturally specific ways that differ. *Kawin lari* practices vary across Lombok indicating that data presented here may differ to those in other ethnographic accounts. Bennett (2005) examined the sexual symbology and mythology of *kawin lari* as practised in the modernizing city of Mataram and argues that “the interplay between sexual desire and danger is central to the sexual mythology of *kawin lari*, in which male desire is constructed as wild, unrestrained and inherently dangerous” (Bennett, 2005, p.96). In her analysis she presents unmarried women as “irresistible (yet passive) objects of male desire” by claiming that “in conventional interpretations of the dynamics of *kawin lari*, aggressive male sexuality is juxtaposed with the sanctity of female chastity” (ibid.). My data builds on Bennett’s by presenting alternative female sexual behaviour that suggests in some cases women are also active sexual predators of men and that *kawin lari* facilitates this in the co-creation of polygamy. Before I turn to an analysis of this, I provide an ethnographic glimpse at *kawin lari* as it was performed in my field site in East Lombok.

While it may be that some couples do elope in the ‘western sense’ as Bennett has described in her analysis (as pre-planned marriage), in my field site it was more common to maintain secrecy and perform the traditional ‘theft’ of the woman that locals refer to as ‘stealing’ (*kawin curi* or *merarik memaling*). A woman’s ‘abduction’ is a prestigious act for it implies she is ‘worthy goods’ and deserves to be stolen. The concept of requesting permission from a woman’s family is considered rude and disrespectful.

The Sasak refer to the act as ‘*mencuri*’ (to steal) and sometimes the woman is not aware that her husband-to-be has planned to steal her. The tradition of stealing the bride-to-be should always occur in the evening time, as there are *adat* fines for day-time thefts. Men usually bring a group of friends to assist and must avoid suspicion from the woman and her family. Some ‘stealings’ are pre-planned and others are not, but at the time of ‘stealing’ a man must inform the woman of his intent and if she opposes she is either

⁸ The high rate of Sasak youth migrating to Malaysia for labouring work also contributes to the high divorce and polygamy rates as many men take a second wife while abroad.

taken against her will or a conflict emerges between her male relatives and those of the man.

The woman is then kept in a secret/safe location so that her family do not know her whereabouts and are unable to find her, usually in the man's family house, but if her family knows of his house then he will put her in the house of a relative or friend. The family understands that she has been stolen when they realise her disappearance. Within a day or two (depending on conditions) *nyelabar* occurs whereby the man or a member of his family approaches the woman's family to arrange bride-price *adat* payments (*mas kawin* and *aji kerame*) which must be agreed on before the marriage can take place, on the grounds that the family agrees with the marriage. The man is responsible for all associated costs of the wedding, which is held in his house. Sasak women traditionally live in their husband's house and after one week or one month of marriage the husband's family and an abundance of friends visit the woman's family by foot to show respect with the *nyondol/nyongkol* ritual, a colourful and lively public parade along the streets showcasing traditional Sasak attire and local Sasak music.⁹

Philosophically 'stealing' practices romanticise women's valued position in Sasak society, but a perilous combination of male strategising and Islamic law allows exploitation of the practice and places a social strain on gender relationships which cuts across status, caste, class, notions of piety and lineage. Paradoxically, 'stealing' can protect women from dangerous, sexually aggressive men, as a stolen woman can be re-stolen, and women planning polygamy also benefit from being 'stolen,' as I detail shortly. I now turn to an ethnographic description of the *pesantren* community and examples of the complexities of women's lives as they intersect with *adat*, Islam and polygamy. I show how although the influence of caste has lessened in the *pesantren*, that traditional 'bride stealing' is still practised because it reinforces and allows for the reproduction of polygamy.

I also note here that is important I do not make general claims about the relationship between caste, marriage and Islam in the *pesantren* and surrounding villages because although caste did not play a forceful role in the life of the *pesantren*, many families continue to engage in the rules of caste ranking thus demonstrating the power of families in controlling women's decisions and lives. However it is very clear that 'bride stealing' practices have been maintained because in particular cases they facilitate polygamy.

