

JAVANESE WOMEN IN HYBRIDISM (A Cross-Cultural Feminist Psychology)

Falasifatul Falah
Fakultas Psikologi Universitas Islam Sultan Agung

falasifatul.falah@gmail.com

Abstract

There are two opinions about Javanese women. The first one says that Javanese women have a big power and high social status, both in family and society. This is because Javanese culture follows bilineal family system in which men and women roles are complement for each other. The second opinion argues that women's important roles in family management do not indicate a high status, they exactly hold a double burden since they have to do both of domestic work and paid jobs. It can be argued that those women's burdens are not only double, but also triple, may be multi-burden. The growing condition of Javanese contemporary society, in results in progress and improvements in people's quality of life, and influences the change of culture and social values as well. Furthermore, progress and modernity have been engaging social ambivalence in Javanese society. Javanese people are in the crossing point of their traditional values and the new values called "hybridism".

Keywords: Javanese women, Javanese society.

Introduction

Javanese is a name for people who have origin in Central Java, East Java, and Yogyakarta, in Java Island, Indonesia. Even though they all are called "Javanese", but in fact Javanese cultures are pretty heterogenic (Sedyawati, 2003, p.7). There are many sorts of Javanese languages and traditions. Javanese language in Yogyakarta, for instance, is quite different with Javanese language in Banyumas. The tradition in Central Java, for other example, is not same with the one in East Java. Even Solo and Yogyakarta, which both of them are recognized as centrals of Javanese culture and had their own Javanese kingdoms, have a bit different customs.

One of these heterogeneity causal factors is geographical condition, which has made Javanese culture has been divided into some cultural areas (Sujamto in Sedyawati, 2003, p.10). Each cultural area has its own characteristic in implementing Javanese cultural philosophies into daily practices (Sedyawati, 2003, p.10).

However, when people talk about "Javanese" in general, usually it is associated with Central Java and Yogyakarta. Nevertheless, as Javanese society is a part of Indonesian nation, discourse of Javanese women cannot be completely separated with Indonesian context.

Issues of "gender, domestic, and household" are undividable elements of Javanese people in both urban and rural areas (Blackwood, 2001, p.915). There are two opinions about Javanese women.

The first one says that Javanese women have a big power and high social status, both in family and society. This is because Javanese culture follows bilineal family system in which men and women roles are complement for each other (Kusujarti in Yuarsi, 2002, p.4). In Javanese society, women usually hold control of family finances. As a consequence, they have authority and autonomy of the household (Robynson, 1996, p.529).

The second opinion argues that women's important roles in family management do not indicate a high status. They exactly hold a double burden since they have to do both of domestic work and paid jobs (Kusujarti in Yuarsi, 2002, p.4). Their burden is not just double, but triple or even multiple. Javanese women bear social responsibilities as well, in which they are forced to spend extra time and energy for those.

The issue of Javanese women, in relation with culture, development, alteration, and violence, is discussed in his paper. The setting place is narrowed in Central Java and Yogyakarta.

As one of Javanese culture's centrals, Yogyakarta is a place where a huge number of youth people from all around Indonesia are living temporarily for studying. Currently there are no less than 75 of state and private universities in this province. There are also hundreds of high schools and educational institutions. These educational facilities are completed by supporting facilities, such as student accommodations, shopping centres, food courts and cheap restaurants for students. No wonder that Yogyakarta have been labelled as the central of education in Indonesia (Yuarsi, 2002, pp.4-5 and 30-31).

If education is perceived as a determinant factor of modernity, we may say that cultural rigidity, particularly those which do not support principal of democracy and equality, will be eroded. The assumption is, the more educated a society, the more awareness and appreciation towards other people, including women (Yuarsi, 2002, pp.4-5). Thus Javanese women in Yogyakarta should be more respected, and the gender equality in that place should have improved.

Women's position in Javanese society is also analyzed in this paper. Is this true that Javanese women have a significant power and high social status? Are they experiencing gender inequality? Do development and modernity in Java improve women's quality of life?

