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

By Bianca J. Smith¹

Abstract

This article explores how the practice of polygamy is maintained in a Sasak *pesantren* (a traditional Islamic boarding school for the study of the Qur'an, Hadith and classical texts) in Lombok, eastern Indonesia. *Pesantren* are patriarchal institutions that are managed by male Muslim teachers and preachers known in Lombok as *tuan guru*. I demonstrate how *tuan guru* play critical roles in the reproduction of polygamy in Sasak society by implicating women in the co-creation of polygamous marriage and simultaneously teaching strategies for resisting it. By situating Muslim women's experiences in wider Indonesian and local Sasak discursive contexts, and based on anthropological field research, the article explores how Muslim women draw on a range of magical forces and prayers that they learn from *tuan guru* in the *pesantren* to resist, embrace and co-create customary marriage laws of "bride stealing" (*kawin curi*) and orthodox Islamic teachings about polygamy.

Key Words: Indonesia, Polygamy, Pesantren

This article² examines the ways in which polygamy³ is maintained in a Sasak *pesantren* (a traditional Islamic boarding school for the study of the Qur'an, Hadith and classical texts) in Lombok, eastern Indonesia. It explores how Muslim women resist, embrace, and co-create polygamy across a range of contexts. Polygamy is a popular practice in Lombok and is a complex site of conflict maintained by cultural integrations of Sasak customary law (*adat*) and Islamic teachings. I explore aspects of women's agency in the traditional marriage practice of elopement (*kawin lari*) which, in some parts of Lombok, is also referred to as a male act of bride stealing or capture (*kawin curi*). Departing from dominant accounts of Sasak elopement practices, I emphasize the need to distinguish between elopement and bride theft as situational,

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³ The term polygamy refers to the practice of multiple marriage. The broad meaning of polygamy includes the practice of polyandry (when a woman is married to more than one man) and polygyny (when a man is married to more than one woman). In 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. They used the term *madu* to refer to co-wives.

and, in doing so, I present an alternative interpretation that situates the practices in the context of polygamy.

My interpretations indicate that *kawin curi* does not only refer to male acts of “stealing” women but also translates into acts of women “stealing” other women’s men in the context of women who willingly embrace polygamy as co-wives. My arguments about varieties of marriage “stealing” practices are anchored by data that show how women are born into pre-determined social structures founded on *adat*, particularly kinship and *kasta*⁴ elements that perceivably disempower them, and that within these structures are a range of Islamic and indigenous discourses, social 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.

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 Islamic teachings that encourage the practice of polygamy as it is played out in the *pesantren* and its surrounding village community. In this *pesantren* community, the reproduction of and resistance to polygamy occur somewhat paradoxically: the Muslim men who manage Islamic discourses and promote polygamy at the same time teach women methods for resistance and self-protection against it. Women’s experiences with polygamy can be situated in 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). Ortner’s understanding of resistance can be located in 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 concerns a *pesantren* belonging to the Nahdlatul Wathan (NW) Islamic organization in East Lombok, where I conducted anthropological fieldwork from 2008 to 2009. Very little anthropological work in English has explored the NW organization and its *pesantren* network. The article begins by contextualizing Islam and polygamy in Indonesia and marriage practices 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.

⁴ My use of *kasta* is an Indonesian adaptation of “caste” that scholars and ordinary Indonesians often use to refer to hereditary, ascribed social rank. I use *kasta* to refer to hereditary social rank (as ascribed) in East Lombok as distinct from class (as achieved). I do not intend to relate the use of *kasta* in Lombok to Hindu caste systems in Bali or India. Sasak do not appear to have a term to refer to the social rank system in general but rather use emic terms and titles to refer to persons of different ranks. Traditional Sasak feudal society was ruled by a nobility which consisted of several levels of aristocrats, who descended from the king, and was ordered by an ascribed social rank system that varied across the island (Budiwanti, 2000). Some scholars (Van Der Kraan, 1980) have described this system as “class-based,” but I prefer to use the Indonesian term *kasta* in order to place emphasis on the hereditary ascription of rank. Although the number of *kasta* ranks formerly ranged in number from area to area, in contemporary society there are two main ranks: the aristocrats (*menak/perwangsa* or *bangsawan*) and the commoners (*jajar karang*) (Lukman, 2002; Syakur, 2006). According to Alfons Van Der Kraan (1980), the Sasak of East Lombok formerly recognized three more “class” groups within the aristocracy: Raden, Mamiq and Lalu. He also noted that in East Lombok two other “classes” formerly existed: free peasants (*kaula*) and serfs (*panjak*) (ibid.). In contemporary East Lombok, the titles *Mamiq* and *Lalu* are still used to refer to married and unmarried *bangsawan* males respectively (but a *Mamiq* has more status). The title *Baiq* refers to a woman (married or unmarried) from a high *kasta* rank. Although *kasta* no longer plays a significant role in contemporary social life, there are some exceptions; the major one being for marriage negotiations between aristocrats and commoners, as I discuss later. It must also be noted that in the post-Suharto era, *bangsawan* families have regained political power in some areas (see Hamdi & Smith, 2012).