Polygamy in the *pesantren* community

Zamakhsyari Dhofier (1982) has described the Indonesian *pesantren* institution as a type of 'kingdom' and the *kiai* (*Tuan Guru*) as its king. The NW 'kingdom' is a patriarchal institution that reinforces traditional gender ideologies about women and invalidates competing discourses on gender and sexuality, especially those from perceived 'western' sources, therefore reproducing statuses that value Islamic piety and *pesantren*-based kin relations over class and traditional *adat* variables such as caste rank. Young women with perceived beauty and piety who embody ideal femininity (refinement, shyness, obedience, chastity) are especially valued in this *pesantren* system.

⁹ Newly-wed couples from the same village do not usually perform *nyondol/nyongkol* because they already know each other's families and houses. Two nights or so after *nyondol/nyongkol* the bride's family will then visit the groom's family in a regular manner without a parade or music.

The NW *pesantren* community that I lived in is situated in a semi-regional area in East Lombok. This *pesantren* experienced conflict in 1998 after the death of its founder, Maulana Syeikh, however the condition stabilised several years thereafter (Hamdi & Smith, 2009). It is the largest *pesantren* in Lombok and the majority of students are non-local and have left their natal villages to board there. The *pesantren* is a centre of Islamic high-culture and the influence of the *Tuan Guru* teachers encompasses entire communities and government, not just the *pesantren* (Hamdi & Smith, 2009).

Maulana Syeikh's teachings and practices play important roles in the reproduction of the *pesantren* by reminding teachers and students of the struggle to spread Islam (*da'wah*) through the practice of polygamy, as he himself practised with a total of seven women, and by encouraging endogamous marriages between *pesantren* students. Muslims who belong to the NW organisation understand that their Saint is integral to the Islamic empowerment of Sasak women, especially because he was responsible for founding the first Islamic girls' school in the 1940s. *Tuan Guru* who belong to the NW organisation maintain the reproduction of polygamy either through discourse they teach in the *pesantren* or by preaching in villages. I make clear here that although significant numbers of *Tuan Guru* practise polygamy, certainly not all do.

As I have outlined throughout earlier sections in the article, in the *pesantren* Islam integrates aspects of *adat* that fit with its discourses and practices. But I have not yet discussed the role of indigenous practices of magic in the lived realities of women. In addition to preaching and teaching Islam *Tuan Guru* also manage access to alternative discourses such as prayers and magic that women employ as preventatives, resistance strategies or for self-protection in their daily lives. Male polygamists also use magic in their plight to acquire more wives or to hypnotise (with magic) first wives into accepting a co-wife. In this way *Tuan Guru* maintain a contradictory position in Sasak society that implicates women in the co-creation of polygamy.

Islamic and indigenous magic practices maintain special roles in Sasak culture for the function they serve in influencing social life and destinies of those seeking change (Bennett, 2005). Special persons with spiritual capital (*Tuan Guru* and other spiritualists) manage the world of magic which is perceived to embrace 'good' and 'evil' elements: Islamic magic is constructed as benevolent 'white' magic and most (but not all) indigenous magic is classified as sorcery or 'black' magic. Sasak, like Indonesians more broadly, most commonly employ magic in response to personal hardship, illness, sexual jealousy, acquiring wealth/beauty/success or seeking revenge (see Bennett, 2005). The emotional and mental hurts associated with polygamy are underlying factors that drive women to seek solace in the counsel of *Tuan Guru* as managers of Islamic magic practices. Male polygamists, on the other hand, are known to use sorcery and black magic in their acquirement of women they desire. Bennett (2005) argues that young women are constructed as easy targets of black magic attacks by sexually jealous men and further examines "the unique potential of indigenous sexual scripts for manipulation and resistance by young women who choose to exercise their sexual autonomy" (p.84). In my field site men and women also draw on a range of indigenous magical practices to manipulate their lives and in doing demonstrate the important function of magic in their complex negotiations of polygamy in a highly regulated society.

Poligami in context

In this section I detail ethnographically the lived experiences of a cross-section of women who embrace, resist, avoid, challenge and reject polygamy in different situations contextualised by pre- and non-determined structures in their society. The women, aged 18-45 years, live in the *pesantren* and its surrounding villages and represent a variety of class and caste groups and occupy social positions as farmers, housewives, students, traders and school teachers, from low and high caste families. Their stories are situated within the historical forces and formal discourses discussed earlier in the article and indicate that a complex mix of notions of status, transgressions, and *kawin lari* play critical roles in the kinds of experiences the women have.

