

Women and Nature: An Ecofeminism Study on The Practice of *Kawin Gantung* in Jrasah Village, Boyolali

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Abstract. Early marriage in Indonesia is still a phenomenon that has significant attention. Even though there have been changes in the rules of marriage regulations in Indonesia which make the requirements for marriage more rigid regarding the minimum age of marrying, early marriage still has a way to exist. It is maintained because marrying is seen as a way out of poverty. The case study in Boyolali District, Jrasah Village, shows a different variant of early marriage called "*kawin gantung*", how relationships are tied from a very young age to secure wealth in the future. From the research results, the urgency to have financial security from an early period was born because Jrasah Village is classified as an area with potential natural disasters (close to Mount Merapi). On the other hand, the issue of climate change is another factor in why early marriages are perpetuated because some of the people of Jrasah Village are dependent on tobacco products, whose harvest season is now increasingly unpredictable. In short, this research then provides a different picture of the Anthropocene era: not only environmental issues that are affected but also women's agency and the authority's right to control their lives.

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1 Introduction

Indonesian marriage has been regulated in the Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 1 of 1974. In that article, *marriage* is defined as an emotional and physical relationship between a man and a woman who become husband and wife to create a family or household, and the minimum age for marriage is 16 for females and 19 for males. With the emergence of Marriage Law Number 16 of 2019, there was a revision of the minimum age requirement for marriage; both males and females are 19. Even so, early marriage in Indonesia still happens despite more strict regulations. It is documented in the research report of the Center for the Study and Advocacy of Protection and Quality of Life for Children (PUASKAPA), which collaborates with UNICEF, the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), and the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas) in 2020, Indonesia is ranked 10th in the world with the highest number of child marriages world. The number of early marriages in Indonesia continues to increase; it is justified by the data from the Central Bureau of Statistics for 2020 shows that more than one million women aged 20-24 years have been married before 18, with a total of 1.2 million people.

On the other hand, there were also 61.3 thousand girls who had their first marriage before 15. In fact, according to the records of the religious court, in 2021, there were at least 65 thousand cases of requests for dispensation of child marriages, and in 2022, there were 55 thousand requests. Based on data from Komnas Perempuan, this dispensation has increased 7 times since 2016. Dispensation consistently used as an alibi for continuing to practice early marriage without looking at other impacts that might occur in the future. And the high number of dispensation, or the phenomenon of early marriage in Indonesia is, of course, not happen without reason. Various factors influence the high rate of early marriage in Indonesia, such as economic, cultural, and religious factors. Economic factors play a critical role in the high rate of early marriage, especially in rural and isolated areas. According to Nurfaiza (2021), many cases of early marriage in rural Indonesia have occurred due to family economic factors that are no longer powerful enough to support the needs of their children, especially daughters. The easiest way the family can use to strengthen the economy is by marrying off their daughter. With the marriage, it was assumed that the burden on the family would be reduced because their daughter had become the husband's full responsibility. Most of these economic factors are also supported by local cultural factors, so the practice is continuously perpetuated.

In 2022, according to data compiled by the Head of the Boyolali Family Planning Population Control Service for Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (DP2KBP3A), 340 youths with Boyolali ID cards applied for dispensation to the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) to marry.

It is not a unique practice that this dispensation is manipulated for individuals who wish to get married but have not yet reached the minimum age for civil marriage. Boyolali is one of Indonesia's suspect areas with early marriage practices, especially among residents of the Jrakah area, one of the villages of Boyolali regency. It is located at the bottom of Mount Merbabu and directly across from Mount Merapi. Geographically, Jrakah Village can be categorized as the most isolated village compared to other villages in Boyolali Regency. In 2018, based on data reported by the KUA Selo, a subdistrict of Jrakah Village, out of 221 married women, 99 were married under 19. Early marriage, which still commonly found in Jrakah Village, is a custom known as *kawin gantung* (suspended marriage), a tradition of marrying off girls and boys who have yet to enter the age of puberty based on both parents' consent and is not valid in the eyes of state law. The purpose of *kawin gantung* initially is to preserve the reputation owned by both sides of the family, so they must have equal economic degrees, or one is higher than the other.

Kawin gantung tradition in Jrakah Village can be seen as an alternative practice to maintain social status. Besides its social function, *kawin gantung* is a coping strategy for the community to maintain wealth and natural disaster mitigation. It is supported by the geographical location of Jrakah Village, which is in the middle of Mount Merbabu and Mount Merapi, which are volcanic mountains. Also, due to global warming, which is increasingly impacting the environment, the knowledge of the Jrakah Village community about weather forecasts has been invalid for the last 5 years. Tobacco plantations, fields, and rice fields in Jrakah Village flooded due to irregular rainfall, significantly affecting their crops. In other words, their economic conditions became unstable. *This kawin gantung* research provides urgency and essential knowledge that other aspects contribute to Indonesia's high rate of early marriage practices, especially in isolated areas prone to natural disasters.

2 Result and Discussion

Early marriage in Indonesia has different forms and types in each region because it is heavily intervened by local culture and customs, including *kawin gantung*. According to a local informant, *kawin gantung* is a tradition that has existed since ancient times and functions to maintain social status. After matrimony, the two children will wait until they are about 15 years old before they are united and live a household life like any other married couple. Even though it looks like a traditional marriage, several things differentiate *kawin gantung* from other types of marriage. *Kawin gantung* depends on social needs rather than individuals, so it could be categorized as arranged marriage and early marriage because the bride

and groom are underage and legally forbidden to marry. Nevertheless, the local community considers the practice of *kawin gantung* to be legal marriage even though they did not register their marriage with the KUA and civil office.

