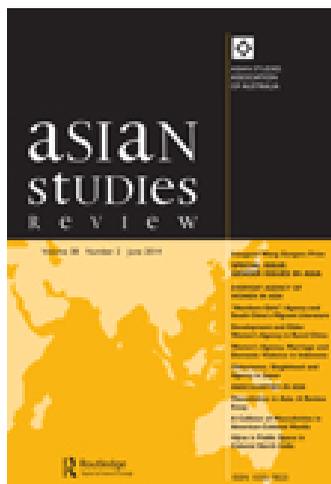


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Publisher: Routledge

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Asian Studies Review

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/casr20>

Problematic Conjugations: Women's Agency, Marriage and Domestic Violence in Indonesia

Siti Aisyah^a & Lyn Parker^b

^a Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar

^b The University of Western Australia

Published online: 28 Mar 2014.



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To cite this article: Siti Aisyah & Lyn Parker (2014) Problematic Conjugations: Women's Agency, Marriage and Domestic Violence in Indonesia, *Asian Studies Review*, 38:2, 205-223, DOI: [10.1080/10357823.2014.899312](https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2014.899312)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2014.899312>

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Problematic Conjugations: Women's Agency, Marriage and Domestic Violence in Indonesia

SITI AISYAH

Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar

LYN PARKER*

The University of Western Australia

Abstract: *This paper examines women's experience of domestic violence within marriage in Makassar, South Sulawesi. It analyses the meaning of marriage for men and women, the roles of men and women within marriage, shifts in marriage practices – particularly the shift from arranged to “love” marriage – and unequal gender positions within marriage. We discuss some salient issues in the “margins of marriage” in Indonesia: polygyny and constructions of masculinity that condone the practice of polygyny/affairs, and attitudes towards divorce, particularly for women. We then examine women's perception of the causes and triggers of domestic violence as revealed by fieldwork data, using the lens of women's agency. Our findings are that women perceive that their expressions of agency – for instance in challenging men's authority, moral righteousness and adequacy as breadwinners – are the most common triggers for male violence within marriage. Finally, we discuss the difficulty for women of escaping domestic violence, thereby getting some purchase on the relative capacity of women to resist, deflect or deal with the violence.*

Keywords: *Indonesia, Makassar, domestic violence, marriage, agency, women*

Introduction

Most studies of domestic violence are about violence that occurs within marriage. In Indonesia, the construction of marriage is quite distinctive and this paper explores the connections between the nature of marriage and the occurrence of domestic violence.

*Correspondence Address: lyn.parker@uwa.edu.au

Since the vast majority of women in Indonesia are married and most domestic violence occurs within marriage, there is a need to examine this important and enduring social institution through a domestic violence lens, and *vice versa*, to examine domestic violence as an aspect of marriage.¹

This paper has four aims: to contribute empirical information about domestic violence in Indonesia to the slim body of literature on this subject; to use this information to enhance our understanding of the ways in which domestic violence can be culturally constructed; to develop a stronger consciousness of the gendering of marriage in Indonesia; and to use the data on domestic violence to better understand women's agency within marriage in Indonesia. The "problematic conjugations" in the title refer to three couplings: the unequal union of husband and wife in marriage; the articulation of marriage and domestic violence; and the connections between women's agency in marriage and the occurrence of domestic violence in Indonesia.

Agency

We are interested in linking two bodies of literature on domestic violence that seem theoretically incompatible. On the one hand, we have many feminist works that position women's experience of domestic violence as central to their analyses (e.g. Allen, 2011; Bambang, 2006; Harding, 1991; Skinner et al., 2005). The feminist focus on women's personal experience of domestic violence has resulted in the dominant representation of battered women as victims. On the other hand, we have many feminist works that analyse the formative, discursive power of patriarchy, of gender-unequal social institutions such as marriage, and of ideologies, such as the gender system, as responsible for domestic violence, such that "patriarchy" is now central to domestic violence policy worldwide (e.g. Dobash, 1980; WHO, 2011). In this paper we want to use great depth of field: to keep women's experience sharp and in-focus in the centre of the picture, and to keep the discursive and institutional background also in focus.

The decision to write about women's agency in a paper on domestic violence might seem strange. Given that domestic violence is a destructive, everyday and inescapable experience for many women, one might well ask if agency is possible. In relation to domestic violence, it might be assumed that a paper on agency would focus on the work of supporting or protecting victims, or on the establishment of mechanisms within the criminal justice system to deal with offenders. While we do mention some of these measures, our focus is on the agency of women in abusive situations and it grew out of the evidence – notably, interviews with abused women who identified their expressions of agency as triggers for their husband's violence. This paper is thus a "dark" paper: it highlights instances where women's expression of agency prompts violence. We stress that we are not saying that women's agency causes domestic violence: we are only pointing to women's agency as a trigger for their husband's violence. The deeper causes, and the condoning, lie elsewhere, not least in the construction of marriage and masculinity in Indonesia.

In the literature on domestic violence, the emphasis has long been on women as victims. This focus has shifted somewhat to conceptualisations that transcend the victim/agent dichotomy: the more recent term, "survivors", encapsulates this shift (Dunn, 2005; Picart, 2003). The shift is partly a response to the fact that there is more research on "women who stay" – i.e. in abusive relationships. Nevertheless, the dominant

discourse about battered women remains one of victimisation. “[C]entral to this vocabulary is the removal of agency” (Dunn and Powell-Williams, 2007, p. 982). The concomitant is that women who leave abusive marriages are considered to have exercised agency, while women who stay remain victims.

