

## Polygamy and early marriage in the Dutch East Indies

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**Abstract:** *The article discusses the role of Poetri Mardika in suppressing early marriage and polygamy during the colonial period in the Dutch East Indies. Poetri mardika was the first women's organization in 1912 during the national movement by boedi oetomo. The organization consisted of women and men who cared about the fate of women. They voiced their ideas through magazines. The position of women who are shackled by customary support makes them powerless to voice their rights. The research aims to examine polygamy and early marriage in colonial society using historical methods, namely heuristics, criticism, interpretation and historiography. Heuristics were conducted by collecting primary sources from magazines and secondary books and journals with the keywords polygamy and early marriage. Criticism of primary and secondary data is internally selected to determine the authenticity of the source. Interpretation uses the lewis coser conflict approach. The result of the research is that the practice of early marriage occurs because the social system of society shackles and there is no power for women to reject the system. Meanwhile, polygamy that occurred in the 1900s had different intensities in each region. This practice had a negative impact on women, so Poetri Mardika tried to raise their status by paying attention through education and teaching. Through education, women can be independent and no longer depend on men so that they can express their rights and obligations without being hindered by the confinement of men.*

**Keywords:** *marriage; polygamy; Indies*

**Abstrak:** Artikel membahas peran poetri mardika dalam menekan pernikahan dini dan poligami masa kolonial di Hindia Belanda. Poetri mardika adalah organisasi perempuan pertama tahun 1912 masa pergerakan nasional oleh boedi oetomo. Organisasi beranggotakan perempuan dan laki-laki yang peduli pada nasib perempuan. Mereka menyuarakan gagasan melalui majalah. Posisi perempuan yang terbelenggu oleh dukungan adat membuat tidak berdaya untuk menyuarakan hak. Tujuan penelitian mengkaji poligami dan pernikahan dini pada masyarakat kolonial dengan menggunakan metode sejarah, yakni heuristik, kritik, interpretasi dan historiografi. Heuristik dilakukan dengan mengumpulkan sumber primer dari majalah dan buku sekunder serta jurnal dengan kata kunci poligami dan pernikahan dini. Kritik data primer dan sekunder diseleksi internal untuk menentukan keaslian sumber. Interpretasi menggunakan pendekatan konflik lewis coser. Hasil penelitian bahwa praktik pernikahan dini terjadi karena sistem sosial masyarakat membelenggu dan tidak ada kuasa bagi perempuan untuk menolak sistem tersebut. Sementara itu, poligami yang terjadi pada 1900-an memiliki intensitas yang berbeda di setiap daerah. Praktik ini memberikan dampak negatif bagi perempuan sehingga poetri mardika berusaha mengangkat derajat dengan memberikan perhatian melalui pendidikan dan pengajaran. Melalui pendidikan membuat perempuan bisa mandiri dan tidak lagi bergantung pada laki-laki sehingga dapat mengekspresikan hak dan kewajiban tanpa dihalangi oleh kungkungan.

**Kata kunci:** *pernikahan; poligami; Hindia Belanda*

## Introduction

Women's lives during the colonial period were governed by traditions, rights and obligations of women who were considered inferior to men. The position of women in Indonesian society was influenced by customary laws and traditions that developed in the community (Stuers, 2008). In fact, at the beginning of the 20th century, the status of women was still far below that of men. The patriarchal culture that was intertwined with the feudal culture that was still alive at that time placed wives as nothing more than a companion to a man. Women were also often only used as objects to improve family status through the arranged marriage process. Women's contribution is only in subservient fields such as being a housewife, while men are expected to be the backbone of the family and appear in the public sphere (Blackburn, 2004). The prevailing social layers differentiated social roles and conditions in daily life in the Dutch East Indies. During the Dutch colonial period, education for girls was not a priority. The inequality of women's access to education is partly due to the patriarchal culture that exists in Indonesia (Nasir & Lilianti, 2017). Adherents of patriarchal culture place men in a more dominant position in all fields compared to women.