However, the results of other examinations show that many did not register with the KUA after committing a *kawin gantung* because of their geographical location, which was very far from the center of government, including the KUA. Living precisely on Mount Merapi's slopes makes Jrasah Village the highest and farthest village in the Selo sub-district. As an implication, the people of Jrasah Village could not reach many public facilities due to distance, especially before 2000s. This isolated geographical location caused the people at that time not well educated about the urgency of registering in civil office as a legal resident of Indonesia with legal identity and marriage. Entering the early 2000s, the people of Jrasah Village began to embrace Islam, and the *kawin gantung* tradition slowly began to be abandoned. However, the practice of early marriage in Jrasah Village is still high because the Muslim community in Jrasah Village believes Islam does not provide a minimum age limit for marriage. If someone feels capable of marriage, they can marry at any age. However, if one is not old enough to marry according to Indonesian law, they will marry secretly and register their marriage with the KUA using dispensation. This phenomenon shows that even though *kawin gantung* is no longer performed at this time, early marriages still exist due to the support factor of the religion that was believed by the local community.

The look of *kawin gantung* today differs significantly from the *kawin gantung* years ago. However, the myth about the bad luck of refusing a proposal still makes the early marriage spirit very prominent. Amid the Jrasah Village community, if women get proposals, they must accept. According to a female local informant, there is a taboo for female rejecting proposals. If a girl or woman has been proposed to three times by the same or different threemen and all of the three proposals are rejected, then the girl or woman will forever be a spinster. Because of this myth, the Jrasah female did not dare to refuse the proposals that came to them. These remains of tradition and knowledge are the reasons why early marriages still exist. Many predominantly female teenagers are getting married early, right after graduating from junior high school.

According to Kartika (2012), cultural factors are indeed an important determinant of the practice of child marriage in Javanese rural communities. Cultural and economic conditions also greatly influence the decisions women make to marry at a young age (Nobles & Buttenheim, 2008). Communities on the slopes of the mountains, including Jrasah village, have a different pattern of social life from the general society because they race against time and weather as an agrarian society in the mountains. They rely on nature through the agricultural sector, with the

main commodities being tobacco and vegetables. As long as they live side by side with nature, the people of Jrahak Village always rely on the weather to carry out agricultural activities such as planting and harvesting. However, in the last 5 years, they can no longer predict the natural conditions and weather; for example, throughout 2017 – 2018, almost all of the rice fields in Jrahak Village flooded due to high rainfall, which impacted the farmers' tobacco yields. Throughout that time, very few farmers were able to harvest tobacco. Not only that, even after the flood incident, the farmers of Jrahak Village admitted that the unpredictable weather resulted in lower tobacco harvests from year to year.

Compared to the previous year, the harvest in 2022 there is a decrease of 0.8 per cent in tobacco output. It was caused by high rainfall and decreased interest of farmers because of the damage to natural conditions.

In addition to facing unpredictable weather, the people of Jrahak Village must also face geographical conditions across from the most active volcano in Indonesia, Mount Merapi. In the past year, Merapi has continued to show its eruptive activity, which has always worried the people near it, including the Jrahak Village community. As residents who live in natural disaster-prone areas, the people of Jrahak Village certainly have various forms of natural disaster prevention and mitigation, and *kawin gantung* is one of them. In the 1930s, Jrahak Village became one of the villages around Mount Merapi most badly affected by the eruption. Based on sources from esdm.go.id, this eruption caused the death toll to reach 1,370 people in around 13 villages around Mount Merapi. On the other hand, many livestock owned by residents also died due to the eruption of hot clouds from Mount Merapi. Historically, according to a local informant, the development of *kawin gantung* in Jrahak Village also reached its highest rate in the early 1990s to early 2000s when Mount Merapi frequently erupted. Many families need additional people to manage their sources of income and wealth, especially in rice fields, and marriage can boost the availability of labour for agriculture and cultivation. The existence of this workforce provides guarantees for parents and provides psychological compatibility (Setiadi, 2021). Marriage then was used to maintain the regeneration of land ownership as the main source of income for families in Jrahak Village. This reality shows that *kawin gantung* is used by the people of Jrahak Village as a form of effort to maintain wealth and overcome unwanted conditions in the future.

The state's ignorance of the problem of early marriage in the Jrahak Village has slowly opened the eyes of several people to pay attention to the issue of early marriage there, one of which is Mrs B and her daughter. Her daughter is one of the people who initiated rejecting marriage proposals because she wanted to stabilize her finances first. It was supported by her mother, Mrs B, who suggested her daughter work outside Boyolali regent to be free from the demands of accepting the proposals. At that time, the

daughter was still very young and just graduated from junior high school but get proposed by a male friend from her school. After asking permission from her parents to refuse the proposal because she feels not ready and she want to work out of the town, the daughter finally managed to escape and left Krakah Village. This phenomenon shows that early marriage is no longer normalized and the emergence of agency from local women to overcome the stigma and culture that harms them.

3 Result

The practice of *kawin gantung* in Krakah Village has already stuck and become a habit that will be difficult to change in society. It has been practised by the Krakah community and used as a natural disaster mitigation because they know they are fragile. Not only are they prone to the Mount Merapi disaster, but they are also vulnerable to the impact of the environmental and climate crises considering that the livelihoods of the Krakah Village community are farmers and their life depends on nature. This early marriage was used to overcome the economic problems that occurred in the Anthropocene era when human activities began to have a major impact on the earth's ecosystems. The government's attention should be present as a form of follow-up to the practice of early marriage in Krakah Village, which is increasingly disturbing. With the formation of Srikandi Merapi, as has been initiated in other villages around Mount Merapi, education regarding marriage issues can trigger agency growth for women. Not only focusing on early marriage, the government can also provide other alternative livelihoods operated by the people of Krakah Village so that current natural vulnerabilities that make them also natural disaster-prone communities can be minimized by having other forms of work.

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