This paper takes agency as arising from within social discourses, norms and structures, and as the capacity to move, literally or figuratively, in self- or group-interest, in the gap between hegemonic discourses and authority structures on one side and everyday practice on the other. We expect expressions of agency to be diverse because different societies and groups have different norms and differently value particular actions – e.g. speaking one’s opinion might be positively valued in one context or society but regarded as poor form in another. In this way agency is culturally embedded (Korteweg, 2008) and “always occurs within social relations and cultural practice” (Parker, 2005, p. 20). Agency might be manifest in transgressive thinking, in challenging talk, in literary expression, in identity construction and in meaning-making. In our case, women’s agency in marriage is exercised when, for example, women challenge or criticise their husbands verbally, a challenge that is simultaneously a challenge of gender norms and husbandly power. In the domestic violence literature, however, the meaning of agency is usually “free will” or the making of choices (Dunn and Powell-Williams, 2007, p. 980). In this literature, scholars, social workers and advocates alike struggle to come to terms with “women who stay”, because of the discursive strength of this idea of agency in Western liberal democratic cultures. It seems unbelievable that women who are bashed by their husbands would choose to stay in such relationships (Loseke, 2003). Nevertheless, following the path laid out by postcolonial feminist scholars, we argue against the classic Western formulations of agency – especially liberal notions of autonomous rational choice – as necessarily implying the exercise of free will, opening the way to empowerment for women (e.g. Mahmood, 2001; Ram, 2007). Ram (2007, p. 139) critiques the

liberal construction of agency as consent between free, knowing individuals. In this construction, the clear light of reason and free choice guides the agency of individuated, contracted adults, unburdened by myth, tradition, and such irrational authorities inherited from the past.

In such formulations, “culture”, “religion” and “tradition” are assumed to hold women back; what they need is liberation (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

Feminism’s twin goals have been to identify the subordinating structures and relations within which women live and to change the situation for women who are oppressed, marginalised or subordinated. As Parker (2005, p. 6) has written elsewhere, “...a central objective of feminist scholarship has been to represent women..., wherever possible giving voice to subaltern women who might not otherwise be heard. In this discursive context, the search for women’s ‘agency’ is prefigured in any feminist scholarship”. Such ideas, however, can lead to the “romanticization of resistance” (Abu-Lughod, 1990), with “the teleology of emancipation underwriting many accounts of women’s agency” (Mahmood, 2001, p. 210). Mahmood critiques the assumption of Western feminism that women universally desire to be free from relations of subordination. Ortner (2001) usefully advances the arguments over agency, identifying two modalities: agency related to power and agency related to intention.

For this paper on domestic violence in Indonesia, we argue that “agency is mainly an issue of power” (Parker, 2005, p. 16). In framing domestic violence within marriage, we are really examining power relations within marriage. In turn, we are examining a society, a religion and a nation-state that can be described as patriarchal. Patriarchy alone, however, is not an adequate explanation of domestic violence. Clearly most husbands in Indonesia are not violent towards their wives. Also relevant is the unit or frame of analysis. Butt and Munro (2007) examined pre-marital pregnancies of young women in Papua. In literature on youth, the free expression of sexual desires has often been seen as the exercise of personal agency. They challenge this interpretation for their field site, arguing that if the analytical frame includes pregnancy and childbirth, and the ways pre-marital childbirth disempowers young women, agency turns into constraint. Similarly, we argue that the framing of domestic violence within marriage is significant in any adjudication of agency.

Domestic violence in Indonesia

Domestic violence has only recently been named in Indonesia, and the most common terms used to describe it are *kekerasan terhadap perempuan* (violence towards women) and the acronym KDRT (*Kekerasan Dalam Rumah Tangga* – violence in the household). *Kekerasan Dalam Rumah Tangga* was the official term used in ground-breaking legislation in 2004: Law 23/2004 has the title *Penghapusan Kekerasan Dalam Rumah Tangga* (The Abolition of Violence in the Household). KDRT has become a common acronym in daily newspapers.

After the resignation of President Suharto in May 1998, Indonesia moved rapidly towards democratisation: the press, bridled under Suharto’s New Order, was freed, women’s groups flourished and many topics, formerly proscribed, were given free rein. Domestic violence was one, and it was a tremendous achievement for feminist activists to get this Law up and running so quickly.² Law No. 23/2004 defines domestic violence as:

any act against anyone, particularly women, bringing about physical, sexual or psychological misery or suffering, and/or negligence in the household, including threats to commit acts, the use of force, or constraint of freedom in a manner against the law within the scope of the household (ROI, 2004, our translation).

The Law is inclusive in its definition, and much work on implementation and training, service provision and reporting has been done by women’s groups and government agencies. Most people in Indonesia now know the concept of “domestic violence”. For each of the last three years, more than 100,000 cases of violence against women have been reported; in 2011, 113,878 cases of domestic violence were reported, 97 per cent being violence towards wives (KOMNAS Perempuan, 2012, p. 1). Yet there remain serious problems of victim blaming and compliance with the Law, and there is now some feeling of stagnation in activist circles (KOMNAS Perempuan, 2012). One of the most intransigent problems is the norm that conflict within the family is not a public matter. Scholars have begun the enormous task of researching domestic violence in Indonesia (e.g. Aisyah, 2007; Baso et al., 2002; Bennett et al., 2011; Djanna, 2007; Hakimi et al., 2001; Idrus, 1999; Idrus and Bennett, 2003; Imawan et al., 2006; Prasetyo and Marzuni, 1997; Rowe et al., 2006; Suhandjati, 2002).