The situation of women at this time was divided into four groups: a) The firstclass group, namely aristocrats; b) the middleclass group, namely women who were given the freedom to work in the fields, learn to sew, but were not allowed to go to school; c) the third group, almost the same as the middle class; d) the fourth group is women who become santri in boarding schools (Stuers, 2008). Women were not allowed to appear in public, study modern education, and were not allowed to leave the house. During this period, the education that women received was in the form of teaching about religion and housekeeping in preparation for becoming a wife and mother. The push to promote education for women aimed to prevent girls from being forced into marriage at an early age (Poesponegoro & Notosusanto, 2019). If women received sufficient education, they would be aware of their circumstances and environment. Women's problems do not only revolve around education, polygamy and early marriage are also diseases that surround women. Polygamy is the practice of marrying more than one partner. In a polygamous marriage, a partner of either sex can have more than one partner at the same time.

During the colonial period, the government did not provide clear formal rules for Muslims regarding marriage law (GUNARYO, 2006). In fact, for European groups, the Burgerlijk Wetboek was enacted which regulates marriage, birth, and power. The law governing Christians is the Huwelijk Ordonantie Christen voor Indonesiers. In the view of Islam, polygamy is allowed in accordance with the guidelines of Al-Quran Surah Nisa verse 3. At present, many people take this verse as an excuse to commit polygamy and harm women (Wibowo, 2022). Based on Islamic law, men are allowed polygamy with a limit of four wives and obliged to be fair to them in all matters, but not many can carry out polygamy according to the law. The loose implementation of marriage because there are no rules governing it causes many disadvantages for women. Thus, in practice there are many divorces, early marriages, arbitrary divorce, polygamy that is carried out unfairly, and other matters related to family law issues. The issue of polygamy was also in

the spotlight of the Poetri Mardika organisation, Sadikoen Tandokoesomo as the editorial board of Poetri Mardika expressed his concern in a magazine published in 1916 as quoted below

Setiap orang beradab yang peka dan berpikir mendalam akan setuju dengan saya bahwa poligami adalah hal yang paling buruk bagi perempuan dan bahaya terbesar bagi keamanan rumah tangga dan masyarakat kita. Untuk membasmi kanker Jawa ini, diperlukan larangan legislatif... (Mardika, 2 Februari 1916; Vrijdag, 1916)

Through this article, Sadikoen wanted to reveal that polygamy was the most frightening disease for women and the greatest danger to the security of the household. Although the Prophet Muhammad tolerated polygamy, the Poetri Mardika organisation still opposed the custom of early marriage and polygamy in Indonesia (Anon, 1915). Many factors contributed to early marriage and polygamy existing during the colonial period. This article examines how the Poetri Mardika organisation's efforts to suppress polygamy and early marriage and elevate the position of women.

## Method

Poetri Mardika as a women's organization tries to unite to fight polygamy and early marriage, this conflict arises because of the patriarchal customs inherent in Java. Thus, encouraging Poetri Mardika to disseminate the negative impact of polygamy and early marriage on women through mass media. Data collection in this research was carried out in Desember 2022, then the stages of source assessment, criticism, interpretation and writing were completed in January 2024. The method used to explore the topic studied regarding polygamy and early marriage, this research uses the historical method which involves the collection and critical analysis of historical data (Kuntowijoyo, 2018). The historical method is the process of critically evaluating information from the past to form a comprehensive understanding of historical events. History as a disciplined method aims to maintain the broadest possible definition of collective memory, and to make the process of remembering as accurate as possible, so that our knowledge of the past is not limited to what is immediately relevant (Tosh, 2015). The method used in this research is the method of historical science with four stages that will be carried out are heuristics, criticism, interpretation and historiography.

