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The stigmatisation of widows and divorcees (*janda*) in Indonesia, and the possibilities for agency

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the discourses and practices of stigmatisation that shape the experience of widows and divorced women (*janda*) in Indonesia. The conceptualisation of stigma allows us to see that the experience of being a *janda* is a gendered, moral experience. The article examines the construction of ideal marriage in Islam and in Indonesia, divorce, and the construction of gender and sexuality. There is a dominant discourse that divorced and widowed women are sexually available and promiscuous; the result is often that men prey upon *janda*. In turn, wives feel threatened by the competition that *janda* represent. This article is based on ethnographic and interview data from two field sites: Bandung, West Java, and Wawonii island, off the coast of Southeast Sulawesi; both are Muslim communities. It also explores the possibilities for women's agency and destigmatisation, through the mobilising of social networks and the emphasising of their worth as good mothers to achieve social respectability.

KEYWORDS

agency; divorcees; Indonesia; stigma; widows

Introduction

Widows and divorcees (*janda*) suffer considerable stigma in Indonesian societies. This article uses the conceptualisation of stigma as a lens through which to view ethnographic data on the experience of *janda*-hood and the treatment of *janda* in Indonesia. The ethnographic data were collected during fieldwork in Bandung, West Java, and the island of Wawonii, off the southeast coast of Sulawesi, in 2012 and 2013.

The status of *janda* can lead to their subordination and marginalisation; as a result they often suffer social exclusion and economic deprivation. The *janda* is not just a person who is disadvantaged, frequently poor and a single parent, and discriminated against. She is also subject to suspicion and accusations of moral turpitude. In Indonesia, sex should be contained within heterosexual marriage. Women who have been married have already experienced sexual desire (*nafsu*) and as unaccompanied widows (*janda mati*) and divorcees (*janda cerai*) they are suspected of sexual autonomy, impropriety and loose-ness. We argue that *janda* are constructed as immoral women because they epitomise the opposite of constructions of ideal marriage, female sexuality and gender. The

anthropological conceptualisation of stigma allows us to see that the experience of being a *janda* is a gendered, moral experience.

However, the ethnographic data also show some ways that *janda* manage their disadvantaged position, mobilising social networks and emphasising their virtuous motherhood to achieve social respectability. *Janda* in Indonesia do not always suffer stigmatisation and in the final section of this article we show how some are able to exercise agency to ameliorate their condition and (re)establish themselves as moral, respectable women.

Stigmatisation and de-stigmatisation

Social researchers in various fields have used the conceptualisation of ‘stigma’ to analyse ‘the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance’ (Goffman 1963: preface) by the ascription of some mark of disgrace. Often a physical attribute or obvious characteristic, such as leprosy, mental illness or a physical disability, is associated with pejorative meanings, such as inferiority, danger or threat. It is these pejorative meanings that are the sociocultural construction of stigma. Thus, the individual with a ‘different’ condition is doubly burdened with physical difference and the shadow of stigma and becomes socially defined by their stigma. Because stigma is a sociocultural construct, a physical ‘mark’ or condition can have different meanings in different societies, and in the same society at different times.

For this article, the important point about stigma on a social scale is the construction of two groups: the ‘normals’ who are hegemonic and powerful, and ‘the stigmatised’ who are a minority (Goffman 1963). Goffman (1963: 5) noted that ‘We [normals] construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his [sic] inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences, such as those of social class.’

The ‘stigma-theory’ of *janda*-hood in Indonesia constructs the *janda* as disgraced and immoral, in contrast to the ‘normals’, who are married. The derogation of the *janda* is an expression of the power of the ‘normals’: it is the power to separate and classify, label and assign inferiority to those who are ‘different’ (Link and Phelan 2001). Researchers have begun to examine the use of social, economic and political power in constructing stigma and in discriminating against the stigmatised. Corrigan et al. (2004), for instance, describe two types of structural discrimination that can amplify the effects of stigmatisation: institutional discrimination can intentionally restrict opportunities for stigmatised groups (e.g. when people with mental illness are not allowed to vote), and structural discrimination can also occur unintentionally. For instance, Indonesia has introduced policies that require birth and marriage certificates before children can enrol in school, and many *janda* find themselves disadvantaged as a result (Platt 2009).

Our interest is in the experience of *janda*, of living with stigma in a local, social world – how *janda* are regarded and vilified, how discrimination is manifest, and the extent to which they have internalised the marks of the stigma. It would not be surprising to find that *janda* feel ashamed: stigmatised people are just as socialised into the norms and values of society as are the stigmatisers, and self-stigmatisation indexes the strength of stigma attached to the condition of difference (Markowitz 2005).

We share the perspective of Yang et al. (2007: 1528), that stigma is ‘embedded in the moral life of sufferers’. They posit that ‘stigma exerts its core effects by threatening the loss or diminution of what is most at stake, or by actually diminishing or destroying

that lived value' (Yang et al. 2007: 1524). We suggest that what really matters, or what is threatened, in the stigmatisation of widowed and divorced women in Indonesia is a social order that depends upon marriage. Stigmatising a woman who is not married (but has been married) is a response that arises from 'feelings of danger, uncertainty, and preservation' (Yang et al. 2007: 1528). If a marriage breaks down, manifest in divorce or separation, what is most at stake for other married people is the certainty that marriage is the normal, moral and best way to live.

In the case of *janda mati*, or widows, the loss of a marriage partner does not send the same signal of social disorder and threat that is sent through divorce or separation. However, it does speak to other possible disorders and chaos, and above all, the fear of the unknown. In both cases, for widows and divorcees, stigma compounds suffering. What is also significant is that these feelings of threat, danger and fear that are expressed in stigma are focused on women, not men. For this reason, we say that the stigmatisation that attends divorce and the death of a marital partner is a gendered, moral experience.