Islam, Polygamy and Formal Discourse in Indonesia

In order to understand the choices Sasak Muslim women in the NW *pesantren* make about polygamy, it is necessary to provide background knowledge about 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 Muslim majority nation in the world with a population of approximately 240 million (Vickers, 2013). The majority of Indonesian Muslims follow the Shafi'i school of Islamic law and can be described as moderate. The ways in which Indonesian Muslims practise Islam differs across its numerous islands and 300 ethnic groups, enmeshing with local culture. Indonesian Islam was generally practised as unorganized, informal Sufism until the state institutionalization of religion in the 1950s (Howell, 2001). The global Islamic revival in the 1970s consolidated Islamic orthodoxy in Indonesia when it became socially fashionable as a symbol of modernity, progress 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 with women in Middle Eastern countries (Bennett, 2005; Blackburn *et al.*, 2008; Lev, 1996). 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 problematize women's leadership in Islam, despite efforts by some conservative and fundamentalist Islamic parties to prevent Megawati from acquiring the presidency based on claims that women cannot be leaders of men in Islam (see van Doorn-Harder, 2002; van Wichelen, 2006). The specific context of Islamic practice is central in determining the gendered experiences women have across Indonesia as they manoeuvre within their changing, modernizing societies.

Feminist scholars have documented the range of dominant formal gender discourses that Indonesian women have access to, including those from the state, Islam and *adat*, as well as various alternative Western and Arabic ones and imported sexual discourses presented by and accessed through the media (Adeney, 2003; Bennett, 2005; Blackburn *et al.*, 2008; Grace, 2004; Hatley, 1990; Murray, 2001; Sullivan, 1994; 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 experiences as members of communal societies who are expected to prioritize marriage and motherhood (see also Sullivan, 1994).

State and Islamic family planning and development programs have penetrated society to the village level, and it is at these localized junctures that women come into close contact with dominant prescriptions for ideal femininity (i.e. as refined, shy, obedient, chaste). The force of these traditional gender discourses most strongly shapes women's lives in village societies where social surveillance remains part of the order of village life, particularly in "pious" Islamic villages where social regulation of female behaviour and sexuality is tightly monitored, such as in the community I explore here.

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 shows that as Indonesia modernizes and prioritizes higher education and a gender-balanced work force, marriage is delayed, providing young women with opportunities for having multiple sexual 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 she has access to alternative discourses in her community.

Although the wider formal (state and Islamic) discourses with which women interact are similarly available to women across the Archipelago, the degree to which women understand, internalize and interact with the discourses in their daily lives is anchored by their local conditions. The young women with whom I lived in the *pesantren* in regional Lombok are situated in very different social conditions from those of Bennett's (2005) young female Sasak informants in Lombok's modernizing capital city, Mataram. Young women in the *pesantren* experienced tight social regulation of daily life and had limited access to competing discourses because of the combined forces of communal Islam and *adat* in social organization, poverty and inadequate infrastructure and telecommunications networks. The lives of full-time *pesantren* students are dedicated to the study of the Qur'an and Islamic texts, characterized by intensive study between *subuh* prayers at sunrise and *isya* prayers after sunset (*magrib*). For some students, study continues into the night when they attend evening sermons at 10 p.m.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 more social autonomy.

Yet, in both regional and city settings, and indeed across Indonesia and in Muslim cultures worldwide, young women's (and men's) behaviour and sexuality are under social surveillance by the wider Muslim community, but the degree to which this occurs is situational. The 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 ones.