Heuristics is the activity of searching for sources in order to obtain data, historical material, or historical evidence (Sjamsuddin, 2019). In this activity, the sources that have been collected by researchers are magazines, scientific journals, and scientific articles. Sources were obtained from the University of Jember Library and the Leiden University archive which has a collection of books and magazines about the history of the Indonesian women's movement. Primary sources were magazines published by Poetri Mardika from 1915 to 1920. The next primary source was written by (Abdoelrachman, 1917) with the title *Voor Vrouwen* in *De Sumatra Post* magazine published on 12 January 1917. This article discusses the holding of the Poetri Mardika association in Cirebon to discuss polygamy regulations with the formation of a committee consisting of 27 women and 4 men which was held in January 1917. The next source was a magazine published by *De Sumatra Post* on 5 June 1915 entitled *Een Vrouw* which

reviewed the article written by Abdoelrachman in *Poetri Mardika* magazine and commented on polygamy in marriage (Anon, 1915). The application of criticism or verification of the sources that have been collected is useful to produce validation of a large number of facts about the past, especially Polygamy and Early Marriage. To see the level of authenticity of the source and the level of credibility, source criticism is carried out on the sources taken to avoid falsehood (Tosh, 2015). Source criticism itself means an attempt to assess, test, and select the sources that have been collected to obtain authentic sources. The data found are *Poetri Mardika* magazines published from 1914 to 1920 in accordance with the movement period of the organisation, these sources are considered credible because *Poetri Mardika* magazines were made in Batavia (read: Jakarta), Buitenzorg (read: Bogor), and Chirebon (read: Cirebon) written by members of *Poetri Mardika*. In addition, when physically examined the paper used was yellowed, the type of writing used Dutch, Malay, Sundanese and Javanese.

Other primary sources such as magazines published by *De Sumatra Post* and *De Expres* also have the same authenticity as *Poetri Mardika* magazine (Mardika, 4 Juli 1915). These sources were obtained through the Leiden University library [https://catalogue.leidenuniv.nl/permalink/31UKB\\_LEU/18s393l/alma990036571210302711](https://catalogue.leidenuniv.nl/permalink/31UKB_LEU/18s393l/alma990036571210302711) and Delpher's website <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/results?query=poetri+mardika&coll=ddd>. The next stage is interpretation, this stage is the process of connecting one historical fact with another historical fact. Another definition of interpretation is the stage of giving meaning and significance to raw facts (Herlina, 2020). At the interpretation stage there are two methods used, analysis and synthesis. In this third stage, the author interprets the facts in *Poetri Mardika* magazine in 1915-1920 which contain forms of attention to women in terms of education, social, and polygamy issues. In this third stage, the author interprets the facts in *Poetri Mardika* magazine in 1915-1920 that contain forms of attention to women in terms of education, social, and polygamy. This research was interpreted with the help of Lewis Coser's conflict theory approach.

According to him, conflict can have positive functions for society, such as encouraging social change, stimulating creativity and innovation, and encouraging cooperation and solidarity among conflicting groups (Coser, 1956). *De Expres* magazine published in May 1914 explains that the organisation was founded in 1912 and initiated by Boedi Oetomo, this is in line with the description in *Poetri Mardika* magazine 1915. In addition, this fact is also found in the book entitled *sejarah setengah abad kesatuan pergerakan wanita Indonesia* by Kowani (1978) and the book *sejarah perempuan Indonesia: Gerakan dan pencapaian* by Stuers (2008). From this example, the fact that the *Poetri Mardika* organisation was founded in 1912 and initiated by Boedi Oetomo is an interpretation that has been made by the researcher. The last step of the various stages of the historical method is historiography, which is an effort to rewrite the results of data that has gone through the interpretation stage. The interpretation stage only presents data that has been given meaning and classification (Herlina, 2020). The results of the writing are presented in the form of writing that is communicated to the reader, at this stage the things that need to be considered are logical, chronological, systematic delivery and prioritising

scientific truth. The writing presented through historical writing cannot be exactly the same as what happened, so a historian is required to be able to imagine as well (Kartodirdjo, 2018). At this stage, researchers conduct conceptual historical writing about the role of the Poetri Mardika organization in suppressing polygamy and early marriage in 1912-1919 by assembling historical facts that have been obtained previously.