Women in Javanese Culture

Javanese societies officially follow bilineal family system, in which women and men have equal position as mutual complementary for each other (Yuarsi, 2002, p.4). In Javanese culture, a husband and a wife ought to work together for family welfare and safety (Koentjaraningrat in Abdullah, 1989, p.18) while women's outcomes are valued as worth as those of men's (Schiller in Abdullah, 1989, p.18).

Women position in Java is ruled by tradition. Rural women have active roles in financial organization, farming, animal husbandry, trading, and home industry. Work relationship in the production process is not defined by sex, but more determined by chances and capacities to get strategic resources. Rural women have opportunity to work in which suitable with their characters, such as cutting rice, selling rice and vegetables (Murniati, 2004, p.135).

Long term family needs, such as building house and children's future, are husbands' responsibilities. Meanwhile, daily needs and ceremonial needs become wives' responsibilities. These show the difference in financial allocation between the husbands' and the wives' outcomes. Particularly in the community where men usually work in farming, while women work in trading. The wives have more opportunities to get more money since they can work without depend on the farming season, thus they can hold money more regularly than their husband (Stoler in Abdullah, 1989, p.18).

Study of farmer families in Sleman, Yogyakarta, found that, while husbands are decision makers about farming technical, decision making in finance is dominated by the wives (Suratiah, 1991, p.iv).

In the Javanese communities who are used to rule family companies, such as batik family factories in Laweyan, Solo, Central Java, there is a classical disposition that "men

are the masters while women are the managers" (Robynson, 1996, p.529). Evelyn Blackwood argues that, through controlling the family company and capital, Javanese women have power over their spouse and family properties (Blackwood, 2001, p.915).

However, the "gendered social dynamics" in Javanese society is quite complex (Blackwood, 2001, p.915). Even though it seems that Javanese women are not powerless, we cannot make a simple assumption that the formal pattern of marriage relationship in Javanese culture indicates gender equality.

Javanese culture is typically linked with a culture of harmony, slowness and quietness. One of Javanese people's philosophies of life is "*alon-alon waton kelakon*" which means "it does not matter to be slow, as long as it is done" (Sedyawati, 2003, p.24).

The stereotypes of Javanese people are soft, gentle and calm. They are likely to be low profile, since showing off is perceived as embarrassing behaviour for Javanese people. Saying "no" is something impolite in Javanese culture. That is why, Javanese people are typically impassive and unassertive (Sedyawati, 2003, pp.144-145).

Another Javanese philosophy is "*nrima ing pandum*" which means "to take for granted whatever happens as God's will or destiny". This has implication in all aspect of their life that Javanese people are used to accept whatever their condition without protest (Sedyawati, 2003, p.15). For women, this attitude is double emphasized. The word "woman" in Javanese language is called "*wanita*" which is abbreviation of "*wani ditata*". The later means "brave to be controlled". Then there is assumption that a good Javanese woman is passive and obedient.

Both of unmarried and married women in Javanese society are bearing unfair psychological burden. Women who have not been married in certain age, women who have no children and women who cannot cook, are often perceived as the ones who are not able to completely play their roles, and this often causes these women to be target of critiques, humiliation, and belittling comments (Yuarsi, 2002, p.xiv).

Javanese Women and Development

Before the period of colonization by European people, Javanese farmer household commonly produced goods for self consumption. Colonialism has influenced rural products, particularly in Java which was a central of Colonizer Government. The systems of market, trading, and colonial finance encourage the products, which previously only for domestic consumption, became used for others' consumption. The

job separation between men and women was also changing. Women were given task to produce domestic consumption products, meanwhile men produce goods for public or market (Murniati, 2004, pp.134-136).

In other words, gender ideology, which was brought by colonial economics' needs together with feudalism, was used by colonizer to enter rural areas (Murniati, 2004, p. 136).