Bennett (2005) explains that competing gender discourses on alternative expressions of female sexuality and desire that media and television programs present are creating mixed messages about how to behave for young women in Mataram. Competing gender discourses have become sites of contestation. Sex practices outside marriage in Indonesia are referred to as *seks bebas* (free sex), 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 marriage). The implications of committing *zina* in village (and some city) spaces in Lombok are severely negative and most definitely damage 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) or *kurang normal* (abnormal) 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* communities 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 limited access to these competing gender discourses, this does not imply 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 in assuming that all young Muslim women *want* to engage with competing gender discourses that claim to provide them with alternative ways to express themselves and their sexualities.

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

Young Muslim women are agentic and capable of interpreting discourses in line with their construction of self and community. Women with whom I lived in the *pesantren* did not have regular access to the internet and were exposed to alternative discourses through television and radio programs or through stories from returned migrant workers who brought home new discourses from other areas of Indonesia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and other countries. They were aware of competing gender discourses, and, to varying degrees in response to these, they consciously chose to live Muslim lives based on their understanding and practice of Islam.

Islamic and *adat* discourses integrate most forcefully to shape feminine identities and statuses of the women I present in this article, and polygamy is a significant aspect of the discourses about gender, perhaps because it is practised at a higher rate in eastern Indonesia than in other parts of the country (Nurmila, 2008). Although polygamy is not a popular practice in Indonesia compared to other Islamic countries, as it has a lower incidence rate than that of divorce (*ibid.*), it remains a sensitive and well-debated issue due to the lingering threat it poses for Muslim women. Beyond that, it is an ongoing source of tension between state and Islamic law (Butt, 2009; 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. Research showed that men and women continued to practise polygamy, placing further strain on the delicate relationship between state and Islamic law (Butt, 2009; 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 in the *pesantren* (except for women married to state employees).⁶

The regulation of state discourses on polygamy at the village level is overpowered by local religious custom, whereby *adat* and Islamic legal discourses often have more influence on daily life than state laws. If we look closely at the role of *adat* (and social class and *kasta*) in traditional, pre-Islamic Indonesian aristocratic societies, we find the practice of polygamy among elites and heavy restrictions on women (Blackburn, 2004; Jennaway, 2000). Anthropologists have shown how, for some men, polygamy enhances status, prestige or power (Zeitzen, 2008), and, for impoverished men, polygamy provides ways for them to improve their economic status if their wives earn income. Therefore, an analysis of polygamy in a *pesantren* setting requires a consideration of the cultural context rather than solely situating it as an Islamic practice.

The practice of polygamy and methods for its resistance are contextual. I show how there is a link between polygamy and *zina* in the *pesantren* community because polygamy provides a way for married men to avoid committing *zina*, and, in some cases, facilitates the reconciliation of fallen status for women who have transgressed sexual boundaries (because women who transgress ideal female behaviour by committing *zina* are considered dangerous). Men and women who commit *zina* can also reconcile their status through monogamous marriage. The Lombok cases illuminate a culture of polygamy that women co-create with their polygamist counterparts as they manoeuvre within village structures that perpetuate perceived male domination.

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

The Intersection of Status, Islam and *Adat* in Sasak Culture

The small island of Lombok lies to the east of the popular tourist haven of 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 also in contexts of education and health. The Sasak are the dominant ethnic group in Lombok, constituting approximately 95% of the population, almost all of whom are Muslim. Balinese Hindus, Chinese, Bugis, Arabs, Javanese, Sumbawans and other ethnic groups from the eastern islands make up the remainder of the population. There are several national Islamic organizations in Lombok, including the two largest ones, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, but the largest local Islamic organization is Nahdlatul Wathan, which, like Nahdlatul Ulama, follows the Shafi'i school of law.

The shaping of female identities and statuses in Lombok is part of a historical process that is central to the social formation of gender relations in the "pious" village community that I explore 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. In the *pesantren* I refer to, social indicators of status include traditional *kasta* ranking, Islamic and spiritual piety, class (social and economic) 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. While individuals are born into a hereditary social rank or *kasta* (which formerly consisted of several levels but now refers simply to aristocrats and commoners), they are also able to shift ranks by being ostracized, demoted or elevated through marriage. The relationship between Islam and *adat* significantly affects the degree to which families maintain the rules of *kasta* ranking.

Islam and *adat* are dialectically integrated sets of belief systems, discourses, laws and social regulations that translate into lived experiences for people embedded in these systems; thus, it is not feasible to isolate the two as separate entities in an ethnographic study of a *pesantren*. Depending on particular social situations the two can be analyzed differently (Karim, 1992; Setyawati, 2008). 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 women (and men), and at times these may clash, integrate or not relate. The integration of the three transpires into Sasak cultural praxis which provides access to a variety of discourses and practices in the formation of status.