## Results and Discussion

### Forced and early marriage

In the 19th century, people were categorized according to their race, ethnicity and gender. As for the system that governed the movement of society at that time, the absence of balance in the distribution of rights and obligations resulted in the emergence of social layers (Amini, 2021). Social layering is the distinction of a certain population into hierarchically stratified classes, giving rise to social layers of lower, middle, and upper (Sorokin, 1959). The Poetri Mardika organization sought to equalize education between men and women. As the first women's movement organization, this was supported by Theresia Sabaroedin's speech at a grand meeting on 6 June 1915 in Buitenzorg (read: Bogor) which stated that

Maka Poetri Mardika satoe vereeniging jang masi moeda, jang hendak bekerdja oentoe itoe hal mengambil djalan dengan: Fatsal a Memperhatikan keadaan prempoean dengan lantaran memoeliakan kasopanan, dan katertipan, begitoe djoega melinjapkan segala adat istiadat jang melintangki kemadjoean. Fatsal ke b, boeat mendapat hasil-hasilnja dari jang tersebut tadi maka Poetri Mardika berdaja oepaja akan mendapat hasil pantes dengan tertimbang tenaganja dengan: Bab 1 Membantoe dengan warna oewang kepada anak-anak prampoean jang miskin atau jang tida mampoe boeat beladjar dan memoedahkan akan meneroeskan pladjarannja. Bab 2 Membri nasehat dan ketrangan pada anak-anak prempoean jang ingin beladja. Bab 3 Membangoenkan kasopanannja pengrasaan dan ingatan pihak prempoean. Bab 4 Membri waktue pada orang prempoean boeat melahirkan pikirannja dalam pandangan agar soepaja dapat melinjapkan keketjilan hati dan Bab ke 5 Segala oesaha jang dappat mendjadikan kasampoernaannja alam prempoean. (Mardika, 5 Agustus 1915).

The organisation seeks to harmonise the position of women and men, so that women do not only work in subordinate households such as masak (cooking), macak (dressing up), and manak (giving birth). T. Sabaroedin's speech explained the things that the organisation would do, including: a) providing financial assistance for girls who could not afford school; b) providing advice and knowledge for women who wanted to learn; c) developing the value of modesty; d) providing opportunities for women to express their thoughts and ideas; e) other efforts that could improve the status of women. In July 1915, Poetri Mardika again highlighted an alarming situation that was detrimental to women. Problems related to polygamy and early marriage are common in society. As expressed by Abdoelrachman in Poetri Mardika magazine in the following quote.

Apa jang akan saja bitjarakan disini, jaitoe adat kita, Boemipoetra, jang tida pantes sekali masih dipakai dalam abad ka XX ini. Seringkali saja mendengar djoega soedah

menjaksikan sendiri, ada Boemipoetra mengawinkan anaknja perampoean, sebab soedah terlaloe besar. Apa jang dikata besar oleh orang-orang, saja rasa ada salah, sebab biarpoean anak perampoean beloem tjoekoep kapandaiannja dan beloem ada pikiran beroemah-roemah, djika ia soedah oemoer 12 taoen, di anggaplah ia soedah sampai oemoer boeat beroemah roemah sendiri oleh orang toeanja.... (Abdoelrachman, 7 Juli 1916).

This paper expresses Abdoelrachman's concern about the prevalence of early marriages with brides under the age of 18. Many parents marry off their daughters when they are 12 years old because they are considered adults. The definition of puberty at this time is still gray. In fact, the Dutch government has paid attention to the elimination of early marriage since the 1900s. The government ordered each resident in Java and Madura to limit it. However, the definition of early marriage at that time clashed with customs. Research conducted by Bemmelen (2018), explains that in 1905-1914, child marriage was common among the natives. In fact, children who had not yet reached puberty were already undergoing marriage. Women's status, which was considered lower than men's, made women powerless. Thus, women were often married off by their families to men they did not want to marry, in order to maintain family dignity. Ironically, they are often married off at a young age. These early marriages have a negative impact as they often lead to psychological distress for women, polygamy, and worse, divorce (Blackburn, 2007). At a very young age, their minds and mentality are not ready to build a new family, causing new social problems in the community.