Rural women in Java, who formerly were free to act in the economic and social areas, then were limited by the social change which restricted them in domestic jobs. If they had activities outside their house, they were ruled by colonial regulation which based in the control over labourers. Colonial economic pattern classified the capital owners and labourers, which sharpened the gaps between social classes in rural places. Rural people can be easily differentiated between the rich farmers and the poor ones (Murniati, 2004, p.136).

Furthermore, men got opportunities to learn how to use new production tools, while women still worked with conventional tools. Women did simple jobs in farming or home industries. Thus in the farming development, men's productivities were likely to improve, whereas women's work productivity were still stable or stagnant (Murniati, 2004, p.136-137).

In the post-colonial time, throughout the New Order State period, for 32 years since 1966 to 1998, "bureaucratic capitalism" had concealed previously active home manufacture centres in which Javanese women have taken part in the main position. As in Laweyan, an urban village in Solo, Central Java, which has been famous as the central of "batik" industry since the period when Indonesia was still colonized by the Dutch. The Laweyan women recognize that the New Order Government had encouraged them to decrease their financial contribution and focus on more suitable domestic roles (Alexander, 2000, p.314).

As stated in the *Undang-Undang Perkawinan Pasal 31* (The Marriage Law No.31), women have obligation to be housewives, in which their job is including to take care, look after, and grow their children (Ediastuti, 1995, p.2).

The Government in The New Order period is often trapped in making generalization of a theory. For instance, the "PKK" program ("*Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*" which means "Family Prosperity Education"). The concept of this social organization for women was emerging as a respond toward women condition in Central Java. Nevertheless, this concept then was taken as a national concept. Thus this was criticized by the question: is the PKK program suitable for women in all social classes

and in all Indonesian parts? Are all Indonesian women having the same problems? (Murniati, 2004, pp.134-135).

The PKK program was dominated by characteristic in which women are perceived as the main problem sources. Therefore it was concluded that women must be educated, and then they became the central objects of this program. Thus the PKK program has double exploited Javanese women. The problem solution for women in the development process has involved only the women, without engaging the others to appreciate or encourage the improvement of people's perspective or women position. (Murniati, 2004, p.142-143). Thus, gender bias in "Women in Development" (WID) strategy was obviously evident in Indonesia as a developing country (Schech, 2000b, p.90).

A study to women in Sendangarum village, Sleman, Yogyakarta, found that 87,7% respondents are working. For unmarried women, the reasons to work are usually to spent time and because of the availability of work opportunities. Meanwhile married women are working for additional incomes. Most of them work in the home industry sector, in which they may do their job at home, or at least they do not have to leave their village environment too far (Ediastuti, 1995, pp.33-36).

Another research which was done in Klaten, Central Java, shows that many women working with putting out system or sub-contracting. In this system, wages are given based on the volume of results. The women are working at home and the work status is informal. The employers depend on the market, therefore they employ the worker or release them from their job anytime when necessary (Susilastuti, 1990, pp.i-ii).

Furthermore, the turn over of women working in home industry is quite high. They are usually engaging in work when they have enough time. However, when they feel they are too busy in looking after their own household, they will temporarily or permanently out from their job (Ediastuti, 1995, p. 36).

Another study was done in Jatinom, Central Java. In this study, women's involvement in trading activities is obvious (Abdullah, 1989, p.1). This condition is based on the fact that farming land in Java has been narrowed as a consequence of "Development" process. Family inheritance system is another factor which plays role in decreasing someone's properties of land. Land monopolized by certain elite groups is also a factor that makes this condition get worse. Thus, farmer family members, who used to work in farm, have gradually had to work in off-farm employment. Women as "household managers" are the most affected by economic difficulties. They have to

arrange family expenses carefully and consider other alternatives of income sources (Abdullah, 1989, pp.16-17).

Women in Jatinom commonly choose to work in pity trading to solve their financial difficulties. Some of them also work as domestic helpers and firewood collectors. These women work just to get daily needs for their families. Their benefit each day are not much, and usually run out directly after they finish their trading activities or other work, to purchase their households' needs, such as rice, sugar, tea, oil, salt, etc (Abdullah, 1989, p.17-18).