Outline of paper

Our depth of field in this paper ranges from women's perception and understanding of the everyday violence of their husbands towards them to Indonesia's legislative framework and socio-cultural norms. After outlining our methodology, we examine the institution of marriage in Indonesia and in our field site in South Sulawesi: the meaning of marriage for men and women, the roles and unequal positions of men and women within marriage, polygyny, and attitudes towards divorce. We then examine women's perceptions of the triggers of domestic violence as revealed through fieldwork data. Finally, we discuss the difficulty for women of escaping domestic violence, thereby getting some purchase on the relative capacity of women to resist or deal with the violence.

Methodology

The fieldwork to collect the data used in this paper was undertaken in Makassar, the capital city of the province of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, in 2004.³ Hereafter, participants will be referred to as S (survivors of domestic violence), WA (women activists), GO (government officials) and RS (religious scholars). Makassar has a population of 1.3 million people (BPS, 2010). The majority of the population is Muslim. Makassar is dominated by the Makassarese, who are Muslim, but other ethnicities are well represented – notably the Bugis, but also the Javanese, Mandarese and Torajans. Interviews were conducted with 38 participants. The main group of informants consisted of 19 women who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence. They were chosen in two ways: introduction by activists in Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), and through the first author's own contacts developed during monthly Islamic study groups (*pengajian*) that she led at a community centre. The participants had a variety of social and educational backgrounds, ranging from not having completed primary school to holding a postgraduate qualification. All were Makassarese or Buginese, all were Muslim and all had lived in Makassar for more than ten years. In addition, the first author interviewed 19 people who had some relevant expertise or experience in dealing with domestic violence. This second group consisted of government employees working in support services, NGO activists in support services, and religious scholars at Makassar State Islamic University.

The Gender Relations of Marriage in Indonesia

Here we present information on marriage and the gender system in Indonesia, where relevant noting local differences in emphasis from the national Indonesian pattern. "Local" here refers to the Bugis-Makassarese culture in South Sulawesi. While Bugis and Makassarese see themselves as distinct ethnic groups, both Bugis and Makassar *adat* (custom) are strongly influenced by Islam, such that it is almost impossible to disentangle them.

Ideal marriage in Indonesia – laws and roles

The law and practice of marriage received considerable attention in feminist work on women in Indonesia during the New Order under Suharto (1966–98) (e.g. Blackburn,

2004; Blackburn and Bessell, 1997; Robinson, 2009; Suryakusuma, 1996; see also Butt, 2008; Cammack et al., 2008). Because of this, here we only focus on those aspects of marriage that are relevant to our data on domestic violence.⁴

The 1974 Marriage Law states that husbands are the heads of families, and that wives are housewives (ROI, 1974, Article 31 (3)). Although the implementation of law is commonly weak in Indonesia, this statement, that husbands are the heads of families, is known and accepted throughout Indonesia and has everyday material effects. During the New Order, Indonesian authorities promulgated an ideal of the happy and harmonious family. The ideological base of the Indonesian nation-state is the “family foundation” (*azas kekeluargaan*). The “family foundation” ideology presumed harmonious affective ties among family members; it assigned to each family member a “natural” place and a role to play. The gender roles within the family were said to be equal and complementary, but actually the model was infused with hierarchical principles, particularly respect for age and maleness. The *azas kekeluargaan* provided a vision of an integrated nation and state: the nation-state was to be one big, happy family. The father at the apex enjoys a natural authority, and those subordinate to him – the wife and children in the new nuclear family – serve his interests, which are conflated with the interests of the family. There is unity of power and authority, the primacy of family needs over individual needs, and no legitimate opposition. Although this was said to suit the Indonesian national character, real-life Indonesian families tend to be much more extended and complicated than this.

Marriage in Bugis-Makassarese society

Marriage for the Bugis involves not just the bringing together of two individuals in marriage but also

the joining of two families into one, whether or not the “actors” belong to the same kin group... [T]he Bugis term for marriage [*siala*] ... can be translated as “to take each other”... [T]here is an act of exchange in which the groom’s side takes the bride’s, and vice versa, in order to form a new social alliance which plays an important role in kinship (Idrus, 2004).

Similarly, for the Makassarese,

marriage among close family members (endogamous marriage) occurs with the aim of maintaining and strengthening kinship ties. The main consideration for choosing a daughter’s partner is social status and kinship or relatedness, and this practice remains predominant. In order to maintain family strength and privilege, arranged marriages often occur (Aisyah, 2007, p. 70).

The Bugis and Makassarese are strongly Islamic societies. Both have patrilineal kinship systems, with marriage cementing a strong tie between wider families or clans. Substantial payments are made to the bride’s family at the time of the wedding. These payments are forfeited by the male side upon divorce. For these and other reasons, divorce is uncommon (Jones, 1994, p. 220).

In Islam, the main reason for marriage is procreation. Marriage “establishes the rights and duties for both husband and wife, and protects any children born from the marriage” (Idrus, 2004). Sex may only occur within marriage; sex before, outside or after marriage is a major sin (*zina*). While procreation is the primary function of marriage for both genders, there are significant gender differences in the meaning of marriage. For men, marriage is an announcement and confirmation of sexual potency and hence masculinity. For women, “the significance of marriage is connected to ... marriageability ... [which] is connected to her sexual purity and commodified value” (Idrus, 2004). Unlike men, women do not usually discuss marriage in terms of sexual needs, as this would render them morally suspect. For Bugis women, there is an economic motivation to get married: “As women commonly said: ‘There is someone who looks for money for me’..., thus making explicit the husband’s role as breadwinner” (Idrus, 2004).

