Land, marriage and social exclusion: the case of Madurese exile widow

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Abstract

This paper aims to seek connections between land, marriage, and social exclusion. In Madurese, marriage are not just a matter of who married whom, but at the core of marriage lies important meaning: the presence of the husband and the birth of children. Husband and children play a vital function as the land processor, and to keep the land processed, it’s important not be infertile. Infertility is a taboo to be avoided, because it would be a reason for divorce. Those who do not have husbands and children do not contribute to the economy of tanean, and hence they got the punishment of social exclusion, lose access to resources, and later on forcing them to come out of their home.

1. Background, question and methodology

For a long time, marriage has been recognized as a romantic relationship, scholars said it is social and cultural institutions. But what do we really know about marriage? Current studies on marriage put the issue of family formation (Niehof 1992; Murphy 2001), birth (Ginsburg and Rapp 1991; Lummaa 2001; Rapp 2001), as well as economic dimensions (Bergink 1992; Amin and Al-Bassusi 2004). Most of the study puts marriage as a social institution that has a specific purpose: to maintain the continuity of generations, which are socially and culturally have the right to draw their lineage, and in turn will be a

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guarantee for the continuity of the human species in general (Holland 2004; Christie-Mizell, Keil, Kimura, and Blount 2007). In other word, marriage is a biological mechanism based on the cultural construction, that every marriage, whether explicitly stated or not, will lead to the creation of next generation that will replace the previous generation.

One thing for sure, not every marriage ended with the birth of a new generation. The failure itself even more forgotten. In contrast to the studies above, this paper puts infertility as a basic foundation. Not many studies put infertility as the main topic (Jin, Li, and Feldman, 2006; van Balen 2009), especially when connected with land and social exclusion. Marriage, as I shall explain later, is a strategic mechanism to maintain the family, and certainly had biological, cultural and economic dimensions as well. Biological dimensions lies in the presence of children, cultural dimensions lies in the meaning of marriage to society, while the economic dimension lies in the processing of land and labor. Eventually, when we talk about land and labor, we talk about function and punishment. Function here mean husband and children, while punishment here means ignorance and exclusion, more precisely is social exclusion. There are connections between land, marriage, and social exclusion, but these connections are often missed when we talk about marriage.

This paper will explore these connections by taking the exiled widows from Madura, who exiled from their home because of infertility and inability to keep the marriage as subjects. Two major questions arose: First, how land and marriage go side-by-side in Madurese context?. Second, how land and marriage activate the mechanisms of social exclusion which forced the widows out of their home?. These questions are important to bring a new perspective about marriage and social exclusion that mostly overlooked, and to answer those questions, multi-sited ethnography used in this research. Like Marcus (2009) and Falzon (2009) said, multi-sited ethnography aims to seek connections between people by following them, erasing boundaries, and expanding horizon. Of course multi-sited ethnography brings another consequence, by following people, I simply redefine the concept of place and space. It was a journey, following five exiled widows from their home in Madura to their destination in Bekasi, interviewing their families, asking about the past, collecting memories, constructing stories, and listening their dreams.

2. Land, marriage, and social exclusion

Madura mostly known with the typical ecosystem and dry climate. Located in the northeast of the island of Java and separated from Java by the Madura Strait, with dry climate and a group of limestone hills and the beach area with white sand dunes and rocks. The climate is characterized by two seasons, rainy seasons or the west, and dry season or the east. With the composition of the soil and low rainfall make land in Madura to less fertile and less economically profitable (de Jonge, 1989:3-9). Kuntowijoyo (2002) named it “a society with dry ecosystems”, which depend more on nature as farming or migrate outside the region to seek a better life.

Madura typical ecosystem influenced Madurese perspective on marriage, especially on women. Niehof (1992) specifically state, that the women of Madura have two destinies: as wives and as mothers. Both of destinies can only be fulfilled through marriage and offspring are born. As a basic obligation to be fulfilled by every woman, not surprisingly, women in Madura married at a very young age. In conjunction with second destiny, as a mother, Madurese is very concern about pregnancy and the offspring are born. In a society that stressing on biological function in the offspring that will continue to be members of the extended family, the failure of this function can affect the sustainability of all extended family.