The Islam and *adat* dynamic is informed by a history of social change that continues to shape the reproduction of Sasak culture in the post-Suharto era. The variation in women's lived experiences in Lombok reflects the relatively heterogeneous practices of Sasak *adat* traditions across the island. Islam plays a critical role in processes of cultural change, a process which the Sasak have actively engaged in since the onset of Islamization in the 1500s (Budiwanti, 2000; Cederroth, 1995; Lukman, 2002; Van Der Kraan, 1980). Doctrinally, Islam is not compatible with the traditional Sasak *kasta* system and thus has contributed to the social transformation of society, gender relations and negotiations with status.

Processes of Islamization contributed to the variation within cultural practice in different areas, most notably with the formation of two dominant Muslim groups: the Sasak *Wetu Telu* (three times) and the orthodox *Waktu Lima* (five times). The former refers to a local Sasak Islam

which is an indigenous religiosity combining animism, Hinduism and Islam. *Wetu Telu* practitioners pray three times a day, in contrast with the *Waktu Lima*, who pray five times a day and acknowledge the five pillars of Islam (Avonius, 2004; Budiwanti 2000; Cederroth 1995, 1996; Grace, 2004). I do not discuss *Wetu Telu* here because my focus is on the NW *pesantren* in East Lombok. Orthodox Islam became a strong force in East Lombok during the latter first half of the twentieth century with the emergence of the NW organization by the locally born Sufi saint, Tuan Guru Kyai Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid, popularly known as Maulana Syeikh. The saint continued to lead the organization in a spiritual capacity until his death in 1997 (Hamdi & Smith, 2012; Mugni, 2005; Smith & Hamdi, 2009, 2014).

Although Islam re-formed the social strata of society, in doing so it also created a new form of social hierarchy with the charismatic *tuan guru* competing with or replacing the prestige of the aristocratic *bangsawan* (Budiwanti, 2000). *Tuan guru* religious figures wield massive social power in their communities (Cederroth, 1996). In the post-Independence era, *tuan guru* have turned to politics; the current Governor of NTB (2013-2018), Muhammad Zainul Majdi, is a *tuan guru* (and the grandson of Nahdlatul Wathan's founder, Maulana Syeikh). *Tuan guru* are highly regarded in society for their knowledge of Islam which they acquire at Islamic madrasah in Mecca or other Arab countries where they study for several years. Lengthy education in Arab nations consolidates a *tuan guru's* superior status in the *pesantren*, therefore challenging meanings about status by attributing more value to notions of piety over *kasta* and class. Yet lineage continues to play an important role in shaping status in a religious context. Children of *tuan guru* accrue high social status, particularly daughters whom potential male suitors often seek for forging kin or political alliance through marriage into a *pesantren* community.

It becomes apparent that organized, orthodox Islam in Lombok placed a strain on the social power of the ruling nobility in the traditional *kasta* system by introducing another patriarchal system based on charismatic religious leadership, thus changing the way status is acquired and accessed. Since the Islamization of Sasak culture, the *kasta* system no longer entirely determines social order or function and is thus ineffective in a broad social sense, but it still plays a role in politics and cultural and personal life in contexts of 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 with 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.

Merariq/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 inform Sasak culture. In order to understand how these cultural elements structure women's experiences, it is important to locate their social meanings in context. I contextualize the cultural integration of Islam and *adat* in the ongoing formulation of marriage practices. Marriage is a critical life-stage for the Sasak in its formation of the family as the basic unit of social life. Through marriage the Sasak become appropriate members of a functioning and productive society. A woman's status as a full-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). Within the wider society a woman's status is further consolidated by her social rank, degree of piety, class position and kin relations (lineage). These variables

determine a woman's social status as a member of the community and are anchored by a systemic integration of *adat* and Islam.

Kasta continues to determine marriage patterns for many families. Inter-*kasta* marriage is traditionally expensive for a man marrying a woman from a higher rank and is detrimental for a woman's status because the act results in her disownment (*dibuang*) by her family for marrying into a lower *kasta*. If she divorces her husband, however, her family may reunite with her and thus allow her to reclaim her former status. A *bangsawan* male's ranking will decrease by one or more degrees should he marry a woman from a lower rank (Syakur, 2006). Although Islam provided some relief from high bride-price payments and rank-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), *kasta* continues to play a role in some marriages and exemplifies the power of the family unit and kinship in controlling women's lives. The hereditary *kasta* system is relatively "open" in the sense that it allows status-shifting and fluidity of identity in the context of marriage, which can both benefit and disadvantage women.