In a 1916 edition of a magazine, *Poetri Mardika* highlighted the existence of forced marriage in society. The social life of the Dutch East Indies society at that time considered that if they had a child who was still a girl, they would immediately find a husband. It did not matter whether the child agreed or not, because according to them, children must obey the will of their parents. This unwritten rule was considered normal among the Inlanders, there was no need to be picky even if the prospective son-in-law was old, as long as he was wealthy and able to protect his son-in-law. This forced marriage is clearly detrimental to women, in households women are often humiliated, for example in Java and Madura most women are wasted by men (Mardika, 5 Agustus 1915). Women's lives have been differentiated by their parents since they were young. Moreover, in Islamic law, girls have been separated like day and night, for example in the division of inheritance, boys get one share of the inheritance, while girls get half a share. In Chinese religious rules, girls are not inherited and are not required to inherit. Moving on from these rules, it is clear that women have always been degraded. When compared to European women, there were too many differences, they were respected and appreciated by men. A Dutch proverb copied into Malay states "Honor all women because your mother is also a woman" (Mardika, 8 Agustus 1916).

### **Polygamy in the colonial period**

The rise of early marriage and polygamy that occurred in the 1900s. Recorded in the official colonial report *Indisch Verslag* based on the 1930 census in 1939 in the Java Island area there were 154.642 men married to 2 wives, 7.696 polygamous 3 wives, and 1.024 polygamous

4 wives. From the census conducted in 1930 alone, the polygamy rate in Java can be said to be high, this of course affects the behaviour and thinking patterns of women. Therefore, the *Poetri Mardika* Organisation seeks to reduce the number of early marriages and provide reviews related to the negative impact of polygamy through mass media, namely the *Poetri Mardika* newspaper. In reality, polygamy was practised by a number of political and community elites. They are proud of their positions, rely on their strength and power, and abuse their trust (Vrijdag, 1916). Thus, the practice of polygamy cannot be prevented as it should be, because they are the perpetrators of the practice. For example, the Regent of Serang said that polygamy was common among the people, landowners and their wives often spoke about it. This was emphasised in the magazine *Poetri Mardika* published in April 1916.

Bangsa priyaji jang beristeri doea atawa lebih nistjajalah anaknja lebih banjak dari orang jang beristeri satoe, sekarang toewan-toewan pematja boleh timbang, bagimanakah bisanja bangsa kita Boemipoetra bisa mendapet peladjaran sampe tjoekoep, djika tiada bisa melinjapken adat kebijasaan jang begitoe.... (Mardika, 4 April 1916).

The Serang regent's statement shows that government officials were proud to be polygamous, even though they were blinded by their own desires. According to the Regent of Serang, education was the only way to empower women (Mardika, 4 April 1916; Vrijdag, 1916). However, Sadikoen thought differently, stating that education was good as long as it was done with the purification of character and moral improvement, and should start with women, mothers, and mothers-to-be. If women who reach the age of 12 are married off and polygamised, how can they be taught, when housework alone is exhausting for housewives (Mardika, 3 Maret 1916). As mothers, they will educate their children, so women should have the right to receive respect from men and be helped to receive the same knowledge and rights. Polygamy was not only practised by Javanese priyayi, but also spread throughout the Dutch East Indies. In the book *Jaarcijvers voor het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden: Annuaire Statistique du Royaume des Pays-Bas*, there are statistical data related to polygamy and monogamy that occurred in several regions as shown in table 1.

Based on the table above, the results of the 1920 population census show that the total number of natives who practiced monogamy was 7.011.357, while polygamy with 2 wives amounted to 99.113, marrying 3 wives totaled 5.215, while marrying 4 wives amounted to 706 people. In addition, the data recorded the marriages of foreigners (Europeans and Easterners) who married in the Dutch East Indies. With a total number of monogamy of 86.095, 2-wife polygamy totaling 1.236, 3-wife polygamy 90, and 4 wives totaling 20. From the Java and Madura regions, it can be seen that the West Java region is the region with the total number of natives who practice polygamy the most, totaling 29.342. This was followed by Pekalongan (12.248), Preanger Regentschappen (12.090), Semarang (11.954), Batavia (10.429). As for other regions, the number is less than tens of thousands, ranging from 1.732 to 8.906. Meanwhile, the total number of foreigners practicing polygamy is in the hundreds, not in the thousands like the total number of natives, with the West Java region coming in first, with 698 cases of polygamy, followed by Batavia 488 cases, Semarang 157 cases, Cheribon 118 cases.