On a different side, the marriage is in fact not merely a biological matter per se, but also involves economic interest, in this case is household economy (Bergink 1992, Oppenheimer 1997; Perez 2007). Household economic function lies in the duty of all family members in carrying out economic activities,
Either farming or fishing. Each family member is responsible for helping and maintaining their extended family. Some of the jobs are adapted by sexual division of labor, a condition where there is a division of labor based on gender, between the partners that allows them to maintain their household needs (Amin and Al-Bassusi 2004), and also cannot be liberated from the cultural construction. Economic activity, such as batik painting and canting (drawing the cloth with wax) became women’s work, while coloring (sometimes using chemicals) and ngelorod (cleaning the wax in cloth) is the responsibility of men, as well as land management is a responsibility of husband and son while the processing of land is the responsibility of a wife and daughter.

In a society with dry culture and rain fed, land management becomes crucial to be done (de Jonge 1989; Kuntowijoyo 2002). Processing the dry land requires further consequences: it must be done manually and requires a lot of power and energy. Although the Madurese are not always rely their life on farming, some of them living in coastal areas will much depend on maritime activities, but the perpetrators of economic activity, which requires energy, is mostly done by men. Thus becomes important to maintain a surplus of men for processing land and natural resources around them.

Marriage is, perhaps, the ultimate way as a cultural scheme to maintain the surplus (Wiyata 2002; Tulistyantoro 2005). Madurese uses tanean lanjang as a residential area for all members of the extended family, with matrilocal system where the entire extended family members living in the same residential area belonging to the family of a wife. Tanean consisting a main house surrounded by other houses, prayer room, storehouse, family tomb, and at the center, is a long yard. The main house inhabited by old parent and houses around inhabited by families of children. Kitchen and farm used together for all family members in tanean. At the entry side in the west there are prayer room and family tomb, and field are surround the tanean. By using the extended family system, all family members including husband and children has the same duty: helping and maintaining the tanean economically.

Because every member of the family living in the same environment, then each member responsible for helping the economy of tanean, it is easily understood why the presence of husband and children are crucial (Niehof 1992). In order to sustain the economy of tanean, every woman should be able to help through marriage. Marriage will directly attract men as husband and birth the children who will help the economy of tanean. The aim is not only for men power, but also the dowry and other things he brings to the tanean. The presence of a husband means the presence of men who could help cultivate the land and earn money for the family, and the presence of children means continuity of the tanean.

In tanean, sexual division of labor can be seen clearly. Husband and adolescent boys are responsible to cultivate the field (or fishing in coastal areas) or any jobs that earn money, while the wife and adolescent girls are responsible to do domestic jobs like cooking and cleaning. The husband is responsible to give almost every needs of his wife, in return, the wife is responsible to give birth and nurse all the children. By this schema, every woman in tanean is prohibited to infertile. Infertility is taboo in Madurese people because the duty to maintain the continuity of tanean by producing offspring is placed with them. As a result, women can sometimes be married more than once due to be divorced by her husband. As the informants said, that they generally marry more than once since divorced by her husband, for not being able to have children.

Marriage put fertility as the basic functions, a crucial factor so that any marriage that does not produce offspring is considered a failed marriage and allowed to stop. The consequence is clear: divorce. In Madurese culture, which affected by Islamic law, divorce is the right of the husband, although the wife can ask an Islamic court to verdict the divorce or ask to husband to divorce her, but the right still in husband hand. The reason for divorced is unlimited, but according to informants, they were divorced because they are not able to give birth. Infertility is the main reason, and certainly bad for tanean, which requires the labor of men who are husbands of women who live in tanean. Continuation of this is how the construction of 'destiny' in the marriage goes with everyday life, especially on how the view of marriage failed to run two basic functions.
On different sides, it is important to give the limits of what is categorized as a widow itself. I gave strict limits, that the widow here is a woman who divorced and/or bereaved by a husband who does not have the offspring of the marriage. I deem this necessary limitation, because there is a difference between the statuses of widow who have no children and widows with children. Widows who have children, despite not having a husband who can assist in the process of economic production, but she still has a descendant who can help as the support of the family economy in tanean. In contrast to the widow in that category, is the positions of widow who have no offspring, and they are more critical. For her, not only has no male figure who became a husband and can help cultivate the ecological environment, she is also does not have a child who can also help in sustaining the economy and the extended family household.