A second important feature of marriage in Bugis-Makassarese society is honour (*siri*). *Siri* has multiple meanings: honour, shame, shyness, fear, humility, disgrace, envy, self-respect, and morality (Baso and Idrus, 2002, p. 207, n. 1). In Indonesia generally, marriage is both a marker of adulthood and a fundamental aspect of an adult’s identity and social status. In Bugis society, which is strongly hierarchical, marriage is an arena that one can use to enhance or lower one’s social status. Usually, a man and a woman who marry are of equal status. Women can marry “up” (i.e. by marrying a man whose family status is higher than their own), but women who marry down because of love are usually “thrown away” (Idrus, 2004) – they are no longer recognised by their families. The woman is thus “the symbol of family *siri*’ (honour)... A woman determines or stabilises the degree of nobility of her family” (Idrus, 2004).

Gender roles and responsibilities in marriage

The Indonesian state prescribes gendered roles within the family and household. The Marriage Law of 1974 sets out the rights and responsibilities of husbands and wives. The economic role of the husband is clearly articulated: “husbands are responsible for protecting their wives and for providing all the necessities of life for the household, in keeping with their capability” (ROI, 1974, Article 34 (1)). Article 34 (2) clearly lays out the wife’s territory: “Wives are obliged to organise the household as well as possible” (ROI, 1974). In Makassar, the gender division of labour is defined according to *adat*. The main duties of women are domestic chores and child care; men should provide for and maintain the safety and welfare of family members. In Makassar society, women’s status is “highly respected” and women should be “protected” (Hamid, 1994, p. 33; Baso and Idrus, 2002, p. 199). There are a range of cultural and social expectations of women – e.g. women should avoid any act that may cause family dishonour, such as adultery and elopement. The accounts of participants in this study with respect to gender roles within marriage are consistent with these anthropologists’ accounts. One activist stated:

There are double responsibilities [for women], especially for career women. They work outside the home and have to be responsible for domestic chores including cooking and taking care of children. Their income is considered secondary. Women are sometimes asked to quit their jobs in order to raise children. Moreover, women have to be submissive and obedient and need to ask permission

from their husband if they want to go out. Men, on the other hand, only work in the public sphere and rarely undertake household tasks (WA1, 2 March 2004).

Another respondent explained gender roles as follows:

Women are supposed to serve and take care of their husbands, be tolerant and submissive, respect them and never challenge them. Men, however, as family financial providers and heads of family, are maintainers of family honour and provide family guidance (WA2, 3 March 2004).

One religious scholar did contradict the idea that women should always be submissive towards husbands, saying “Submission is not appropriate in all circumstances, especially in things that go against religion” (RS2, 8 April 2004). In other words, submission is required only where the husband’s will is put to good purpose; it follows that there is no requirement that women should submit to acts of violence. That is, men do not have absolute rights or power over women. Married women are often expected to take on the role of managing the family income and expenditure, organising the household and caring for elderly relatives. Women nevertheless have limited power within the family: the position of household manager does not entail rights to control the family economy.

The margins of marriage: Polygyny

The 1974 Marriage Law and associated regulations made early marriage, divorce and polygyny more difficult in Indonesia. The issue of polygyny has been a continuing sore spot for the women’s movement throughout the twentieth century, not least because it has been impossible for activists to unite under an anti-polygyny banner (Blackburn, 2004). Nurmila’s recent study of polygyny in Indonesia revealed that polygyny was consistently associated with “significant degrees of emotional and physical violence” for women (2009, p. 14). Even literalist Muslim women felt “shocked” and “heartbroken” when their husbands suddenly announced that they intended to take a second wife (Nurmila, 2009, p. 82). To read these women’s stories is to read of suffering, of “dying while standing”, of trauma and distress, social isolation, loneliness and maltreatment “under the guise of male religious piety” (Nurmila, 2009, p. xiv). While Indonesia’s Law on Domestic Violence 2004 does recognise acts that cause “sexual or psychological misery or suffering” as domestic violence, this is not to say that Indonesia recognises polygyny as necessarily entailing domestic violence (ROI, 2004). However, there does seem to be a strong link between polygyny and female suffering, and between polygyny and divorce. For instance, Suhandjati (2002) examined the cases of 50 women who registered as having experienced domestic violence: 12 were women who filed for divorce because of violence toward them that involved polygyny or *selingkuh* (unofficial wives, mistresses or long-running affairs).

Arranged and “choice” marriages

As young women in Indonesia increasingly pursue education and careers, marriage increasingly occurs through the individual choice of marriage partners. The discourse

of *cinta*, romantic love, has become dominant in Indonesia, mainly through the medium of popular culture. This trend has occurred in Makassar, where educated and employed women sometimes refuse a parent's choice of partner and choose a partner themselves (Aisyah, 2007, p. 73). Nevertheless, young people still generally seek parental approval and consent. Although arranged marriage has become less common in Indonesia, it has not been discarded. Arranged marriage continues to exist in certain places, particularly in rural areas around Makassar (Aisyah, 2007, p. 72).⁵ Marriages that are not arranged can be elopements or abductions. After such a marriage, women in Makassar are not only restricted to socialising with their husband's family members, but also may, on rare occasions, face the risk of being killed if they have damaged family *siri'* (Aisyah, 2007, p. 72).

We turn now to our data on domestic violence, to see how this discursive environment shapes women's perception of the violence that their husbands mete out to them. We preface this section by saying that we cannot claim that our data are comprehensive for Makassar, let alone for Indonesia.