Status is rendered obsolete in cases where women transgress sexual boundaries prescribed by *adat* and Islam. In orthodox village communities, such as the one this article considers, sexual relations between unmarried men and women are intolerable. Punishment is severe and a woman's reputation is destroyed if she is caught, regardless of her rank. 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 that were market-oriented. Jocelyn Grace's (2004) work shows that (traditionally) women from high-ranking families were restricted in choosing marriage partners, in contrast with low *kasta* women, who experienced more social freedom, yet nowadays most Sasak women are free to choose their own husbands.

In traditional Sasak society, endogamous marriage was preferred and was usually pre-arranged between patri-parallel cousins (Budiwanti, 2000; Grace, 2004). Child marriage was also common. Since the 1960s, the force of these practices has lessened, and, as a result of social change, society now accepts exogamous marriages based on the concepts of love and mutual attraction (Grace, 2004). Divorce and polygamy are common and socially acceptable; serial marriage-divorce (*kawin-cerai*) has also become socially acceptable.⁷ The high rate of divorce in Lombok can be both advantageous and disadvantageous for women. Unlike in other parts of Indonesia, the culture of *kawin-cerai* allows a destitute woman to remarry without bringing intense shame upon herself or her family. In some areas, such as the community referred to here, there are no *adat* fines for divorce. In these villages, the marriage process (Bahasa Sasak: *metikah*) begins with the traditional practice of *kawin curi* (Bahasa Sasak: *merariq*) for endogamous family-arranged and exogamous non-kin marriages.

Kawin Curi (Kawin Lari)

The Sasak are well-known for the *adat* practice of *kawin lari*. In anthropological accounts, *kawin lari* has been translated as "elopement" or "runaway marriage," which is marked by a man's "theft" or "capture" of the woman he desires to marry (Bennett, 2005; Budiwanti, 2000; Cederroth, 1983; Grace, 2004). *Kawin lari* practices vary across Lombok, indicating that data presented here may differ from those in other ethnographic accounts. Bennett (2005) has

⁷ The high rate of Sasak youth travelling abroad for work also contributes to the high divorce and polygamy rates. It is common for husbands working abroad to take a second wife. It is perhaps less common for women left behind at home to acquire a divorce and remarry.

examined the sexual symbology and mythology of *kawin lari* as it is practised in Mataram. She 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 build on Bennett’s by presenting alternative female sexual behaviour that suggests that, in some cases, women are also active sexual predators and that *kawin lari* facilitates this through the co-creation of polygamy in cases where women “steal” other women’s men. Before I turn to an analysis of this, I provide an ethnographic glimpse of *kawin lari* in East Lombok, which is referred to as *kawin curi* or *merariq*.

While it may be that many couples do “elope” (as pre-planned marriage) as Bennett and others have described, in the community I worked in, it was also common for men to maintain secrecy and perform the traditional “theft” or “capture” of the woman that locals refer to as “stealing.” A woman’s “abduction” is a prestigious act, as it implies that she is “worthy goods” and deserves to be stolen; the concept of requesting permission from a woman’s family is considered rude and disrespectful.

Although some “stealings” are pre-planned and others are not, often the “stolen” woman has no prior knowledge of the marriage proposal. The tradition of “stealing” should occur in the evening time, as there are *adat* fines for day-time thefts. Men usually bring along a group of friends to assist, being cautious to avoid arousing suspicion from the woman and her family. At the time of “stealing”, a man must, however, inform the woman of his intent, and if she rejects him, she may be released, taken against her will or a conflict could emerge.

The woman is then kept in a secret/safe location so that her family does not know her whereabouts and is unable to find her. Safe places include 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 realize she has disappeared. 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, which must be agreed upon before the marriage can take place (given that the family agrees with the marriage). The man is responsible for all associated costs of the wedding, which is usually held in his house. A Sasak woman traditionally lives in her husband’s house, and after one week to one month of marriage, the husband’s family and friends visit the woman’s family on foot to show respect with the *nyondol/nyongkol* ritual—a colourful and lively public parade along the streets showcasing traditional Sasak attire and local music.⁸

Philosophically, “stealing” practices romanticize women’s valued position in Sasak society, but a perilous combination of male strategizing and Islamic law allows for exploitation of the practice and places strain on gender relationships, cutting across status, *kasta*, class and notions of piety and lineage. Further, “stealing” can protect women from dangerous, sexually aggressive men because a “stolen” woman can be “re-stolen” by her family or another man.