Working in pity trading and home industry makes those women are never shown in statistic as workers. This is because their jobs are informal and hardly ever be regarded as "working" (Bhatt in Susilastuti, 1990, p.2). The lack of concern toward pity traders and home industry workers is also caused by the fact that most of them are females. Economic activities which are done by women are often perceived as their domestic role's continuity (Susilastuti, 1990, p.2). Those rural women are really holding double roles. They are doing domestic jobs and participating in economic activities such as trading, even help their husband's activities in farm. Their work time in trading is quite long, and not equal with their small benefit (Abdullah, 1989, p. 18).

It can be argued that those women's burdens are not only double, but also triple, may be multi-burden. Since they also have social responsibilities in their communities, such as attending social activities like *arisan*, *pengajian*, or PKK program. Communal system in Javanese culture is very strong. If Javanese women ignore their social responsibilities, they will get social punishment from their environment. Therefore, Government program such as PKK, is often more a burden for women than a way of improvement, since this gives more duties to women rather than benefit.

Javanese Women and Alteration

The growing condition of Javanese contemporary society, in one hand results in many kinds of progress and improvements in people's quality of life. On the other hand, this influences the change of culture and social values as well. Feudalism is fading, also patriarchies and bilinear pattern in the society. Modern life style is getting stronger, while communal relationship is getting weaker (Yuarsi, 2002, p.31). Furthermore, progress and modernity have been engaging social ambivalence in Javanese society as well (Brenner, 1998, p.11).

Javanese people are in the crossing point of their traditional values and the new values which have come as a consequence of globalization. They are currently in the

condition which is called "hybridism" (Schech, 2000a, p. 79-80). The idea of hybridism has been developed by Escobar, from the term which was created by Homi Bhabha (in Schech, 2000a, p. 70 and 79). In other words, hybridism is defined as "cultural mixing in which there are no sharp boundaries between old and new, tradition and modern, but 'complex processes of cultural hybridization encompassing manifold and multiple modernity and traditions' " (Escobar in Schech, 2000a, p. 79-80).

One of social economy characteristic in Javanese urban areas is a huge number of young age new comers who are involved in economic trading activities (Yuarsi, 2002, p.35). Young rural women are living home after finishing basic formal education, to gain money in cities, since they perceive this as better than doing unpaid domestic work in their own homes. Unluckily, these girls are often treated inequitable. Such as paid lower than their male counterparts, since there is an assumption that men have to support their families, although in fact this is not true (Jensen, 1995, p.291).

The common phenomenon in Yogyakarta, for instance, there are many young women working in shops, supermarkets or department stores, or as sales clerks. Their wages are typically under the reasonable living standard. Thus they usually lives in a very poor condition, such as sharing a small room for up to five people and eating no more than twice or once a day (Yuarsi, 2002, p.35).

This condition got worse when the economic crisis was emerging in Indonesia. This national financial crisis has most directly influenced the quality of lives of poor women in both urban and rural areas (Hartini et al, 2003, p.654).

High living cost without suitable income results in distorted social behaviours. For example a phenomenon of implicit prostitution in Yogyakarta's urban area, which is called "*cewek barko*" (*cewek* means girl or chick; *barko* is an abbreviation of *bubar toko* which means shop's closing time). "*Cewek barko*" is a sobriquet for single girls working in trading activities, who are available to be dated after her work place closed. They usually can be dated until 00.00-04.00 am. Unfortunately, when these girls come home in the lateness, they are often exploited by jobless boys in the street or around their neighbourhoods, forced to give money to those boys (Yuarsi, 2002, p.35).

It can be argued that this phenomenon of *cewek barko* is not just a social phenomenon, but also a kind of economical unfairness implication for some members of the society. This is a sort of survival strategy for these young women (Yuarsi, 2002, p.41).