Domestic Violence in Makassar

The view that domestic violence is a private matter that does not require intervention from outsiders is held by many in Indonesia, including some women who have experienced it. In this view, conflict and disagreement within marital relationships are natural, and husbands and wives are expected to resolve their problems within the family. In Makassar it is commonly believed that speaking out about domestic violence causes a woman to feel *siri'* (shame), which undermines family honour. One woman stated that it was better to keep silent rather than seek help, because seeking help would cause humiliation, and anyway, for the most part, she believed that she deserved it (S4, 4 March 2004). This puzzling final comment led us to think deeply about the meaning of marriage for our respondents.

Domestic violence and women's agency: Challenging men's authority

Many women in our sample traced the act of violence to an expression of their own agency vis-à-vis their husband's authority. One woman noted, "My husband beats me if I interrupt or talk while he is speaking" (S1, 4 March 2004). This is not to say that in general women blame themselves for domestic violence – contra the statement of S4 above. Rather, when a woman challenges a man's authority, he finds this threatening and retaliates by striking her.⁶ The violent response of men to the exercise of agency by wives is one of the strongest themes in the talk of women who experience domestic violence in Makassar. It clearly indicates the hegemony of the patriarchal gender ideology, as enshrined in the Marriage Law: men are the powerful heads of families, and women are rightly subordinate to men. Some women stated that they were always at risk of abuse if they advanced an opinion or made comments during confrontations. The husband wished them to keep silent and not challenge them. In such cases, violence was often used to end the argument.

Articles 31 and 34 of the 1974 Marriage Law clearly ascribe power asymmetry. In addition, Muslim women often accept that marriage entails presumed consent for sexual

intercourse, whenever a husband demands it outside of menstruation. This was also reported by Idrus and Bennett (2003, p. 51):

He believes that as a husband, he has the right to be sexually served by his wife whenever he pleases. If I refused him, he would throw me onto the bed, take off my clothes, and force me to have sex. He also forced me to make sounds to stimulate his passion. He treated me not like a wife, but like a whore. If I resisted him, he would become angrier and hit me without any thought or respect.

Again the woman's agency in the form of resistance was met with further violence. The language of "serving" is frequently used. While women generally accept that they should serve their husbands with food and drink, opinion is divided over sexual services. In the Criminal Code there is no concept of marital rape. In our sample, only two women mentioned sexual violence, detailing that their husbands had tried to force them to engage in sexual relations, including during menstruation (S2, 15 March 2004; S19, 27 April 2004).

Alcohol consumption is proscribed by Islam and drinking is not the common social problem in Makassar that it is in countries such as Australia. When violence occurred after a drinking episode, it was usually if the wife asked, "Where have you been?" or "Can you please stop drinking?" (S1, 4 March 2004). The husband's responses to such questions included violence and threats to kill her. Another man expected his wife and children to always be waiting at home for him, after he had been drinking:

My husband always gets angry or physically abuses me if I or my children are not at home. He often kicks me when I ask him not to drink alcohol. This occurs almost every day and the most frightening is when he hits me with a piece of wood. Because of that, I have a permanently broken leg (S3, 4 March 2004).

Another survivor also revealed that she had been beaten for going out (S3, 4 March 2004). This indicates that women's agency is countered by male possessiveness and wish to control. One woman stated that her husband's abuse was a way of problem solving for him (S1, 2 March 2004). Thus, domestic violence was frequently triggered by the wife's questioning of the man's authority, supremacy, adequacy or morality, and the man's intolerance of criticism.

Domestic violence and gender roles within marriage

Acts of domestic violence are frequently traced by women to their husband's perception that they (the women) are not playing their gender role as household manager, when the women felt that the men were not adequately providing for the family. There is often a sense that the man is shifting the blame for economic difficulties on to the wife:

I am not allowed to manage the family budget. My husband keeps questioning how I spent the money if there is not enough to cover bills or food (S1, 4 March 2004).

Something of the pressures of the husband's role can be discerned in the following woman's description of a confrontation over their roles in the household economy:

I asked him to look for a job. He replied that I should not harass or ask him to find work because he was aware of that. He said, "I know ten times [better] than you, and I understand [the need to seek employment], and you as a wife do not need to tell me about that". He also suggested that I was not clever enough to pass judgment on him [by making that suggestion] (S6, 8 March 2004).

This man sounds quite sensitive about his unemployed status: his male pride is wounded when his wife points out his inadequacies as a provider. In a developing country such as Indonesia, it is clearly impossible for all men to provide adequately for their families. For this reason, the burden of responsibility on men is a heavy one. Many men in Indonesia do not get married until they are economically independent: in this way, marriage for men is a mark of successful masculinity. This statement shows that embedded in men's role as provider for the family is an assumption that he occupies the high ground when it comes to evaluating the success or otherwise of the family unit: he denies his wife the right to criticise, by denigrating her intellectual capacity.

Five women provided stories of economic abuse. One said that her husband restricted her spending on daily necessities (S1, 4 March 2004); another that she had never received any financial support from her husband because he had another wife (S3, 4 March 2004). Other women stated that their husbands were physically violent towards them if they asked for money (S5, 4 March 2004; S13, 15 March 2004). These accounts indicate not only men's attempts to restrict and control women's access to financial resources, but also men's refusal to take responsibility for economic shortfalls – implied when their wives had to ask them for money. One survivor (S6) revealed her polygynous husband's failure to provide for his families – see below. Men shifted their failure to carry out their responsibility for the economic wellbeing of the family on to women, at the same time as they attempted to silence women's verbal reminders of their failure through violence.