I now turn to an ethnographic description of polygamy in the *pesantren* community by providing examples of the complexities of women’s lives as they intersect with *adat* and Islam. I show how, despite the lessening influence of ascribed social rank in the *pesantren*, some families

⁸ Newly-wed couples from the same village do not usually perform *nyondol/nyongkol* because they already know each other’s families. Two nights or so after *nyondol/nyongkol*, the bride’s family visits the groom’s family in a regular manner without a parade or music.

continue to identify with *kasta* in the context of marriage and that *adat* “bride stealing” facilitates the reproduction of polygamy. I also argue that *kawin curi* offers a way for women to “steal” other women’s men by agentively embracing and co-creating polygamy.

Polygamy in the *Pesantren* Community

Zamakhsyari Dhofier (1982) has described the (Javanese) *pesantren* institution as a type of “kingdom” and its Muslim leader as a king-like figure. The NW *pesantren* network can also be referred to as a kind of “kingdom.” It is a patriarchal institution that reinforces traditional gender ideologies and invalidates competing discourses on gender and sexuality, especially those from perceived Western sources. The NW institution ideally reproduces statuses based on Islamic piety and *pesantren*-based kin relations rather than class and traditional *adat* variables such as *kasta*. Young women with perceived beauty and piety who embody ideal femininity (refinement, shyness, obedience, chastity) are especially valued in this *pesantren* system.

The NW *pesantren* community that I lived in is situated in a regional area in East Lombok. This *pesantren* experienced a series of conflicts in 1998 after the death of its founder, Maulana Syeikh, however, the condition stabilized several years thereafter (Hamdi & Smith, 2012; Mugni, 2005; Smith, 2012; Smith & Hamdi, 2014). It is considered to be one of the largest *pesantren* in Lombok, and the majority of students are non-local, having left their natal villages to board there. The *pesantren* is a centre of Islamic high-culture, and the influence of the *tuan guru* teachers extends beyond the *pesantren* itself into entire communities and government institutions.

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 by practising polygamy through endogamous marriage between *pesantren* students; Maulana Syeikh practised this method by marrying a total of seven women during his life. Muslims who identify with the NW organization 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 (Mugni 2005; Smith & Hamdi, 2014). The *tuan guru* associated with the NW organization maintain the reproduction of polygamy either through discourse they teach in the *pesantren* or by preaching in villages. Although many *tuan guru* practise polygamy, not all do.

As I outlined earlier, in the *pesantren*, Islam integrates with aspects of *adat* that fit with its discourses and practices, but I have not yet discussed the role of indigenous magic practices in women’s lived realities. 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 for heartbreak, resistance strategies or for self-protection in their daily lives. Male polygamists may also use magic in their efforts to acquire more wives or to “hypnotize” first wives into accepting a co-wife or co-wives. In this way, *tuan guru* maintain a contradictory position in Sasak society that implicates women in the co-creation of polygamy and at the same time offers ways for them to resist it.

Islam and indigenous magic practices play critical 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 (i.e. *tuan guru* and 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 Sasak magic is classified as sorcery or “black” magic. Sasak, like Indonesians more broadly, most commonly employ magic

in response to personal hardship, illness and sexual jealousy, for acquiring wealth/beauty/success or for seeking revenge (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 acquisition of women they desire. In her examination of “the...potential of indigenous sexual scripts for manipulation and resistance by young women who choose to exercise their sexual autonomy” (p.84), Bennett (2005) argues that young women are constructed as easy targets of black magic attacks by sexually jealous men. In my field site, men and women also drew on a range of indigenous magical practices to manipulate their lives and, in doing so, demonstrated the important function of magic in their complex negotiations with polygamy in a highly regulated *pesantren* society.