The ethnographic data reveal some ways that widows and divorced women exercise agency to avoid or reject stigmatisation, ameliorate their position in society and restore their reputation. In saying that *janda* exercise agency we mean that they mobilise different sorts of capital (see below) and capacities that enable them to get by, to deal with the stigma, and, in some cases, to rebuild their identity as 'normal' and respectable members of society.¹ Mostly we see that they mobilise support from their families and communities. Bourdieu's idea of different forms of capital – economic, social, cultural and symbolic – is useful here (1977, 1986). Social capital refers to the social resources and networks that a person can draw upon – families, friends, neighbours, colleagues, the larger community. Cultural capital refers to knowledge, skills and language, as well as embodied habits. Cultural capital is long-lasting and is acquired by individuals mainly from the family during childhood socialisation, in both conscious and unconscious ways (Bourdieu 1986). In Bourdieu's work, 'symbolic capital' refers to honour and prestige attached to a family or individual (1977: 179); we extend it to encompass respectability for *janda*. The different forms of capital can be expended as well as accumulated, and converted into other forms of capital. In the final section of the article, we see how *janda* draw upon and cultivate these different forms of capital in an exercise of agency that aims both to de-stigmatise their selves and ameliorate their sometimes difficult conditions of life. In Wawonii, the cultivation of social capital is particularly important as a method for mitigating the consequences of isolation and poverty.

In order to understand *janda*-hood as a gendered, moral experience, we first present an analysis of ideal marriage in Indonesia, according to state regulations and in Islam, to show the hegemonic norm of the married couple; and we present the dominant discourses on divorce. Then we outline our two field sites, where our ethnographic data were collected, and proceed to the ethnographic data that show how *janda* experience their 'spoiled identity' (Goffman 1963).

Ideal marriage in Indonesia

The regulation and social practice of marriage in Indonesia received considerable attention in feminist work on women in Indonesia during the New Order under Suharto (1966–98)

¹This interpretation of agency follows the work of Parker (2005) and Lister (2004: Chapter 6).

(e.g. Blackburn 2004; Blackburn and Bessell 1997; Robinson 2009; Suryakusuma 1996; see also Butt 2008; Cammack et al. 2008). Because of this extensive attention, here we mainly focus on state regulation of marriage and Islamic teachings that are relevant to our data.

State regulation of marriage

The 1974 Marriage Law states that husbands are the heads of families, and that wives are household managers or housewives (*Hukum* 1974, Article 31, point 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, no doubt partly because it echoes the Islamic injunction noted below. In various ways, this equation causes problems. Individuals and government and non-government agencies that seek to improve the socio-economic well-being of *janda* who are effectively the heads of their household, face the problem that these women cannot be formally identified as such. Although well established in development discourse internationally, in Indonesia the Female-Headed Household eludes both definition and legal status (Akhmadi et al. 2011: ix).

The ideological base of the New Order Indonesian nation-state (1966–98) was the happy and harmonious family, in which the various family members had a ‘natural’ role: father as the head of the household was a figure of authority and the breadwinner; mother was subordinate to him and the housewife; and she and the children were to serve his interests, which were conflated with those of the family. These gender roles echo Islamic teachings about roles within marriage (below).

In 1991 the New Order government promulgated a state-sanctioned version of Islamic law, the Compilation of Islamic Laws (KHI, *Kompilasi Hukum Indonesia*), which reiterated many articles of the 1974 Marriage Law, drawing together state and religious discourses about marriage. It defined marriage as a religious observance (*ibadah*, see below), and stated that the aim of marriage is to create a peaceful, calm and loving household; the husband is the household head and the wife is the manager of the household; a husband must be a guide and mentor to his wife, protect her, provide *nafkah* (economic support) and education in religious matters.

The hegemony of the New Order gender ideology was partly deconstructed during *Reformasi* (post-1998), through democratisation. Presidential Decree No. 9/2000 on Gender Mainstreaming, which required that all government agencies consider gender perspectives in planning, implementing and evaluating policies, and the passing of Law No. 23/2004 on The Abolition of Violence in the Household show remarkable progress in the dismantling of a patriarchal gender ideology. However, at the same time, fundamentalist Islam has blossomed, accompanied by a socially conservative agenda: the declaration of *syariah* in some districts and provinces and other measures such as the Anti-Pornography Law of 2008 have had the effect of restricting women’s mobility and dress; the discourse that women should be stay-at-home wives and mothers has gained new strength; and some reforms that more secular or liberal-minded people advocate (for instance, sex education in schools, liberalisation of abortion laws, easier inter-religious marriage, a new marriage law to abolish the gendered roles of household head and housewife) have had to be shelved.

Islamic teachings

Islam strongly recommends marriage (Q. 24:32), and this relates to guarding one's chastity (Q. 4:25). It lies between *ibadah* (religious duty) and *mu'amalah* (social/private action). Marriage in Islam is called *nikah*, which means sexual intercourse (Arab. *wath'*, *dlom'*), but also refers to the marriage contract, '*aqd*', between the groom and the bride represented by her guardian (*wali*), with *mahr* (bride price or *mas kawin* in Indonesian) given to the bride as a gift (Q. 4:4, 20, 24, 25).² This inextricable connection between marriage and licit sex is central to the construction of *janda* in Indonesian society. The Shafi'i school of law is the dominant one in Indonesia (Feener 2007), and Shafi'i jurists define *nikah* as 'a contract ('*aqd*) that results in the permission of sexual enjoyment (*milk wath'*)' (Al-Jaziry n.d.: 1). Many jurists consider this '*aqd* a contract of exchange: the bride price (*mahr*), which the wife receives, is exchanged for the husband's sexual access to his wife.