Infertility is a basic problem because in Madurese cultural construction women are expected to give birth. In tanean, a child is a guarantee of tanean sustainability both in intergeneration or economy. In economy, infertility is a direct threat to the sustainability of the extended family, because no children were born, and no one help to cultivate the land, then the land is unproductive. Infertility becomes a reason for divorced. Women, who are divorced by her husband, would lose the man who will assist in processing the natural environment around the tanean. It will be more difficult when she does not have descendants who, in a certain degree, can take the role of his father to cultivate the natural environment. Without a husband or children, position of women in tanean is critical, because she cannot help the economic sustainability of the extended family as well as endanger the sustainability of the extended family in tanean itself.

Cultural construction of the body involves the function of economic production and reproductive biology focuses on the position of women as wives and mothers (Niehof 1992; Christie-Mizell, Keil, Kimura, and Blount 2007). The failure in biological reproductive function resulting the problem in economical production and raises social exclusion, because she was considered failure in keeping and maintaining the needs of family, both economically and biologically. Economically, women fail to provide manpower to process the natural environment, because in general the management of the natural environment left to family members, in this case a husband and children. Biologically, women fail to produce offspring that can maintain the continuity and existence of the extended family. These malfunctions creating pressure and punishment in social life around her. The punishments itself from moral sanction like ignorance or non-acceptance in a social environment to social exclusion, even more, expulsion.

Social exclusion can be seen with the exclusion of widows in tanean routine activities, such as family weddings, family gathering (arisan), or religious activities. Moral sanctions are also given to the exclusion like spreading the gossips, ridiculing and insulting. On a broader scope, social exclusion is also seen to be excluded from the social activities like gathering and harvest festival. For the Madurese, social exclusion is the heaviest penalties, because its existence as an individual is no longer seen. The dimension of social exclusion is not only socially, but also the closure of access to natural resources: the widows are no longer allowed to participate in planting and harvesting. When the access to this resource is closed, it’s creating limited options available to them. The cultural context of the marriage emphasis on two main things that they failed to fulfil. Thus, the widows are increasingly cornered in a decision that could be useful for them. Without access to natural resources and support of their families in tanean, even more, with ignorance and social exclusion, encourage them to take the decision to get out of the problems they face. Migration is a decision they take, out of home is the only way.

Different from the push-pull factor as Lee (1966) stated, the decision to migrate for women sometimes causes by the limited options available to them. As I try to argue with taking these widows as an example, the decision to migrate cannot be separated from their background. How infertility, divorce and social exclusion encourage them to come out of their extended family and left the tanean which is their historical and cultural roots. Tanean not only a group of houses and field, tanean serves as a home for those who have long walked away and left their homes. Social exclusion as a result of the failure of marriage encourages widows directly to migrate and leave their extended family. Deprived from
historical and cultural roots, the widows are living in other places, to get a bit of happiness which no longer available to them.

3. Conclusion

In societies that put the marriage in biological and economical aims at the same time, the failure to achieve these aims is prohibited that must be closed immediately. Those who fail in the first marriage are getting married again, only to achieve the ultimate goal of marriage: a husband and children. Husband and children was not biological and psychological needs, it is the economical need: to cultivate the land, to make land more productive, and later on to sustain the economic side of tanean. The economic and ecological environment underlies marriage itself. Every woman in tanean must achieve her destiny: as wives and as mothers, and punishment of social exclusion are made to make sure the destiny is fulfilled. Alienated in their own homes, social exclusion becomes punishment they received. Isolated in a social environment, ignored in the party, closed to natural resources, and finally, lost in the collective memory of the extended family. Social exclusion is certainly encouraging them to come out, cut off from its historical roots, and stranded in a foreign territory for new hope.

This paper tries to explain how the construction of marriage goes hand in hand with land and social exclusion. Basic argumentation of this paper is to explore the connection, that land and marriage have a clear connection is already known, but the land and marriage creating social exclusion is something that is forgotten. Land, marriage, and social exclusion become reality in a society that focuses on the marriage on two sides: biological and economical. Regardless of the deficiencies that appear in this paper, this paper may open new perspectives on marriage, sometimes is not visible from the outside, another side that is often overlooked.

Acknowledgements

I thank all my informants, Prof. Sulistyowati Irianto, Dr. Iwan Tjitradjaja and Dr. Semiarto Aji Purwanto for brilliant discussion.

References