**Table 1**

*Polygamy and monogamy statistis (Source: U.V. Resultat de Accensement, Jaarcijfers voor het Koninkrij der Nederlanden. (1921) p. 12.)*

Region	Married male Inlanders					Married mannel. Vr. Oosterl				
	Polygamie					Polygamie				
	Monogami	2 Womans	3 Womans	4 Womans	Total	Monogami	2 Womans	3 Womans	4 Womans	Total
Java and Madura										
Bantam	188.594	1.997	121	21	2.139	1.056	26	2	1	29
Batavia	552.543	9.728	595	106	10.429	23.859	448	6	4	488
Cheribon	356.812	4.387	249	48	4.684	6.342	105	2	1	118
Preanger	823.820	11.545	491	54	12.090	4.644	58	8	5	63
Regentschappen										
West Java	1.921.769	27.657	1.456	229	29.342	35.901	637	5	6	698
Pekalongan	459.582	11.447	707	94	12.248	4.642	85	7	1	93
Semarang	526.616	11.308	588	58	11.954	9.094	147	6	4	157
Rembang	349.035	1.661	63	8	1.732	3.909	22	5	3	30
Banjoemas	367.364	8.366	483	57	8.906	2.456	39	-	1	40
Kedoe	497.897	7.470	411	54	7.935	3.368	59	2	-	61
Jogjakarta	240.608	3.154	151	29	3.334	1.839	18	-	-	18
Soerakarta	398.700	5.141	230	40	5.411	3.237	49	1	2	52
Madioen	297.388	3.528	140	13	3.681	1.300	10	-	-	10
Soerabaja	466.090	2.685	121	15	2.821	9.309	60	5	1	66
Madoera	357.498	4.699	300	47	5.046	1.232	15	-	2	17
Kediri	343.751	3.444	138	11	3.593	3.330	17	-	-	17
Pasoeroean	458.681	5.267	250	33	5.550	4.062	55	6	-	61



Besuki	326.378	3.286	177	18	3.481	2.416	23	3	-	26
Total	7.011.357	99.113	5.215	706	105.034	86.095	1.236	90	20	1.346

For the other regions, the number is only in the tens. Based on this table, it can be concluded that it was not the colonizers who practiced polygamy, but the natives themselves. In polygamy a man must share his love with his four wives (the maximum limit of polygamy as proposed by R.M Soewardi), and in return each woman gets a quarter of the man's love (Mardika, 3 Maret 1918). In line with the table above, here are the figures for polygamy outside Java.

**Table 2**

*Polygamy data outside Java island (Source: U.V. Resultat de Accensemen, Jaarcijfers voor het Koninkrij der Nederlanden, 1921)*

Gewesten	Married male Inlanders					Married mannel. Vr. Oosterl				
	Polygamie					Polygamie				
	Monogami	2 Womans	3 Womans	4 Womans	Total	Monogami	2 Womans	3 Womans	4 Womans	Total
Buitengewesten										
Lampoengsche districten	44.018	3.226	427	75	3.728	856	33	2	1	36
Palembang	164.708	3.206	183	44	3.433	3.414	40	4	1	45
Djambi	44.137	605	19	1	625	801	14	-	-	14
Oostkust van Sumatra	214.923	4.513	336	80	4.929	24.043	310	23	4	337
Benkoelen	49.718	646	41	13	700	558	19	2	-	21
Sumatra's Westkust	271.901	20.127	2.371	455	22.953	2.385	25	-	1	26
Tapanoeli	153.788	6.053	467	67	6.587	592	11	1	-	12
Atjeh en Onderh. (1)	100.648	4.337	259	44	4.640	2.193	31	-	-	31
Riou wen Onderh	39.686	638	39	9	686	3.508	42	-	-	42
Bangka en Onderh	17.380	61	2	-	63	10.248	29	-	-	29
Billiton	8.140	65	1	-	66	1.532	30	-	-	30
Westerafd van Borneo (1)	45.764	443	22	8	473	5.884	135	3	-	138