A valid marriage, according to the Shafi'i school, should meet five requirements, namely: prospective husband, prospective wife, guardianship (*wali*), two witnesses, and the offer and acceptance (*ijab* and *qabul*) (Al-Jaziry n.d.: 32). A valid marriage contract assigns certain duties and rights to the husband and wife. The husband's duties become the wife's rights and vice versa. The allocation of rights and obligations to both partners varies from one jurist and school of law to another. However, two basic duties that are believed to be complementary have almost become the consensus among the majority of jurists: financial support (*nafaqa*) for the husband, and obedience (*ta'a*) for the wife. Most Muslims agree that the husband is required to support his family financially (Q. 2:233 and 4:34). Obedience (*ta'a*) is considered a wife's duty towards her husband as a consequence of him providing *nafaqa* (Zuhaily 1985). The Qur'an, however, describes marital duties and rights as mutually shared (Q. 4:19, 30:21, 66:6).

Polygyny is a 'hot topic' in discussions of Islamic marriage, and polygynous marriages appear all the time in the ethnographic data on *janda*. In contention is Q. 4:3 on polygyny, which some more contextual scholars argue suggests that polygyny should only be allowed in very strict circumstances, requiring care of orphans and man's ability to act justly (e.g. Abu Zayd 2000; Nurmila 2009; Shahrur 1994). In relation to this verse, another verse in the Qur'an states that it is almost impossible for men to treat several wives justly,³ so it is best to only marry monogamously (Wadud 2006). In practice, however, Q. 4:3 is seen by many Muslim men as permission to practise polygyny and they tend to ignore the conditions associated with polygyny mentioned in the verse. Many cases show that a husband's high sexual desire can be used to permit polygyny in Indonesia (Nurlaelawati 2013).

Divorce in Indonesia

The Indonesian Marriage Law of 1974 states that following divorce, both parties have certain obligations: both parents are responsible for taking care of and providing education

²Much of the literature discussing *mahr* translates it as dowry, but it is best translated as bride price. The two terms, bride price and dowry, are often confused. Bride price can be defined as 'property or money presented by a bridegroom to his bride's relatives in recognition of the marriage' while dowry is 'the money, goods, or estate which a woman brings to her husband at marriage' (Macquarie Dictionary Online). Dowry is often familial property transferred from parents to the daughter upon her marriage, and is typical of South Asian societies (Goody 1973; Tambiah 1973).

³Q. 4:129: 'You will never be able to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire to do so, but do not ignore one wife altogether, leaving her suspended [between marriage and divorce].'

for the children; and the father has financial responsibility for the support of his children and ex-wife (*Hukum* 1974, Article 41). The grounds for divorce include 'irreconcilable differences' and adultery, and it is not generally considered difficult to get a divorce in Indonesia.

Islam gives both parties (husband and wife) the right to report for divorce (Q. 2:229). Dissolution of marriage in Islam, apart from death, can take three forms: *thalaq* (lit. release), *khulu'* (lit. compensation), and *fasakh* (lit. annulment). *Thalaq* is terminating marriage from the husband's side – it can be revocable (*raj'i*) or irrevocable (*ba'in*); *khulu'* is dissolution of marriage from the wife's side by either returning the *mahr* (bride price) or paying financial compensation as agreed by both parties (*iwadh*) (Q. 2:229); and *fasakh* is ending the marriage bond by the court. In Indonesia, the third category includes *ta'lik talak*, the conditions set for the wife to report for divorce: maltreatment, abandonment and insufficient financial support; these are the most commonly used 'causes' of divorce in the courts.

Divorce in Islam is considered normal and permissible, but it is discouraged. Reconciliation is a better approach (or aim) before deciding on divorce, and arbiters are recommended to avoid fights (Q. 65:2, 4:35). Islam emphasises mutual and peaceable reconciliation or separation, and aims to prevent the abandonment and ill-treatment of women (Q. 2:229). After divorce, a waiting period ('*iddah*') is assigned to the wife and on the death of one spouse, to both parties (Q. 2:234). The idea of '*iddah*' is to give time for both parties to consider reconciliation, and to ascertain that the woman is not pregnant so it is easier to recognise the child born (if applicable) for lineage and guardianship purposes. During the period of '*iddah*', divorced women and widows are entitled to maintenance (Q. 2:241): financial support, housing and kind treatment from the husband and/or husband's family (Q. 2:240, 2:233, 65:6).

Indonesian statistics on divorce are unreliable, partly because divorce records are collected by two agencies: the Islamic and the civil courts, both of which are under state control. Divorce is most commonly dealt with in the Islamic courts. Hull (2011: 23) notes significant under-reporting due to shame. However, we know that Indonesia had very high rates of divorce in the 1950s and 1960s – as high as 50% in the 1950s (O'Shaughnessy 2009: 63 and 228, n.17 cites many authors) – followed by a steep decline from the mid 1970s and increases in the new millennium (BADILAG 2010).

The 1974 Marriage Law and associated regulations made early marriage, divorce and polygyny more difficult. O'Shaughnessy (2009: 199) has argued convincingly that the New Order state constructed divorce as shameful, and women who divorced were 'placed in symbolic opposition to the state and the authority of male-headed families and nation'. Perhaps surprisingly, in Indonesia women are the ones who most commonly file for and are granted divorce (O'Shaughnessy 2009: 66ff). Conventional feminists might see this as positive. However, because the state's ideal is the 'happy and permanent family' (*Hukum*, Marriage Law, 1974, Article 1), women who want to escape marriage are constructed as transgressive: if they initiate divorce, they are exhibiting impropriety. Women who file for divorce are often rendered the perpetrators of marital conflict and separation.