Stealing women's men

The case of *Tuan Guru* Malik's (aged 48) polygamous marriage to his first wife Shaheda (aged 45) and his second wife Ipa (aged 19) reveals the complexities of status, sexual transgression and emotional trauma involved in the cultural practice of polygamy. Despite that *Tuan Guru* Malik is married to Shaheda and has five children (aged 21, 18, 16, 7 and 5) his superior status in the community as a teacher and preacher makes him a target of young female desire in the acquisition of status. Following in the footsteps of his younger brother and other men in the *pesantren* community, in 2002 Malik had urges to marry another woman. His desired target was a *pesantren* student Ipa, his daughter's 'beautiful' 19 year-old friend from a low class, commoner family.

The attraction intensified when Ipa visited him one night to seek his help in curing her from supposed illness (some *Tuan Guru* are considered to have healing powers). Clearly Ipa responded to Malik's signs of desire and after a brief, secretive dating period, Malik 'stole' Ipa. In this case Ipa agreed to the 'theft,' an agreement endorsed by her family who was motivated by external social factors that would bring them renewed status, confirmed piety, and a secure economy.

Shaheda knew nothing of Malik's plans to marry Ipa until a day before the wedding. In a public display Shaheda caused a violent scene at the wedding and threw a bar of soap at her husband and screamed, "Are women worth nothing at all?" Local women in the *pesantren* community empathised with Shaheda, especially when she began showing signs of severe depression and panic attacks. Local women told me that after the wedding Shaheda would walk the streets at night talking to herself and would disappear for weeks on end. Neighbouring family women stepped in to take care of the children. Shaheda became underweight and unhealthy.

Malik built a new house for Ipa up the road from his and Shaheda's house, which made it very difficult for Ipa to fit into her new community. Malik continues to live full-time with Ipa and visits Shaheda and the children once a week for no more than an hour, only to give them money. Village women referred to Ipa as a 'whore' and a woman without morals. The effects on Shaheda's and Malik's children are profound. The two eldest children, both girls, are still grappling with the negative effects of polygamy. Their father is a highly prized *Tuan Guru* who teaches that polygamy serves a greater purpose for strengthening Islam and that women who can accept polygamy will earn a special place in heaven. The blame is shifted to Shaheda as a first wife, who is said to lack the qualities of a 'good Muslim wife.' The girls and their mother are struggling within themselves to be 'good Muslim women' by learning to accept polygamy, but there

is something deep inside that tells them that what happened is simply wrong. Having achieved the ability to listen to their own personal truths, the women use Islamic prayer for comfort and strength and this has given them the power to continue living as a family headed by a mother and her female-kin, all of whom abhor polygamy.

Although *Tuan Guru* Malik has high social status in the community, at a personal and private level some (but not all) village women and men harbour disrespect for him because of the betrayal he has served his family. Interestingly, young male and female students with whom I spoke at the *pesantren* told me that only a minority would choose polygamy because they have witnessed the negative effects the practice has on mothers and children, and many of these students are children from polygamous marriages. They explained that in reality only a Saint (like their Saint Maulana Syekh) and the Prophet are able to justly perform polygamy in accordance with the requirements in the Qur'an: ordinary men are not Saints or Prophets and should therefore not even attempt to practise polygamy.