Women are also often blamed by their husbands for failing to fulfil their gender responsibilities. Wives are often chastised over domestic misdemeanours such as a child's bad behaviour, children's injuries, poor cooking, or for going out without their husband's knowledge. One woman related that her husband hit her because her child fell over. The husband accused her of failing to meet her child-caring responsibilities, and of not taking care of their child (S1 and S2, 4 March 2004; S10, 14 March 2004). Another woman noted that her husband became angry when she did not provide meals for him. He commented that it was not difficult to cook rice, which takes only a few minutes. By belittling domestic skills, the husband denigrated her as a woman (S9, 13 March 2004). Physical and emotional violence are often used when women are perceived as not complying with their prescribed gender roles or failing to undertake them in ways deemed appropriate by men. The effect of such criticism is often to damage the woman's self-identity and esteem: she is made to feel inadequate as a woman, a wife and a mother.

It is also the case that each woman's story is complicated. The following excerpt from an interview shows a woman's typically densely-woven narrative that combines many strands: challenges to male authority, conflict over gender roles, alcohol abuse,

conflict over control of money, and finally, the hurt of having to compete with another woman:

My husband beats me if I interrupt or talk while he is speaking, or if the children fall down, or after drinking alcohol or if I am looking for him at a drinking site... I cannot make decisions about family expenditure and when the money is insufficient he keeps asking "How has the money been spent?" My husband often hits me if I purchase something which he dislikes. Also, my husband is having an affair with another woman (S1, 4 March 2004).

Rowe et al. also reported that "[s]pousal abuse often followed a wife's complaint about her husband's affair" (Rowe et al., 2006, p. 44). We turn now to this final theme in women's stories about the violence they experience.

Domestic violence, men having affairs and polygyny

"Having cancer might be better than having a polygamous husband" (S13, 15 March 2004).

Many women who are the victims of violent abuse by their husbands have to put up with sexual infidelity – through their partners having affairs or through polygyny, which is sometimes kept secret. Six of the 19 survivors interviewed noted that their husbands were having affairs. One woman who divorced her husband for this reason claimed: "If he has a special girlfriend, it means that he does not love me any more... I divorced him because I prefer to enjoy and improve my life, not to be beaten and dishonoured" (S18, 12 April 2004). The issue for wives is not just one of love, sexual jealousy and competition: it is also about their self-identity and self-esteem as women and wives, their social status and family honour. Polygyny and mistresses frequently mean economic deprivation for the wives as well as for their children.

One woman stated that her husband became violent when she challenged him about his affair with another woman. He denied having an affair, but many people had witnessed it. She advised her husband that "having a mistress is socially unacceptable and that he should be aware of such a mistake" (simultaneous interviews with S1 and S16, 4 March and 14 April 2004). Comments that take the moral high ground and challenge male power and authority are a common precursor to domestic violence in Makassar. Advising men to adhere to religious and cultural values and norms, such as abstaining from alcohol and not having affairs, leads to arguments that often end in violence. Women's attempts to "guide" men or to negotiate with them undermine and threaten men's apical position in the family. In taking a mistress or having affairs, a man is contravening social and religious norms. One of our interviewees said: "I never complain or tell anyone when my husband physically abuses me, but when he engages in a sexual scandal, I let others know about that" (S1, 4 March 2004). While it is regrettable that the perpetrator of violence gets away with his crime, we can almost hear the wife's vengeful pleasure as she reveals her husband's sexual misdemeanours. The cultural logic that causes men who are having affairs to be violent to their wives, thereby inflicting a double pain, seems to be related to the fact that their wives can take this moral high ground. The men have no defence: such behaviour is not condoned by religious or social norms – and indeed is a major sin (*zina*) in Islam. Women suffer

significant emotional turmoil due to a husband's polygyny/affairs. They identified this issue more overtly and more frequently than any other as a contributing factor to domestic violence. The virtuous wife, who perceives that she has been wronged by her polygynous husband, is herself perceived as a threat by the husband, so he lashes out in an attempt to deny his wrong-doing and impose his will on her virtue.

When a man takes on a second (third or fourth) wife, he is legally required to secure the signed consent of his first and former wives. Such marriages are rather suspect in Indonesia: as noted above, marriages are supposed to be smooth and harmonious. Taking a second, third or fourth wife seems to be stating that the early marriage/s were lacking. Under the New Order, there was a disapproving attitude towards polygyny, at least in public:

A woman who was a second wife couldn't be out in the open because of the sense of shame and embarrassment arising out of her position. Society despised those involved in polygamous marriages (Minza, 2009, p. 25).

When a man takes a second wife, there is the suspicion that the first wife is inadequate as a wife, particularly "in bed" – that is, that she does not know how to "serve" her husband and satisfy his sexual demands (Idrus, 1999, p. 84). In addition to the personal hurt that the first wife might feel at being supplanted in her husband's affections by a (usually younger, prettier) second wife, the first wife must also contend with gossip and sexual innuendo that undermine her confidence in herself. One woman, whose husband practised polygyny without her consent, stated that she suffers permanent psychological distress. She said that it was not easy to recover from his insults or to forgive him, even though he had since divorced his second wife. He had been considerate and quiet when living the lie. When she realised that he had married another woman, she had felt humiliated. She could not trust him again when he was away from home, even for business (S13, 15 March 2004). In the Indonesian and Islamic context, women assume that their husbands are sexually faithful. Often they have not realised, or made explicit to themselves, the sexual double standard that prevails in Indonesian society: that women must be pure and monogamous, but men not only may be sexually promiscuous, but can also enhance their masculine status by having affairs and taking multiple wives.