Many researchers of marriage and divorce in Indonesia, and particularly in West Java, up until the 1980s, concluded that divorce was common, culturally acceptable and that there was no stigma attached to it (Jones et al. 1994; McDonald and Abdurrahman

1974; Singarimbun and Manning 1974; Zuidberg and Hasyir 1988).⁴ We wonder if the reported lack of stigma associated with divorce might be related to the lack of gender analysis in their research – much of it conducted by men. Also, traditionally, divorce was associated with the lower classes and with rurality, low education and a young age at marriage. Hirschman and Teerawichitchainan (2003: 244–5) suggest that divorce has become less acceptable and less common in recent times, with marriage at a later age, prolonged education for both genders and improved employment opportunities for women. The stigma associated with divorce has overtones of ‘backwardness’ associated with low social and economic status.⁵

The practice of *nikah siri* in Indonesia

Nikah siri is marriage conducted by a couple secretly and without government registration. *Siri* is taken from Arabic *sirrun-sirri*, meaning secret.⁶ Couples who decide to conduct *nikah siri* generally do so because they fail to fulfill one or several of the requirements for a valid marriage, like the requirement for a guardian or witness (*wali*), or for a first wife’s consent to a husband taking a second wife. This type of marriage is unregistered because they do not report it to the marriage registration office (KUA, Kantor Urusan Agama). *Nikah siri* is risky for women, both socially and legally. *Nikah siri* is subject to gossip, and legally a woman cannot claim the rights she is entitled to within marriage, e.g. it will be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain documents such as birth certificates for the children born from this marriage (Akhmadi et al. 2010). This kind of marriage is officially considered never to have happened.

However, *nikah siri* is commonly practised by Indonesians, for various reasons (Idrus 2011). Surprisingly, many people consider it as *nikah secara agama* (religiously accepted). Secret marriage and unregistered marriage should be differentiated. Sometimes, couples from a lower economic background do not register their marriage due to the cost of registering it or the distance from the KUA, but it is not secret, and they may fulfill all the requirements needed for valid marriage according to Islam. In many cases, the purpose of a secret and unregistered marriage is in order that no one knows about the marriage. Such cases usually violate the requirements stipulated by religion and the state and therefore cannot be said to be religiously accepted. One of the requirements of marriage in Islam is to make the relationship publicly known (*walimah*).

⁴H. Geertz’s study aligned with other studies in noting the primacy of conflict avoidance and the preservation of harmony in Javanese society (1961). However, attitudes towards divorce were class-inflected. Many poorer parents married off their daughters at a very tender age; when there was marital conflict, divorce was seen as an easy mechanism to restore communal balance. However, for high class *priyayi* (aristocratic) families, who had more at stake (both status and wealth), divorce was much more shameful and therefore rare.

⁵The extent of stigma associated with divorce is quite variable across the archipelago, e.g. as in 1960s Java, divorce appears quite acceptable in contemporary Lombok, but in Bali divorce is quite devastating for women because they must leave their children behind and this leaves them bereft of even the respectability of virtuous motherhood. This issue is surveyed in another article in this *Indonesia and Malay World* special issue, see Parker (2016).

⁶In Indonesia, many different terms are used to indicate ‘informal’ marriage, e.g. *nikah kampung*, *nikah di bawah tangan*, *kawin liar* and *nikah syiri* (see, e.g. Idrus 2011:107; Iswarini 2011: 74). Such marriages can be secret or known among the community, conducted by ‘wild imam’ (*imam liar*), celebrated with a wedding or not, have parental consent or not, and many other variations.

Field sites

The ethnographic data for this article were collected in 2012–13 by co-authors Irma Riyani and Brooke Nolan in Bandung, the capital of West Java, and in North Wawonii district, Wawonii island, in the province of Southeast Sulawesi, respectively. For both authors the fieldwork comprised a major part of their doctoral study. Although all the research participants are Muslim, the two field sites are quite different, as sketched below. The respondents are very diverse in terms of age and life stage, economic status, ethnicity, and class and educational backgrounds. While the Sundanese and the Wawonii are distinct ethnic identities, in both societies, *adat* (custom) is strongly influenced by Islam and vice versa, such that it is almost impossible to disentangle them.⁷

In East Bandung, most people are Sundanese who speak Sundanese, but the community is heterogeneous and there are many migrants from various districts in West Java and Central Java, who have gone to Bandung to find jobs in the many factories, and to study. Their occupations are various, and respondents included factory labourers, petty traders, construction workers, academics and government officials. As the main topic of research was sexuality, and this topic is quite sensitive, the main techniques of field research were in-depth and open-ended interviews. Irma Riyani interviewed 42 women from different economic and educational backgrounds. Five of the 42 women are divorced, four are widowed and one is separated from her husband. Three of the women are remarried: one remarried her former husband; the other two are married to other men and one of them has been married five times.

Wawonii is approximately four hours by boat from the capital of Southeast Sulawesi, Kendari. Brooke Nolan conducted fieldwork in several small villages in North Wawonii district. In these rural, working class villages of between 200 and 500 people, the main form of work is farming (rice, cloves, vegetables, fruit, coconuts). Both men and women work as farmers. Men who own small boats fish in the afternoons and evenings. People typically eat two meals a day, and sometimes, during the rainy season when it is too dangerous to fish, only one. Older women advise their children and grandchildren to drink a lot of tea to ward off hunger. If a man has an unusually large catch at sea, it is shared around the village, usually in exchange for vegetables or bananas. Fish and rice are the main year-round sources of food. There are only small differences in the socio-economic status of the families in these villages. The families with the highest economic status in these villages are generally Bugis migrants (or the families of sons of Bugis migrants) who have married local women. They derive income from building, operating and selling the boats which run between Kendari and Wawonii, and from farming.

Participant observation was the primary research method but Brooke Nolan also conducted over 200 interviews and recorded conversations with local people. Most of these were done with individual women; some were group interviews and some also involved men. Nolan interviewed seven divorced women and five widows (one had been widowed twice). She also interviewed four women who had remarried and women

⁷As Geaves (2005: 217–40) indicates, there can be no absolute agreement as to what counts as culture and what as religion in Islam.

whose husbands had sailed to other islands and never returned. Their ages ranged from 35 to over 60 years. All of these women had children. She also interviewed women who had been *janda* before remarrying. Other participants gave their views on the *janda* they knew and *janda* in general during interviews.