Poligami in Context

In this section, I detail the lived experiences of a cross-section of women who resist, embrace and co-create polygamy in situations contextualized by pre- and non-determined structures in their society. The women, aged between 18 and 45 years, live in the *pesantren* and its surrounding community. They represent a range of *kasta* and class groups who occupy social positions as farmers, housewives, students, traders and school teachers. Their stories are situated within the historical forces and formal discourses discussed earlier and indicate that a complex mix of notions of status, transgression and *kawin curi* play critical roles in the kinds of experiences the women have with polygamy.

Stealing Women's Men

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. His superior status in the *pesantren* community as a teacher and preacher positions him as a target of young female desire in the acquisition of status, despite him having five children (aged 21, 18, 16, 7 and 5) with Shaheda. 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 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). Ipa responded positively to Malik's advances and after a brief, secretive dating period, Malik “stole” Ipa. In this case, Ipa agreed to the “capture,” which her family endorsed based on reasons that they believed would bring them renewed status, confirmed piety and a secure economy by marriage into a *pesantren* community.

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, screaming “Are women worth nothing at all?” Local women in the *pesantren* community empathized with Shaheda, especially when she began showing signs of severe depression and panic attacks. Local women told me that, after the wedding, Shaheda walked the streets at night talking to herself and would sometimes 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 to give them money. Village women refer 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 regarded *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 woman. 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, many (but not all) villagers 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* indicated that only a minority of them would choose polygamy because they have witnessed the negative effects the practice has on mothers and children. Many of these students were born into polygamous households. They explained that, in reality, only a saint (like their saint Maulana Syeikh) and the Prophet are able to justly perform polygamy in accordance with the requirements in the Qur'an; thus, ordinary men should not even attempt to practise polygamy.

Tuan guru also teach discourses in the *pesantren* about ways to prevent (future) husbands from taking co-wives, including the idea that women should always keep themselves groomed, act with humility, and learn to pray perfectly. Discourses about how to avoid polygamy co-exist with the social acceptance of young female students' attempts to win the attention of married and unmarried *tuan guru* with the intent of marrying to acquire high social status in the present 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 religious status. There are thus differing understandings about the relationship between gender, piety and status. Although these young female students desire 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.

Young women who "steal" men with prestige negotiate between Islamic discourses on polygamy, which promise 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 does nothing because 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 failed to return home one evening in September 2007. They had heard rumours around the village that Zira (aged 21) had been seeing a man from central Lombok. After two days, the brother of the man who had stolen Zira went to

her village to inform her family of his brother's intent to marry. Zira is from a high-class, aristocratic family of landowners who did not want her to marry into a low *kasta* group in 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 had several children. Her family demanded that he return Zira to them. He refused. Over several weeks, the two families negotiated and fought, and eventually Zira's family reported the incident to the authorities, but, unfortunately, the matter could not be resolved.

In the meantime, Zira's brother, who at that time was 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-ranking male from her village. This way, any marriage between Zira and her central Lombok captor 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 unable to argue against Zira's well-educated brother, whose status was almost that of a *tuan guru*. At this point, Zira declared love for the 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, which her cousin will not grant her. Zira's agentic method of 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. Recent information I received is that Zira's husband has a new girlfriend, and this could lead to either divorce or polygamy. One method that women in Zira's position employ so that their husbands will divorce them is to become unattractive, disrespectful and rude so that their husbands cannot stand being near them. Many use magic from *tuan guru* that causes the husband to fall in love with another woman or to 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. Acts of "stealing" facilitate polygamy, and the social effects of this are detrimental and 'potentially dangerous' (Cederroth, 1983, p.166) for high ranking groups because women are central to the reproduction of the family and *kasta* patterns. Zira's abduction allowed for the possibility of polygamy, saving her and then marrying her to her cousin. This is a perilous combination of the forces of orthodox Islam, *adat* and *kasta* situated within a family that relied on a daughter's marriage into a suitable lineage in order to maintain its status.

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 *kasta*, and Hawa's parents are low-class farmers struggling to survive. Since Hawa's 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 community has significantly damaged the family's reputation. Hawa is referred to as a *selaq* (a

witch figure that in East Lombok often refers to a mythical part human/part animal that flies in the night time in search of baby's blood). This "dangerous" social image was formed in response to Hawa's sexually aggressive behaviour and *zina* with an older, married man (aged 40) who works at the *pesantren*.