Furthermore, the change in sexual behaviour is also shown in a controversial survey by lip Wijayanto in the year 2002. Wijayanto reports that 97,05% female university students in Yogyakarta have lost their virginity. This statement has made people in Yogyakarta, even Indonesian society as general, are shocked. This can be understood, since university students in Indonesia generally are youth people who have not been married, while sexual relationship before marriage is officially strictly prohibited in Javanese culture. Therefore, virginity has been perceived as really worth, and this has been the most representative symbol of "women's dignity" (Kurniawan, undated, online).

This case shows three condition of current Javanese society. Firstly, despite this survey has been criticized as not meet methodological rules, this report can be indicator of social change, particularly in term of sexual behaviour. The number 97,05% is shocking because this says that a lot of young educated women in Yogyakarta do not respect social values and norms anymore.

Secondly, this case shows that in the Javanese society sexual behaviour is still not a private area. Different with the Western society, who regard sexual business as an individual privacy, sexual behaviour in Javanese community is still everybody's business.

Lastly, both of the survey and people's reactions towards the report obviously demonstrate the strong patriarchal system in the society. The symbolism of virginity proves the cultural control over women's behaviours. Men's virginity is never been exposed since this is not perceived as a matter.

Javanese Women and Violence

Violence is not monopolized by patrilineal societies, but occurs in bilineal and matrilineal communities as well. Women in Javanese culture, which formally have a bilineal family system, are not free from violence (Yuarsi, 2002, p.3). The common perception that Javanese cultural environment will be able to eliminate violence is not evident. Tradition has precisely been a trigger for violence against women (Yuarsi, 2002, p.48).

The expansion of women's social relation increases women's vulnerability as the violence perpetrators are commonly the people who have close social relationship with the victims. In many cases, the perpetrators are the victim's relatives. Violence actors often cannot be found. Even if they are found, in many accidents the victims are exactly

at disadvantage since the authentication pattern is psychologically burdening the victims (Yuarsi, 2002, p.48-49).

Study in Yogyakarta found that, in general, violent behaviour against women more often occurs in the urban areas than in the rural ones. Approximately 99,3% of urban women in Yogyakarta have experienced facing sexual harassment and violence, compare to 88,9% of rural women who have experienced that (Yuarsi, 2002, p.62).

Javanese women who are working outside their homes have to face problems of dichotomy. In the one hand, as a woman, they have to follow the norms and value systems in their society, particularly the value of "woman's dignity". Meanwhile, as an employee, they have to obey to the systems and rules in their offices or companies, in which they often have to break those society's values and norms (Sumarni in Falah, 2003, p.2). For instance, doing a journey in the night; being in a closed room with men who are not their husbands or their families' members; dressing provocatively, etc.

A lot of working women in Java's urban areas experienced unfair treatments in their work environment. As to be discriminated in term of wage or salary and harassed by their male counterparts, supervisors or managers (Murhanawati in Falah, 2003, p.2).

However, Javanese women in quiet and isolated rural areas are not free from violence as well. They are often harassed and raped by their neighbours, particularly when their husbands are not at home. The accidents usually occur at their own homes or in quiet places, such as farm which is usually located far from people's housing. These tendencies show that women's position is defenceless. Even their own homes, which ought to be shelters for them, do not guarantee to protect them from violent behaviour (Yuarsi, 2002, pp.46-47 and p.52). In certain kind of violence, unavailability of women's partners is often being causal factor of violence. This happened to both unmarried women and widows. Assumption that women are weak and need to be accompanied by men is perceived as an opportunity for men to annoy widows or single women (Yuarsi, 2002, pp.64-65).

Knowing each other among people in their environment, in one hand is good for social security. Ironically, this is precisely disadvantageous for women. Because of familiarity, the women who were victim of sexual harassed or violence by their neighbours usually are ashamed to reveal their experience because of fear to be target of gossip which possibly destroys both of their own families and the perpetrators' families. This condition evoke security feelings for the perpetrators and encourage

them to repeat their behaviour (Yuarsi, 2002, pp.46-47). This attitude of those victimized women, who repress their problems to avoid conflicts, is in accordance with Javanese philosophy: "*Crah gawe bubrah, rukun agawe sentosa*" which means "dispute evokes dissension, concord creates prosperity". Javanese people are encouraged to always keep harmony and avoid open conflict to maintain peaceful lives (Sedyawati, 2003, p.23).