Ethnography of stigmatisation

Avoiding divorce – projecting stigma and self-stigmatisation

Field research in Bandung shows that women avoid divorce as best they can because of the stigma attached to it. The stigma attached to the divorced woman is not only associated with her social and economic status but also with her sexuality. This finding confirms van Bruinessen's conclusions from field research in Bandung: that because of the social stigma following divorce, women are likely to stay in a marriage even when their marital experience is unhappy (1988).

Several women stated that they did not want to get a divorce from their husband even when they knew that their husbands had had or were having an affair, have another wife or are abusive. This avoidance of divorce can be traced both to the stigma of divorce for women, such that the prospect of being divorced is not necessarily any better than an unhappy or violent marriage, and to the women's internalisation of failure, i.e. 'self-stigmatisation' (Markowitz 2005). Several women lamented (*meratapi*) and pitied their fate (*nasib*), saying: 'Why did this happen to me?' or 'Why can't I have a happy marriage like other people?' Here we can see the gendered and moral nature of the stigma of divorce.

Nisa (37), whose husband insisted on marrying polygamously, said:

I do not want to get a divorce, but I also do not want my husband to practise polygamy. But my husband forced me to agree to his decision. He gave me some time to think about it, but as he said that if, at a certain time, I still could not give him permission, he might divorce me. Being divorced would not guarantee me a better social and economic condition.

Ita (59), whose husband was physically violent, said:

I actually wouldn't mind if my husband wants to have another wife, as long as he asks my permission first. I do not want to get divorced, because I am concerned about the psychological impact on my youngest daughter, her position at school and also our social and career status. In fact, my husband has already taken another wife secretly (*nikah siri*) and his new wife has insisted that he divorce me.

This divorce affected her husband's career: he was transferred to a lower position in his workplace. In this case, the woman projected the expected experience of the stigma of divorce on to her young school-aged daughter, anticipating that she would experience some negative social as well as psychological repercussions.

Shame and secrecy, sexuality and stigma

While the identity of the widow is less stigmatised than that of the divorcee, because there is not the shame of a 'failed' marriage, the widow still has a reputation for sexual, and hence, moral, impropriety. Both young and middle-aged widows are seen as attractive and hence are stigmatised; it seems that it is only in old age – approximately over 60, when they are considered as *nenek* (grandmothers) – that *janda* are safe from sexually

predatory behaviour. Both Ani and Citra are middle-aged widows. Ani (45) preferred to conceal her status as a widow:

Not many people in my workplace know that my husband has passed away. I only told my closest friends. I don't want to create gossip because of my status and I want to feel safe, with people knowing that I am married. I don't want to reveal my current status of being a widow.

Citra (50) was 22 when her first husband died two years after their wedding. Soon after her husband died, she was accused of seducing one of the married men in her workplace, but in fact it was he who had harassed her. She was forced to defend herself and challenge the accusation. This situation concerned some of her senior male colleagues who suggested she remarry soon to avoid further gossip. She agreed to this suggestion and with their help arranged a meeting with her prospective husband. After this meeting and agreement to marry, Citra still avoided walking with her prospective husband – as she said, because she is a *janda*, she has to try and keep her good reputation and avoid gossip in her neighbourhood.

Ethnographic research on men and women's experiences of marriage shows that divorced women and widows bear a much heavier burden of stigma than men of the same status. This is related not only to their being sexually experienced but unattached, but also to the gendered understanding of sexuality. As young, single women, *gadis* are unattached, but their sexuality is under control, i.e. denied, because they must remain virgins; as respectable wives and mothers, *ibu* put their sexuality into practice, but only with their husbands; as *janda*, they have experienced the pleasures of sex, but are unattached and under nobody's control. Women are assumed to have developed sexual appetites (*nafsu*) and once 'single' again, are theoretically free to express their *nafsu*. They are assumed to be knowledgeable about contraception, and therefore able to have sex with anyone without any repercussions.⁸ Young *janda* are typically targeted by 'naughty' husbands and young males who want to experience sex.⁹ Many of them are teased or harassed with sexual innuendo, to the extent that some give in to the constant pressure and have affairs. They are feared by currently married women who are afraid that *janda* might steal their husbands; in this discourse of threat, *janda* are cast as sexual predators. These are the 'feelings of danger' that Yang et al. (2007: 1528) identified as typical of stigmatisers. The threat of loss of marriage is very powerful when marriage is the ideal state in society. However, men who are divorced or widowed are also sexually experienced and unattached. They bear no stigmatisation – no labelling or stereotyping that says they are a threat to other marriages or to society because of their sexual experience. There is no expectation that they will be preyed upon by married women – this is the so-called sexual double standard.

Uum (35), who had married secretly because her family did not consent to her marriage, asked for a divorce from her abusive husband. It took a while for her to finally declare herself divorced in public, because her husband, who had deserted her, did not want to divorce her and she had no proof of her marriage. After divorce, her friends became suspicious about her sexual life. She said:

⁸We thank Dr Aquarini Priyatna for her clarification of this section of the article.

⁹Research in West Java by Zuidberg and Hasyir (1978) shows that divorced women are desired as marriage partners, and this is related to their sexual experience. However, there is a contradictory discourse that *janda* are 'secondhand' goods – see below.

I swear to God (*demi Allah*), I never have illicit sex. I never even have time to think about sex. I am busy with my life. My focus right now is caring for my daughters and studying hard. I do not want to make the same mistake again and experience failure again in my study and my marriage. So, I am working hard to achieve a better life for my future.

Sofi (39), whose marriage only lasted for three months because of her husband's unstable behaviour, said:

Being a divorcee is uncomfortable. No matter how good my behaviour is, people always suspect me, because I attract men. Married men often harass me and ask me to have affairs. Even married women in my neighbourhood often make unpleasant comments about me. Sometimes I just ignore them but sometimes I also feel sick and tired of all these comments.