It is unclear how this relationship was initiated. Hawa and her friends gave 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, until she became pregnant out of wedlock. She had an abortion, (with a local healer) and, although she did her best to hide it, her female friends knew because of excessive bleeding and her inability to hide the agonizing pain. When Hawa became pregnant to this same man for the second time, five years later, she decided to marry him. In this case, *kawin curi* was pre-planned and enabled Hawa to hide her illegitimate pregnancy through 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 her. 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 found about his marriage to Hawa, she became obsessed with identifying Hawa by searching for her at the *pesantren* on a daily basis. This continued, and eventually the first wife obtained 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 said that her husband promised her he would divorce his first wife again, but as of now he has not done so.

As a self-protection strategy, Hawa started to agentively use her negative, "dangerous" image as a *selaq* by threatening to harm her husband's first wife 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 regularly. As a form of self-medication, Hawa used Islamic prayers and mantras that she learned from *tuan guru* Malik, whom 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 in her life on earth (including financial ones from her husband) and in the afterlife. She told me that this knowledge helps her and she recites the mantras after completing each prayer so that she feels closer to God. She disagrees with polygamy and told me that her husband will not divorce her, so she will therefore continue using magic to protect herself from her co-wife.

Hawa's case demonstrates how *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 suffer negative consequences in society and that polygamy provides a way for them to reconcile their statuses through legitimate marriage (facilitated by *kawin curi*).

Hassanah and Nuri

At the time I began my research, Hassanah was a 45-year-old, unmarried woman who was happy with her single life. 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, who used derogatory language to describe her physical appearance. During the course of my research,

Hassanah started dating a man 25 years younger than her. She bought him a motorbike, cooked for him and gave him money, which the wider *pesantren* 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 dating (*midang*) practices became too regular, arousing suspicion of possible *zina*. *Midang* is a traditional courting practice, where, in the evening, young men, sometimes together with their close friends, visit girlfriends or women they desire. Because Hassanah lived 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 solidify her status in society as a (married) woman.

Although Hassanah was an outcast, she had a particular spiritual status due to her familial lineage: her late father was a *tuan guru* whom villagers believed possessed spiritual powers and people interpreted that she inherited his powers. 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 the effect that her husband had plans to marry a young fertile woman, but this did not (and has not) eventuated, reinforcing the strength of Hassanah's magical manipulation of her husband.

Hassanah's friend, Nuri (aged 36), occupies an interesting position in her village community. She is low-class, unmarried, blind in one eye and works as a part-time chili farmer. Nuri lives alone in a small, part-bamboo, part-brick house she built herself beside her father's residence. She believes that her disability is a blessing in disguise, as it deters many men from pursuing her. Nuri respects the fact 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 become a co-wife of impoverished men in her village, she always refuses because she believes 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's and Nuri's ability to avoid and resist polygamy is in part because they were able to master Islam in ways that benefited them spiritually. Hassanah's spiritual status was predetermined by her lineage, and Nuri acquired her status through dedication to leading an ascetic life as a Sufi. Like the other women I have presented here, Hassanah and Nuri also used Islamic magic and prayers that they learned from *tuan guru*, but their ability to apply them in spiritually potent ways is what determined their skill and success. More broadly, the women did not have family or social rank 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 did. Importantly, women who opposed polygamy told me that they did 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 shows that women can and do challenge the Islamic discourses taught by *tuan guru* in *pesantren* communities.

Concluding Remarks

Polygamy is practised for different reasons across a range of contexts, and it is the structural and cultural conditions of such contexts that facilitate the reproduction of a culture of polygamy. In East Lombok, the social power of *tuan guru*, in addition to cultural practices of “stealing women” and “stealing men,” contribute to the social reproduction of polygamy because it is advantageous for both men and women in the *pesantren* community. The cases demonstrate that women from different social ranks can be and are drawn into polygamy either through *adat* “stealing” practices in the wider village or by choice and that polygamy benefits particular groups of women who “steal” men for building economy and status through forging kin alliances with *tuan guru* with the aim of acquiring spiritual status in the afterlife.

I have further argued that polygamy provides a way to avoid sexual transgression (*zina*) in the *pesantren* community. 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 *kawin curi* facilitates a fast and socially legitimate marriage for them.

I have demonstrated how 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* in the *pesantren* community, as well as indigenous Sasak magic practices, to resist and in some cases agentively embrace forms of male dominance in practice. As managers of Islamic discourse, *tuan guru* play pivotal roles in the reproduction of polygamy, which in the *pesantren* is considered natural, and which women, as “dominateri,” respond to by creatively drawing on discourses and practices to assist in co-creating cultures of polygamy.

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