The *Tuan Guru* also teach discourses in the *pesantren* about ways to prevent (future) husbands from taking co-wives: women should always keep themselves groomed, act with servitude, and learn to pray perfectly. Paradoxically, discourses on how to avoid polygamy co-exist with the social acceptance of young female students' attempts to win attention of married and unmarried *Tuan Guru*, with the intent of marrying to acquire high social status in physical life and the afterlife (*akhirat*). These young women are threats to ordinary women and especially to first wives of *Tuan Guru* because they transgress ideal notions of passive, docile female sexuality by expressing aggression in their pursuit of status. Yet there is a paradoxical (mis)understanding about the relationship between gender, piety and status: although these young female students feel that they acquire a high social status by marriage to a *Tuan Guru* (any wife of a *Tuan Guru* naturally acquires higher degrees of social status), most female members of society abhor these 'dangerous' women who 'steal' other women's husbands, as we saw by the hatred Shaheda's village friends expressed for Ipa. Young women who 'steal' prestigious men negotiate between Islamic discourses on polygamy which stipulate heavenly rewards in the afterlife, and earthly challenges of economy, status-building and forging kin alliances to improve familial statuses. By contrast, the majority of men in polygamous marriages do not meet the requirements for polygamy as outlined in the Qur'an. Society is aware of this but says nothing and there is no 'religious policing' that protects women from exploitative *Tuan Guru*. Hence the reproduction of a culture of polygamy co-created by women.

Stolen Zira

Zira's parents knew she had been stolen when she didn't return home one evening in September 2007. They had heard rumours around the village that Zira (aged 21) had been seeing an unknown man from central Lombok. After 2 days, the brother of the man who had stolen Zira went to her village to inform her family (*nyelabar*). Zira is a high caste girl from a high class family of land owners who did not want her to marry a low caste stranger from another village. With little information her male kin set out in search of her in a borrowed van. They eventually found Zira in the man's house. After investigating the identity of this man, her male kin discovered that he had been married three times and has several children. Her family demanded that he return Zira to them.

He refused. Over a two week period the two families negotiated and fought and eventually Zira's family reported the incident to the religious affairs authorities but unfortunately it was unresolved.

In the meantime, Zira's brother who is a student of Islamic law at a university in Egypt flew home to help his little sister. He created a plan to save her: he reasoned that according to Islamic law, in dire situations a family can marry a daughter in her absence if it is of benefit to the girl. The family agreed to this and in her absence, and without her permission, Zira was married to her cousin, a high caste male from her village. This way, any marriage between Zira and her central Lombok capturer would be deemed illegal. Zira's male kin, along with the police, went immediately to her location and presented the marriage certificate with the intention of bringing Zira home. The man's family was inept to argue against Zira's well-educated brother, whose status was almost that of a *Tuan Guru*. At this point Zira declared love for this man and refused to return home. Her male kin suspected the man had used magic to disillusion her and after a struggle and police involvement the issue was settled and Zira returned home to her family.

Zira did not want to marry her cousin and has since then requested a divorce many times, a request her cousin will not grant her. Zira's method for resistance is to live separately from her husband and to never be seen with him. If she does this for long enough she hopes he will divorce her. The most recent information I received is that Zira's husband has a new girlfriend, which could lead to either divorce or polygamy. One method that women in Zira's position employ so that their husbands divorce them is to become unattractive, disrespectful and rude so that the husband cannot stand to be near them, and many use magic from *Tuan Guru* that causes the husband to fall in love with another woman or simply request divorce. In Zira's case it is unlikely that the family will intervene to support her because they arranged the marriage and have a social responsibility to maintain it.

Zira's story demonstrates the structural powerlessness of women in the *adat* marriage system and the power of Islam when a *Tuan Guru* manages marriages. There is a clear facilitation for men to perform polygamous marriages by 'stealing' women, and the social effects of this are detrimental for high caste groups because women are central to the high caste reproduction of the family and particular kinship patterns, a position Sven Cederroth (1983) describes as 'potentially dangerous' (p. 166). Zira's abduction allowed for the possibility of polygamy, saving her, and then marrying her to her cousin: a combination of the forces of orthodox Islam, *adat* and caste situated within a family context in which Zira's womanhood was central to its reproduction.

She who is hunted

Hawa (aged 26) lives at home with her parents and three siblings in a bamboo farm house on the side of a river, not far from the *pesantren*. The family is low caste and Hawa's parents are low class farmers struggling to survive, although since Hawa's recent graduation from the *pesantren* and a private university the family has accrued slightly higher status because of her position as a part-time primary school teacher. Yet Hawa's negative image in the *pesantren* and surrounding communities has significantly damaged the family's reputation. Hawa is referred to as a *selak* (a derogatory term that refers to a mythical part human/part animal that flies in the mid of night in search of baby's blood).