Many researchers have noted that the high rate of divorce in West Java was sustained by a high rate of remarriage (Jones et al 1994; McDonald and Abdurrahman 1974). It is worth suggesting that this high rate of remarriage could relate to the stigmatisation of the divorcee/widow and the unfortunate position of the *janda* in society. Van Bruinessen (1988), who did research among the poorest urban migrants in Bandung, suggested that the demand for remarriage was more likely concern for a woman's reputation than for economic reasons. Remarriage would re-establish a woman's position in the community as a respectable woman. Further, van Bruinessen (1988: 29) mentioned that widowed and divorced women were considered as 'non persons': they were excluded from certain social activities and sometimes even classified with prostitutes.

Virginity and 'used goods': structural stigmatisation

In Wawonii, in Southeast Sulawesi, the most overt, socially sanctioned form of stigmatisation against *janda* is the reduced amount of bride price (*mas kawin*) that *janda* receive. According to Wawonii *adat* (customary law), bride price comprises betel leaf, areca nut, a piece of white cloth, a gold ring and a number of coconut palms (depending on the social rank of the bride) or an amount of money equivalent to the number of coconut palms. One coconut palm given as bride price is worth Rp30,000. The whiteness of the areca nut represents honesty and the roundness represents the common hopes of the two families which are now united for the future happiness of the couple. Taken together, these two components of bride price symbolise aspirations for harmony, not only between the individuals but also between the two families. The families of most grooms give 30 coconut palms to the prospective bride as part of the brideprice. *Janda*, however, receive 10.

As a practice perpetuated according to social norms, which is indifferent to the individual identity or circumstances of the *janda* in question, this is a form of structural stigmatisation. Not only are forms of structural stigmatisation often more explicit than individual cases of stigmatisation, they are also more entrenched. Fortified by a history which stretches back years, decades and sometimes centuries, these forms of stigmatisation are more difficult to overcome. They rely on an enduring consensus within the social group for their efficacy. In societies such as Wawonii, where tradition and the wisdom of ancestors are highly valued, forms of structural stigmatisation which depend on these values and which marginalise only a small, relatively weak minority are particularly inflexible.

A (male) descendant of the last Wawonii royal family justified the lower bride price for *janda* by stating that this is explicitly a result of (presumed) loss of virginity. Unsurprisingly, in this patriarchal Muslim society, female ‘value’ is directly and uncompromisingly linked to virginity. This respondent connected the bride price practice to the norms and rules of both religion and customary law. This practice, which is fundamentally based on the commodification of female sexuality, suggests that since a *janda*’s body is ‘used goods’, she is ‘worth less’. The female body is framed specifically as an instrument of sexuality which becomes the ‘currency’. This is consistent with the idea of ‘*aqd*’ as a contract of exchange, on which marriage is based: the bride price is awarded to a wife in exchange for the husband’s sexual access to his wife (see above). In Wawonii, this practice was accepted without resistance. Nor was there disagreement with the conceptualisation of women’s bodies according to a scale which bestows a quantifiable value (expressed in bride price) according to virginity.

Stigma and pity

In both field sites, there is also a dominant discourse of ‘pity’ (*kasihan*) for *janda*. This expresses care and concern for the woman, especially for her presumed economic plight, and also for her new, anomalous, single status in society. For instance, in Wawonii, Sinta had been a widow for the past decade. She lived in a three-room house, had seven children and no rice fields or other land. Other women in nearby villages helped her by taking in her children for months at a time. Ririn and her husband, for example, regularly had Sinta’s two youngest sons staying at their house for weeks or months. Ririn and her husband said they pity Sinta because she has to rely on her oldest son’s irregular income from fishing for economic support.

When asked how others in her community treated *janda* like herself, another widow, Wulan, replied,

They treat us with love (*disayang*). The point is, they pity us because we’re *janda* and we don’t have a man. If there’s men’s work or heavy work to be done, people help us women who don’t have husbands ... I have a relative, my first cousin helps me, my younger brother ...

This was a sentiment echoed by other *janda* in North Wawonii. In Wawonii, almost every time *janda* were brought up in conversation the *kasihan* discourse was deployed. *Janda mati* in particular are likely to encounter the *kasihan* discourse, rather than suspicion. However, while expressing empathy and altruism, the *kasihan* discourse also has discriminatory discursive effects: it constructs the *janda* as Other to conventionally married people, positions the speaker who has pity as superior, and reinforces the ideal of marriage.

Ethnography of agency

Social capital

In both Bandung and Wawonii, social capital is a vital element in the strategies deployed by women once their husbands have left them through divorce or death. The agency displayed by *janda* in Bandung and Wawonii is complex. The formation of new relationships and the strengthening of existing ones are essential to struggles against stigma. These relationships form the basis of women’s social capital and it is with this social capital

that women are able to push back against the stigmatisation they encounter specifically as a result of their *janda* status.

In Bandung, West Java, where the stigma of *janda*-hood seems stronger than in Wawonii, women developed a range of different strategies to deal with nasty gossip and accusations of sexual misconduct. Some of them said they just ignore the rumours and behave in ways that are less likely to attract gossip. This strategy might seem very minor, but when viewed against the alternative – flirting, being promiscuous, etc. – it can be seen as exhibiting an understanding of social relations, and as building symbolic capital. Indeed, women noted that people did stop gossiping when it became clear there was no ‘fire’ behind the ‘smoke’. Most of them said that they have more important things to do, such as managing their life and building their future, than listening to rumours and gossip.

To re-establish their respectability in society, some of the women in Bandung, especially older *janda*, actively involved themselves in religious gatherings (*pengajian*). Many dedicate themselves to becoming devout Muslims. This strategy not only facilitates networking and social support, but also improves religious knowledge and gives them relief and strength after the loss of their partner or ‘failure’ of their marriage. Through this religious network they can engage in social activities and good deeds arranged by the group, like attending marriage ceremonies, visiting sick neighbours and helping with charity events. Thus, the women are constructed as increasingly pious, as well as good citizens, in the eyes of their community. This de-stigmatising strategy involves the accumulation of both social and cultural capital, thereby also raising symbolic capital.