The fact that domestic violence goes hand-in-hand with polygynous marriage is hardly surprising. The man is under considerable social pressure, not least because he is supposed to be economically and equally supporting two (or more) families. Many divorce cases instigated by wives have been successful because polygynous husbands have been economically negligent – i.e. they have not provided for the family of the first wife (O'Shaughnessy, 2009; Suhandjati, 2002).

Domestic violence and socioeconomic class

Women of all educational backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses experience domestic violence. Rowe et al.'s (2006) study of academic women in Medan who experienced domestic violence makes it clear that professional standing and high education do not protect women from violent husbands. Further, the "material wellbeing and presumed independence of [financially independent] wives actually contributes to the violence

because it challenges cultural patriarchy” (Rowe et al., 2006, p. 46). Idrus’ study of eight cases of marital rape in 1997 in Makassar revealed a wide range of education and socioeconomic statuses (1999, p. 11). Nevertheless, there are some classed patterns. For instance, Suhandjati found that women with higher education (senior high school or above) were more likely to express their feelings and to file for divorce than those with only primary or junior high school education (Suhandjati, 2002, pp. 96–97).

Our Makassar data do not reveal any class patterns in the type or frequency of violence, but education was a factor in some women’s strategising. One survivor saw education as necessary for women “to prevent them from being underestimated by men, especially when they are abused” (S2, 4 March 2004). One highly-educated woman, the family’s main economic provider, does not tell other people about her experience of violence. She conceals her husband’s violence because she believes it is a private family matter and a personal problem. Disclosing abuse is very embarrassing, and she is worried about being ostracised by the community. She said that they might ask, “Why do educated people have such problems?” (S6, 8 March 2004). This reveals a presumption that domestic violence is the preserve of lower-class, ill-educated people, and a middle-class concern with keeping up the appearance of propriety and respectability.

Escaping Domestic Violence

Leaving a husband is a very big step to take in Indonesia. The single woman is strongly stigmatised in Indonesian society. The category of single, adult woman does not really exist in Indonesian society: the word for mother, *ibu*, is also the title for all adult women. In effect, adulthood for women equates with motherhood. Marriage leads quickly to parenthood; infertile couples are much pitied. In Indonesian, the term *janda* refers to both widows and divorced women. The stigmatisation of *janda* has to do with the fact that they are autonomous women, not under the control of a man; sexual desire (*nafsu*) in a divorced or widowed woman is thought to be alive and unsatisfied. As Wieringa said, “Non-married women such as widows or divorced women,... sex workers and lesbians are seen as deviant or abjected and face various kinds of harassment” (2009, pp. 21–22). “Cultural stereotypes that divorced women are considered to be ‘bad’ and ‘shameful’ may contribute to [the perpetuation of] domestic violence” (WA2, 3 March 2004).

Divorce is restricted by the state, not only through the Marriage Law but also through discourses of shame (O’Shaughnessy, 2009, Ch. 3). The state courts are embedded in a gender order which defines female-initiated divorce as shameful and sees divorce as an attack on men’s superior social status. Women who want to escape marriage are constructed as transgressive: if they initiate divorce, they are exhibiting impropriety. Women bear the brunt of public humiliation and shame for failed marriages as well as for their husband’s affairs. In Bugis society, where marriage is a matter of family honour, a failed marriage is a public disgrace, especially for the woman. Reddy has noted that shame “derives from thoughts about how one is seen by others... Thus, shame can lead to withdrawal coupled with action aimed at managing appearances” (1997, p. 347).

Both educated and uneducated women in our study wanted to conceal domestic abuse in order to present an image of family harmony. One woman whose husband frequently abused her said she really hates her husband but is traumatised by having

run away after a violent episode (S2, 4 March 2004). Another, who had been attacked almost daily, and has a permanently broken knee, said she feels irritation and anger, but has no power to confront her husband. She fears that he might kill her. The only thing she can do is accept the abuse (S3, 4 March 2004). One woman was physically, emotionally and economically abused by her husband, but opted to keep silent and tolerate the violence. She often thought about running away from her violent husband but her parents refused to allow her to stay with them (S1, 4 March 2004). This introduces an interesting new finding from this study: women who have experienced domestic violence following a love or "choice" marriage, as opposed to an arranged marriage, find that they cannot go home to their birth family. Two of the 19 survivors interviewed stated that their parents were reluctant to let them return owing to the fact that their marriages were marriages of choice. One woman said that it was the shame of being subject to criticism by others that kept her silent. Her family would criticise her, asking, "Why did you not screen him more carefully before marriage?" (S1, 4 March 2004). Particularly for women who have exercised agency in choice of marriage partner, domestic violence is a private matter that should be resolved privately. The following quote shows that this abused woman, who had married for love, was equally as frightened by the threat of violence if she returned to her natal family as by more violence if she stayed with her abusive husband:

[I] wanted to make a complaint about the violence but I could not do that. My parents disagreed with my choice of partner. It was frightening to go to my parents' home or to stay at my own home... I was emotionally shattered; my left eye was swollen and bruised. [I wanted] to apply for divorce, but what about my children and their education? The status of "divorced" is not socially approved of and has negative [connotations]. Divorced women are not allowed to go out, and if we do, it is assumed we do so to find a man. This brings about family dishonour (*siri*)... A woman is always blamed for divorce (S6, 8 March 2004).