This 'dangerous' social image was formed in response to Hawa's sexually aggressive behaviour and *berzina* with an older, married man (aged 40) who works at the *pesantren*.

It is unclear how this relationship was initiated as Hawa and her friends told me different pieces of information, all of which suggested that the relationship was transaction-based and that Hawa received expensive clothes and gifts from the staff member in return for sexual favours, which led to her becoming pregnant out of wedlock. She had an abortion (with a *dukun* – local healer) and although she did her best to hide it, her female friends knew because of excessive bleeding and her inability to hide her agonizing pain. When Hawa became pregnant to this same man for the second time, five years later, she decided to marry. In this case, *kawin curi* was pre-planned and enabled Hawa to hide her illegitimate pregnancy by concealing an immediate marriage without the knowledge of her husband's first wife and children who lived in a village some distance from the *pesantren*.

At the time of their marriage, her husband had divorced his first wife. But after just one month of marriage, without Hawa's permission, he remarried his first wife. With this, Hawa became a first and second wife at the same time. Hawa had a miscarriage shortly after their wedding. When his former first wife discovered his marriage to Hawa she became obsessed with identifying Hawa and would look for her at the *pesantren* on a daily basis. This continued and eventually the first wife got hold of Hawa's mobile phone number and then her children started threatening Hawa by text messaging and making abusive phone calls. Hawa told me that she felt 'hunted' (*diburu*) and was afraid to travel too far from home. She told me that her husband promised her he would divorce his first wife again, but until now he has not done so.

As a self-protection strategy Hawa started using her negative, 'dangerous' image as a *selak* to threaten her husband's family. She threatened to attack them in the middle of the night and kill them with black magic. This seemed to have the desired effect as the family toned down their threats and Hawa's husband began sleeping at her house and rarely went to visit his other family. To medicate herself Hawa uses Islamic prayers and mantras that she learned from *Tuan Guru* Malik who she turned to for help in warding off her co-wife. Hawa told me that *Tuan Guru* Malik, himself a polygamist, advised her that if she can survive polygamy she will receive great benefits, including financial ones from her husband. She told me that this knowledge helps her and she recites the prayers and mantras after completing each *solat* prayer so that she feels closer to God. She disagrees with polygamy and told me that her husband will not divorce her so her only method now is to continue using black magic to protect herself from attacks by his family.

Hawa's case demonstrates that *Tuan Guru* manage the cultural reproduction of polygamy and that women are active in co-creating its maintenance in cases where they choose to commit *zina* in response to structural hardships. Motivations for such transgressions are rooted in efforts to build family economy and social status. It further indicates that 'dangerous' women who transgress normative prescriptions of ideal feminine behaviour through *zina* suffer negative consequences in society and that polygamy enables a way for them to reconcile their statuses through legitimate marriage (facilitated by *kawin lari*).

Hassanah and Nuri

At the time I began my research Hassanah, a 45 year old unmarried woman, was happy with her single life, although she professed to me that she would like to marry. She owned a small shop in the *pesantren* community and lived there alone. Somewhat of an outcast in the village, Hassanah was undesirable to men and behind her back they used derogatory language to describe her physical appearance. During the course of my research Hassanah started dating a man 25 years younger than herself. She bought him a motorbike, cooked for him, and gave him money, which the wider community interpreted as inappropriate based on the assumption that he was using her to improve his economy. The relationship became problematic when Hassanah's boyfriend's *midang* practices became too regular, arousing suspicion of possible *zina*. *Midang* is a traditional courting practice, where in the evening young men sometimes with their close friends visit their desired woman, or girlfriend. Because Hassanah lives alone there was no parental supervision which intensified the social threat of pre-marital sex and after several months of gossip the social impact of their relationship exploded in violence when local youths attacked Hassanah's shop. In response *Tuan Guru* Malik and another high profile *Tuan Guru* instructed that they marry. Unplanned, Hassanah's boyfriend stole her one evening and without hesitation she married him three days later. She was elated that she had been stolen because marriage would consolidate her status in society as a (married) woman.