We have seen that in Wawonii, the bride price awarded to *janda* upon remarriage is one-third that awarded to new brides, a precise calibration of the value of virginity. However, in Wawonii, *janda* refuse discourses of subordination, exercising agency through their social networks in several ways.

Wulan’s husband abandoned her and her four children. Nine years earlier, he had sailed to Sumbawa to work as a fisherman. He never returned. Wulan heard that he had married another woman, so, in his absence, she divorced him. She explained, ‘I divorced him. He didn’t support us financially, he didn’t return and he didn’t take care of us.’ In the absence of her husband (both before and after the divorce), Wulan’s younger brother stepped in to perform many of the difficult physical tasks, such as fixing her roof and collecting firewood. Her younger brother often slept in the front room of her house. Wulan benefited from her brother’s assistance in terms of practical support and social respectability. Since her brother slept in her house, there was little scope for gossip about sexual misdemeanour.

Thus, the first source of social capital these women draw upon is often their extended families. Ayu’s uncle played a similar role to that of Wulan’s younger brother. Although she was only in her mid 30s, Ayu had been widowed twice and had two daughters, a 19 year old and a 10 year old. In 1993, as a 15 year old, Ayu married her first husband. The following year, her first daughter was born. Shortly after the birth, before his daughter was a year old, Ayu’s husband died. At this point, Ayu went to live with her parents, who she said supported her financially and emotionally. A few years later, Ayu’s father died. Consequently, Ayu’s uncle, who had no children of his own, adopted her (*jadi anak angkat*). In 2002, Ayu remarried and in 2003 gave birth to her second daughter. After

her second husband died in 2010, Ayu's uncle built her a small wooden house and shop beside his house. Since then, Ayu and her youngest daughter have lived and worked here. Like Wulan, Ayu was not subjected to gossip regarding sexual behaviour or her behaviour towards men in the village, quite likely because of the close proximity of a male relative.

As the families of Wulan and Ayu supported them, so too did Rizka's. Rizka had been married for 19 years and had three children when her husband, who had already married other women secretly, left her for another woman in a neighbouring village. However, when asked about difficulties or discrimination since becoming a *janda*, Rizka explained,

I rarely experience difficulties. In fact, when I became a *janda*, my family wanted to help me. When I was not yet a *janda*, when I still had the status of being married, my family didn't look after me because I had a husband. Since I've been a *janda*, when I see my family they always look after me.

When parts of the roof on Rizka's house were destroyed during a storm, her uncle paid approximately Rp2.5 million for those sections to be replaced. The same uncle paid for the costs of schooling Rizka's children when she did not have the money. On Rizka's frequent trips to Kendari, she stays with a cousin who is a civil servant at the local university and who also lends her money from time to time. Far from being pressured by relatives to return to the marriage, Rizka has the support of family members who are aware of her *janda* status. She feels that she can therefore stand up to her ex-husband.

Almost every evening he comes to my house. Last night he came over, he left at 3 o'clock in the morning, he just came to the house, wanted to sleep. I said, Don't sleep here or my family will beat you up, my family don't like it

Virtuous motherhood

Some *janda* become economically independent and focus on raising their children and making sure that they have a proper education. Although the economically independent single woman is not heroised in Indonesian society, the dedicated mother has an honourable place. Many of the women in our study emphasised their hard work and sacrifice for their children. Uum, cited above, said, to counter gossip and construct herself as the dedicated mother: 'I am busy with my life. My focus right now is caring for my daughters and studying hard.'

After divorce, most women in the Bandung study did not have significant difficulty in supporting themselves and their children.¹⁰ Not only do their families provide support but also the women can support themselves economically. Most of them are hard workers and were smart enough to find a job long before the divorce occurred. Both Uum (35) and Nanda (36) expressed it this way: 'When my husband abandoned me, I racked my brains (*memutar otak*) to work out how to survive.' Research by van Huis (2010: 16) in Cianjur, West Java shows that 65% of divorced women perceive that they are no worse off after divorce than before divorce. Research by Horikoshi (1976), in another region of West Java, suggests that women have an advantage in receiving post-divorce support. Since most couples resided matrilocally, women were usually the ones who received the house, the alimony and the children and the husband the one who had to move out of

¹⁰This is not typical nationwide (Sumner 2010), or even in West Java (van Huis 2010).

the house. Therefore, men tended to avoid divorce. However, van Huis (2010) documents the ineffectiveness of court decisions about alimony and child support. After divorce, several women in the Bandung study were able to regain their independence in making decisions related to their activities. Two of them went back to their previous employment, because there was no one to prevent them from doing so. Uum and Sofi had not been allowed to work by their husbands since their wedding, and Uum had not been allowed to go outside the house without her husband's permission whenever he was at home.

Several women in the Bandung study reluctantly tried to maintain a good relationship with their ex-husbands for the sake of their daughters' guardianship when they are married later on. Most *janda* in Bandung kept and supported their children. However, Uum's three daughters were taken care of by her mother and her sister's family – again we see the importance of social capital. The wellbeing of children is an important consideration when remarrying – there is quite a well-worn belief that step-parents will neglect or abuse children from previous marriages. Three of the women in the Bandung study stated that they do not think about remarriage – this is especially the widows. One of them has been a widow for 18 years. The widow's decision not to remarry was to show loyalty to her former husband (Zuidberg and Hasyir 1978; cf. Idrus 2011). Women are concerned about their children's wellbeing after remarriage. Diah (45) said: 'It is not easy to find a man who would accept me and my kids as a package: love me and at the same time love my children.' The decision not to remarry should not necessarily be seen as women sacrificing their own desire; quite often the women are older and wiser and are being more careful in finding new marriage partners, in order that their next marriage will be more successful. Men, however, seem to be in a hurry to remarry in both situations – whether widowed or divorced – and not infrequently have secretly married or had affairs before divorce took place. The divorces of three women in Bandung (Ita, Nanda and Uum) were triggered by the husband's secret marriage and infidelity.