Leaving the marital home is a very serious step, especially for women who cannot access temporary accommodation and get support from their natal family. If a woman escapes briefly and is then forced to return to her husband, she may well experience further violence. Thus, feelings of hopelessness, vulnerability and isolation are reinforced. Many women have no experience of supporting themselves. There is also the possibility of having to leave children behind – depending on local *adat*.

In Indonesia, women who experience domestic violence often have nowhere to escape and feel there is no way to end the violence. Parents' failure to provide support and temporary accommodation is a major obstacle for women who suffer domestic violence. One government official stated:

Men are socialised into a belief that wife abuse is permissible and that they can do whatever they wish because the wife is considered as their property. Women, on the other hand, are powerless and ... tend to conceal it... Women survivors ... have difficulties in achieving financial autonomy and their self-esteem deteriorates. Neither temporary accommodation nor emotional support is available from family, community and state. The family and the community often lack respect for the victims and claim they have provoked the violence (GO3, 9 March 2004).

Table 1. Nineteen Women's Responses to Domestic Violence*

Responses	Number of Cases	% Cases
Accepted Abuse	9	36
Left	3	12
Separated	1	4
Sought Divorce	3	12
Resorted to Violence	5	20
Sought External Intervention	4	16
Total	25	100

*Some women offered more than one response.

In the table below we have presented 19 women's responses to domestic violence. Given the social and economic problems outlined above, it is hardly surprising that the dominant response was to accept the abuse.

Conclusion

This study has shown that, in Indonesia, marriage is constructed as an unequal power relationship in which husbands can legitimately wield power over wives. Domestic violence is an abuse of this husbandly power. Our study has shown how women's agency, marriage and domestic violence are interconnected. It has identified three points within marriage where women exert agency to claim some equality, dignity and autonomy, and at each of these three points their agency can be met with violence. The first is when women have chosen to marry a partner for love. In doing this, they resist parental authority and the social convention of arranged marriage. This expression of agency can come back to bite them later on: if their husbands are violent, their natal families can refuse to provide shelter for their errant daughters. As in Butt and Munro's (2007) study, if we take a wider frame, and look not just at the autonomy of the "love" marriage but also at the violence in the marriage, we see a classic example of how agency at one time can bring about disempowerment later on, when their husbands hit them, their families decline to support them, and can even turn violent against the victim. Second, if abused women take the initiative, "go public" and seek a divorce to escape their husband's violence, their agency is seen as transgressive and they are blamed for the failure of the marriage. The third, and most important, finding of the study is that most instances of domestic violence were identified by women as retaliation for and/or attempts to control women's agentic actions. Women consistently identified their own expression of agency within marriage as the cue for their husband's violence. Sometimes it was when women verbally challenged their husband's authority or moral righteousness, for instance, if the man was having an affair, marrying polygynously or drinking; sometimes it was when women pointed out their husband's inadequacies as a provider; sometimes it was when women pushed against their husband's possessiveness by going out or visiting their families. Thus domestic violence indexes not only the cultural construction of power within marriage, but also, ironically, wifely agency. This study shows the truth of Ortner's claim that "the cultural construction of power is always, simultaneously, the cultural construction of forms of agency and effectiveness

in dealing with powerful others" (1997, p. 146). Women's expression of agency within marriage triggers men's violence.

Our identification of culturally specific aspects of marriage, the aetiology of domestic violence, and the lack of options for women who experience domestic violence in Indonesia indicate the great need for feminists to respond in a locally sensitive way to the needs of women who experience domestic violence. In the years since fieldwork was conducted for this project, Indonesian feminists have had considerable success not only in legislating a Law against domestic violence but also in direct action such as setting up refuges, information and reporting desks in police offices, and other institutional supports for women who experience domestic violence. The gender ideology still instantiated in marriage in Indonesia, as revealed in the first half of this paper, also shows there is much to be done in building a public discourse against domestic violence in the mass media.

Notes

1. In Indonesia, the level of non-marital cohabitation is so low as not to register in censuses. The level of domestic violence outside marital domestic violence – for example, violence towards children, housemaids or the elderly – is not yet known.
2. The neglect of domestic violence and the transition to democracy are dealt with in Blackburn (1999 and 2004). Sciortino and Smyth (2002) analyse the reasons for the silence about domestic violence in Indonesia.
3. The fieldwork on which this paper is based was undertaken by the first author during her PhD program; she was funded by AusAid and Flinders University, Australia. The researcher initiated contact with respondents personally and explained the purpose of the study and related issues and made appointments for interviews. In a few cases, preliminary contact was only with coordinators of women's NGOs. Most women were interviewed at a Women's Centre to minimise their stress; some were interviewed at home.
4. As part of the raft of new legislation after Suharto, a Muslim feminist scholar, Musdah Mulia, worked with a team in the Ministry of Religion to complete a Counter Legal Draft (CLD), which was a revision of Indonesia's Islamic legal code. Among the revisions were a ban on polygyny and arranged marriages, and the raising of the age of marriage for girls from 16 to 19 years. Both changes, she said, would help to prevent domestic violence and child abuse. The revisions were deemed so inflammatory that the Draft has not gone to legislation.
5. Recently, there have been reports of a swing towards arranged marriage in Java, particularly among fervently Islamic university students (Nilan, 2008; Smith-Hefner, 2005).
6. We note that the violent response of a man to his wife's challenge is an acknowledgment of her resistance. Scott notes "The ability to choose to overlook or ignore an act of insubordination as if it never happened is a key exercise of power" (Scott, 1990, p. 89, n. 44). The fact that the men did not ignore the challenge suggests that the men felt vulnerable – perhaps because the women had right on their side.

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