Those victims are also reluctant to reveal the accident because of ashamed. Being object of sexual harassment is often perceived as a shame or embarrassment. In Javanese culture, shame has a very negative value and has to be avoided. There is a philosophy "*wedi wirang wani mati*" which means "better die than ashamed" (Sedyawati, 2003, p.145).

Another reason of these women hiding their experience is to avoid to be blamed, since the disclosures of sexual violence are usually burdening the victims themselves (Yuarsi, 2002, p. 49). This is because Javanese women bear psychological burden of norms and values systems in their community. They have to obey to the social restrictions which are ruled by their society, in order to conform to what the Javanese society call as "woman's dignity" (Sumarni in Falah, 2003, p.2).

Like the cases of unfaithfulness, sexual harassment is something that people think as a "normal" expression of men being attracted in women (Falah, 2003, p.7; Yuarsi, 2001, p.139). Every sort of violence towards women is often put in the condition when a woman break cultural "correctness", such as go out alone in the night or get dressed "inappropriately". Thus the victims are often blamed as the ones who are "provocating men to harass women". This is not only men's opinion, but a lot of women believe this view as well. Even the victims sometimes blame themselves (Falah, 2003, p.7; Yuarsi, 2002, p.13).

The law institution's respond towards cases of sexual violence is still dominated by legal approach only. The other side of moral, social, and psychological aspect are hardly considered (Yuarsi, 2002, p.132). Worse, there is a tendency that some media put the case of sexual violence as sensational entertaining news.

Study in Yogyakarta found a contrary fact that, in rural communities, there is a tendency that the more educated a woman, the more possibilities to have sexual violence. The tendency in urban society is the converse of this. The more educated an urban woman, the less possibilities to experience sexual violence. This might be able to be explained by the reason that the category of "educated woman" in urban areas and that in rural areas can be different. Women who are perceived as "educated" in rural

areas might be not regarded as “educated” when they are in the cities, since the education level in urban places is usually higher than that in rural ones. However, this still shows that education cannot really improve women’s position in the society. Men’s physical power and privilege seem to be still more dominant than women’s education (Yuarsi, 2002, p.65-66).

Conclusion

Even though Javanese society officially follows bilineal family system, in fact they are still dominated by patriarchy system which tends to marginalize women (Yuarsi, 2002, p.4). A lot of social restrictions have been ruled to control women behaviours and activities, in the name of cultural values and norms.

Financial difficulties in both urban and rural areas in Java force women to work outside home. The reason to work is not for self actualization at all, but no more than to keep their families to stay alive. On the one hand, women’s work in industry, trading, garment, etc, has helped them to survive and be more independent. On the other hand, this has been burdening women, since they have had to play multi roles, such as housewives, breadwinners, and social members.

For Javanese women, globalization is more a threat than an opportunity to improve their quality of life (Sutrisno in Falah, 2003, p.2). Like other women in the developing countries, Javanese women have become objects of stratified exploiting system, in which women are victims of discrimination, gaps and unfair crossing between capitalism and patriarchy system, which are strengthening each other (Nasikun in Falah, 2003, p.2). This is in accordance with what Maria Mies wrote in analyzing the Women and Development (WAD) strategy, that “patriarchal violence” is linked with the process of modernization in the Third World (Mies in Schech, 2000b, p.94).

In this societal level, women have to face dilemmatic problems. On the one hand, as members of a patriarchal society, they are restricted by social values and norms of “good Javanese woman”. On the other hand, the capitalism demand push them to break those norms and values (Sumarni in Falah, 2003, p.2)

Then women are always positioned in a difficult vulnerable situation. When Javanese become target of oppression, they are often blamed and forced to bear the most social responsibility for the accidents which they are suffered. Many sort of Javanese cultural concepts and traditions, which originally have good intentions, are often used misleadingly and pushing women coercion.

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