As in Bandung, in Wawonii the discourse of the 'good mother' is a vital element in efforts to fend off stigma and regain social respect. A salient part of the 'good mother' discourse in Wawonii is that a *janda* should refuse to remarry or at least wait several years before remarriage. This is framed as putting the interests of the children first, since step-parents have a reputation (real or otherwise) of treating their stepchildren harshly. Wawonii women who had grown up with step-parents reported being refused food and forced to do hard physical labour from a young age. One *janda*, Wulan, argued that *janda* who remarried without thinking were often responsible for their own difficulties and the difficulties of their children.

Only those who remarry (have difficulties). Those (*janda*) who think, they rarely (have difficulties), because they still think, they have pity on their children ... Those who don't think remarry as soon as they're divorced, but we (here) think about our children first, we love our children.

Wulan expressed fears of stepfathers being cruel (*kejam*) to stepchildren. A woman who 'thinks' does not put herself and her children in such a situation. When asked about discrimination against *janda cerai* (divorcees), once again Wulan located responsibility with *janda* themselves:

Usually there is that, yeah, it depends on us, if we play around anything could happen ... Hopefully that won't happen ... it depends on us. If we don't think then anything could happen ... But those who think can relax.

In both cases, Wulan understands 'thinking' as a mechanism for behaviour regulation. By 'thinking', not only is a woman regulating her behaviour but also she is attempting to take control of the social consequences of her behaviour. Fundamentally, women such as Wulan aspire to operate as best they can within the social structures and discourses (of which stigmatisation is a part) within their community. Wawonii women work at regaining social respectability by complying with, indeed emphasising, dominant discourses of morality for women, i.e. as good mothers.

Like Wulan, Rizka was cautious about the idea of remarrying, primarily out of concern for her children's wellbeing. Furthermore, Rizka linked her ability to educate her children with their future prosperity and with her own economic wellbeing (presumably dependence upon them) when she is old.

I want to be single for now. I'll take it easy first. If I marry again, it will be too stressful, poor me. My poor children ... Children are important, poor them. If we don't look after them and their future, they will be neglected. Poor them, they're born because of us ... We give birth to them, then we make them miserable ... That's the responsibility and risk we take as people ... I'm a woman but I try my utmost to support my children ... I hope my children's future will be good so that I will also have a good life when I'm old. That's my principle. I try to work hard so my children can be educated.

Wulan and Rizka take the view that to be moral, and therefore to avoid stigmatisation, is not to quickly remarry, but to put the wellbeing of one's children before one's own desire (or community pressure) to remarry. In Wawonii, the discourse of the good, selfless mother appears to be a stronger determinant of morality than the discourse of the ideal married woman. 'Moral women' use this discourse rather than immediate remarriage to regain their social footing.

Concluding remarks

The strength of marriage as both the ideal way to live and the bedrock relationship in Indonesian society means that the end of marriage, either by death or divorce, is traumatic. The position of the single, once-married woman – single by virtue of death or divorce – is anomalous in Indonesian society and constitutes a deviation from the norm of the 'peaceful, calm and loving' family (KHI). The stigmatisation of *janda* compounds the difficult experience that divorce and death of a spouse bring, but it is only women, not men, who experience this stigma. Many *janda* have internalised the stigma discourse, and prefer to keep their marital status secret – sometimes for the sake of their children, who will also be stigmatised. Divorcees typically experience more shame and more sexual innuendo than widows, but young and middle-aged *janda* of both types are subjected to frequent and remorseless sexual harassment. Gossip about the sexual impropriety of divorced and widowed women is often triggered by men's assumption that sexually experienced women want to have sex with anyone. Married women in turn see *janda* as a threat to their marriages.

Women develop strategies to avoid stigmatisation, drawing upon and deploying social, cultural and symbolic capital in the exercise of agency. Perhaps most commonly they draw

upon the support of extended families, a form of social capital that refutes the hegemony of the New Order nuclear family. In joining religious study groups, and thus creating social and cultural capital, and very deliberately avoiding gossip, they build respectability, a form of symbolic capital.

In Wawonii, the lesser status of *janda* is made obvious in the sharply reduced amount of bride price that *janda* receive when they remarry (10 coconut trees), compared to that received upon first marriage (30 coconut trees). This starkly quantifies the value of virginity and expresses the notion of *janda* as ‘used goods’. It also reinforces the idea of marriage as an exchange: the bride price is awarded to a wife in exchange for the husband’s sexual access. However, in Wawonii *janda* are not seen as a source of social destabilisation which must be contained by a hasty remarriage, as in other parts of Indonesia. If women in Wawonii are relegated to the fringes of their communities in social or economic terms following divorce or the death of their husband, they are commonly re-integrated through becoming, or taking on, an *anak angkat* (adopted child) or via the social and economic support of their families and neighbours.

Janda re-frame the moral category of *janda*-hood by emphasising their status as mothers rather than as sexual beings. Unlike in other parts of Indonesia, in the small villages in Wawonii, this message appears to have gained acceptance as the dominant framework through which *janda* are socially integrated. Perhaps this is because the socio-economic hierarchy in Wawonii is much less elaborate than in Bandung, and it is a much ‘flatter’ society, with most people living at or near survival level. Certainly the isolation of Wawonii means it is less influenced by government and popular culture messages; and Bandung is much influenced by resurgent, fundamentalist and more puritan strains of Islam, which have a very socially conservative tone.

The stigmatisation of *janda* in Indonesia can only be understood in relation to the norm of marriage, the ideal of the ‘peaceful, calm and loving’ family, the construction of the ideal woman, and the construction of female and male sexuality. Female sexuality must be contained within marriage – if that norm is transgressed, or perceived to have the potential to be transgressed, the woman is judged immoral. However, by emphasising their success in playing women’s traditional role as mothers, by replicating ‘family’ through adoption, through remarriage, and through religious service, *janda* can re-establish respectability.

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