



**Reseña de Maria Platt, *Marriage, Gender and Islam in Indonesia: Women Negotiating Informal Marriage, Divorce and Desire.* Asian Women in Asia. Nueva York, NY: Routledge, 2017, xiii + 158 pp.; ISBN 978-041-56626-11**

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Heterosexual Islamic marriages have long been a subject of academic interest. Research findings that are based on Southeast Asian societies in this respect often reveal perceptions and practices that support patriarchal and androcentric agendas, which are often doubly-sanctioned by state and religio-cultural systems. Maria Platt's book is positioned squarely within such conversations. The entire corpus is woven around the *marital continuum*, a concept which aims to capture the multivalent, uneasy and unruly dynamics of relationships from marriage to divorce that are performed by the Sasak people in the Indonesian island of Lombok.

Platt's research at the intersection of gender relations and religion reviews the tensions between community-based marriages and the 1974 Marriage Law, which the country foregrounds as a project of modernity. Despite attempts to produce modern subjects and egalitarian relationships, as well as protect women's rights, the Marriage Law does not sufficiently consider socio-cultural forces at work. Communal expectations and financial difficulties produce uneven adherences to official marriage legalities. Consequently, many women fall outside the protection of the Law. By capturing the narratives of Indonesian Sasak Muslim women, the author highlights highly complex executions of agency and autonomy that enshroud gendered operations. I turn my attention specifically to three elements of the marital continuum that Sasak women strategize for personal agency: *talak*, *kawin-lari* and *pacaran lagi*.

As gender dynamics are arguably a consequence of Islamic modernity, Platt explains that the doings of Indonesian Islam play a strategic role in the construction of agency, despite being popularly perceived as oppressively sexist in nature. Clarifications of the often ambiguous practice of *talak* —or the threefold pronouncement of divorce by husband to wife— can actually be instrumental in helping women liberate themselves from unhappy unions. While it may lie beyond the scope of the author's research agenda, I would have been extremely interested to learn how such women fare post-*talak* in a society where marriage —in its varied forms— is considered as a significant event in human relationships. For instance, how would Sasak women who are embedded deeply in gendered vulnerabilities negotiate possibilities of *talak* by future husbands? Does experience provide any leverage?



Platt explains that the practice of *kawin-lari*, loosely translated as elopement, can be used to manipulate women as women can be coerced to run away with their male suitors for fear of the dire consequences of the *senggegar* or love potion that are used by men. Platt, however, rightly underscores the false binary of *kawin-lari* as *either* the effect of coercion *or* an act of resistance. While women have been disadvantaged by *kawin-lari*, it also allows them to select their own love interests, circumvent parental directives in the choice of life partners, give expression to the spontaneity of romantic love, and provide sense-making of the ambiguities of consent in relationships. This community-sanctioned practice interrupts the marital continuum as a seamless process from *midang* or ordinary courtship to *akad nikah*, or Islamic marriage.

The practice of *pacaran lagi*, or post-marital courtship with one who is not a spouse, becomes an avenue for women to exercise personal agency. The fact that this activity has escalated due to a transition in Lombok's political economy demonstrates an intimate connection between production, consumption and gender performances. While the vast majority of active practitioners are men, women can also take the lead. Through this practice, women effectively destabilize the marital continuum. Rather than coasting along a linear progression from courtship to marriage with one man, women show their capacities beyond being virtuous and patient victims of extra-marital affairs to being proactive proponents of *pacaran lagi* for their own advantage. I applaud Platt's approach in avoiding an exclusive focus on the lives of women—she rightly discusses women's lived realities *in relation* to men as a crucial crucible. Epistemological pursuits of gender complexities must take this relationality into account. Yet this strategy, while potent, is restricted within systemic patriarchal constraints. The pervasive uncontested self-definition of women in relation to men, particularly as sanctioned by Indonesian Islam, is an issue that could have been further explored. What would the Sasak Muslim woman look like if she ceases to articulate herself predominantly in terms of, and within a male-masculinist framework that is buttressed by Islamic inflections?

Such enquiries aside, this is a well-researched and thoroughly accessible monograph. It navigates the complexity of gender relationships in which the personal provokes the communal, and



where the communal challenges the legal in the meaning-making of human lives. Scholars interested in diverse facets of Indonesia, religion, and gender and sexuality studies will find in Platt's work an indispensable resource.