Although Hassanah was somewhat of an outcast in the village she had a particular spiritual status due to her familial lineage: her late father was a *Tuan Guru* famous for his spiritual powers and it was apparent that these powers had passed onto her. In their constructions of Hassanah villagers claimed that she manipulated her husband into attraction and marriage by her spiritual ability to perform magic and create a false aura of beauty for herself. For villagers this was a rational explanation that could explain this strange phenomenon that produced marriage between an old, barren woman and a young fertile man. Just two days after the wedding gossip circulated the village to effect that her husband had plans to marry a young fertile woman, but this did not (and has not) eventuate, reinforcing Hassanah's magical manipulation of her husband.

Hassanah's friend Nuri (aged 36) occupies a paradoxical status in the village. She is low caste, low class, unmarried, is blind in one eye, and works as a part-time chilli farmer. Nuri lives alone in an incomplete, small part-bamboo part-brick house she built herself beside her father's house. She believes that her disability is a blessing in disguise, as it keeps men away from her. Nuri respects that some older unmarried women embrace polygamy because it provides them with confirmed social status and an enhanced economy, and although she has had several offers to be a co-wife of impoverished low caste men in her village, she always refuses because she perceives that men ruin society with polygamy. She declared that she lives for Allah alone and she only thinks about the afterlife. As a Sufi, she does not want to waste her time on materialism, men or children when she can recite Allah's 99 names and pray to Him to advance her soul. Nuri's piety and asceticism earned her a particular social status as a pious woman with spiritual abilities. This benefited her as by the time I had finished my research Nuri was teaching over 70 children how to read the Qur'an on a weekly basis.

Hassanah and Nuri's ability to avoid polygamy is in part because of their ability to master Islam in ways that benefit them spiritually. Hassanah's spiritual status is pre-determined by her lineage and Nuri acquired her status through dedication to Islam. Like

the other women I have presented here, Hassanah and Nuri also use Islamic magic and prayers that they learn from *Tuan Guru* but their ability to apply them is what determines their skill and success. More broadly, the women do not have family or caste restrictions placed upon them like Zira, and did not choose to engage in economic or status enhancing relations ('stealing men') with *pesantren* staff and *Tuan Guru* like Hawa and Ipa. The role of beauty is also important to consider here because Hassanah and Nuri were socially constructed as unattractive. Importantly, women who oppose polygamy told me that they do not believe they earn special status in heaven if they can accept polygamy, unlike many female *pesantren* students who believe this to be true. This tells us that women challenge the Islamic discourses taught by *Tuan Guru*.

Concluding remarks

Polygamy is practised for different reasons in different contexts and it is the structural and cultural conditions of such contexts that allow the reproduction of a culture of polygamy. The social power of the *Tuan Guru* contributes to reproducing polygamy through discourse and practice and the use of 'bride stealing' practices also facilitates polygamy and is advantageous to men and also women in some cases. The women's cases demonstrate that women across caste groups can be and are drawn into polygamy either through *adat* 'stealing' practices in the wider village or by choice, and that clearly polygamy benefits particular groups of women in terms of building economy and status through forging kin alliances with *Tuan Guru* and acquiring acknowledgement in the afterlife.

I have further argued that polygamy provides a way to avoid sexual transgression (*berzina*) and in cases where women have transgressed ideal prescriptions of female chastity by committing the 'dangerous' act of *zina* with married men, polygamy functions to reconcile their social status through marriage and that *kawin lari* facilitates a fast and socially legitimate marriage.

The cases substantiate Bourdieu's (2001) point that gender construction is always a social variable which carries different meanings for different groups of women contextualised by ethnicity, class, education, religious status, age, social grouping and so on. This point is explicit in the Sasak construction of gender which is dependable on one's rank within the traditional caste system yet which is overpowered by Islam in certain contexts such as the *pesantren*.

I have demonstrated that women are aware of dominant Islamic and local cultural and familial discourses that privilege men in the Sasak-Islamic marriage institution and how in doing so they draw on a variety of Islamic magical forces and prayers made available to them by *Tuan Guru*, as well as indigenous Sasak magic practices, to resist and in some cases embrace forms of male dominance in practice. As managers of Islamic discourse *Tuan Guru* play a pivotal role in the reproduction of polygamy which Sasak culture has come to mask as natural where women as 'dominateri' creatively use discourses and practices from their dominators in resistance and co-creation processes.

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