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Z. en Oosterafd. v. Borneo (1)	133.388	2.183	161	26	2.370	3.333	80	11	2	93
Manado	40.428	271	7	5	283	1.642	62	6	1	69
Celebes en Onderh (1)	435.009	7.801	855	199	8.855	3.636	108	17	14	139
Amboina (A. en. T. (1)	47.952	560	27	8	595	1.153	24	5	1	30
Amboina (Nieuw Guinee (1)	11.033	168	27	4	199	266	31	1	-	32
Timor en Onderh	16.985	297	20	5	322	982	52	9	1	62
Bali en Lombok	295.282	11.167	742	178	12.087	2.000	101	12	2	115
Total	2.134.888	6.367	6.006	1.221	73.594	69.026	1.177	96	28	1.301

The practice of polygamy that occurs outside Java and Madura has a different intensity, reflected in the data that a total of 2.13.888 natives practice monogamy, while a total of 66.367 practice 2-wife polygamy, followed by 6.006 3-wife polygamy natives, and 1.221 practice 4-wife polygamy. Furthermore, for the marriage data of foreigners (Europeans and Easterners), the results obtained were 69.026 single marriages, 1.177 2-wife polygamists, a total of 96 3-wife polygamists, and 28 4-wife polygamists.

From the whole table, Sumatra's Westkust region has the most polygamists, with a total of 22.953. Followed by Bali and Lombok with 12.087, Sulawesi and Onderdil with a total of 8.855, then the Tapanoeli region with 6.587, the Oostkust van Sumatra region with 4.929, followed by the Atjeh en Onderh region with 4.640, the Palembang region with 3.433, the Z. and Oosterafd Borneo region with 2.370, for other regions in the hundreds. Meanwhile, the total number of foreigners who practiced polygamy was in the hundreds, not in the thousands like the total number of natives, with the Oostkust van Sumatra region first, 337, followed by Celebes and Onderh 139, Westerafd van Borneo 138, and Bali Lombok 115. For the other regions, the numbers are in the tens. These phenomenal numbers show the instability of family life in some neighborhoods and the unclear position of women.

Unequal education, economic weakness, and the tensions experienced by mothers are the reasons polygamy continues to be practiced. This moral crisis continued into the Japanese occupation (Stuers, 2008). Indigenous men were made romusha and heiho to help the Japanese, while some women moved to the city and became prostitutes to avoid starvation. In relation to polygamy, the data below refers to the official colonial report (Indisch Verslaag) of 1939 on the website of the book *Sejarah Perempuan Indonesia: Gerakan dan Pencapaian*.

**Table 3**

*Indisch verslag data based on 1930 census (Stuers, 2008)*

Wilayah (1939)	Monogami	Poligami			Jumlah
		2 Istri	3 Istri	4 Istri	
Jawa	8.230.788	154.642	7.696	1.024	163.362
Sumatra	1.518.889	63.635	5.197	958	69.790
Sulawesi	702.849	20.010	1.875	493	22.378
Maluku	117.505	4.688	387	75	5.150
Bali, Lombok	338.312	12.956	934	171	14.061

The table above is data that can be used to illustrate that the practice of polygamy in the Dutch East Indies was a major problem that had to be solved. There were 154.642 two-wife marriages in Java, which shows that polygamy increased by 60.228 marriages from 1920 to 1930. This practice caused a lot of harm to women, both in terms of physical and mental health, as well as to women’s equality and rights. Polygamy does not only occur in Java, but in various regions, for example polygamy in Minangkabau. The Minangkabau custom that makes the husband a *sumando* in his wife’s gadang house does not necessarily make the husband lose his independence. The husband remains as independent as before marriage, and is allowed to have more than one wife without being prevented by his wife (Sari, 2020). In addition, according to Minangkabau customary law, there is no law between father and son. So, if the wife is divorced by her husband, the child will live with the mother and is not allowed to be taken by the father. Women who are polygamous and forced into marriage are severely traumatised, and there is a case of a woman who ran away and was sold. Sadikoen Tandokoesomo, who was stationed in Singapore, learnt of this and intended Poetri Mardika to seek the establishment of a special orphanage for women who had been forced into prostitution, trafficking, slavery and working in brothels (Abdoelrachman, 7 Juli 1916).

This special orphanage would later teach women to be more self-sufficient. Poetri Mardika also held a meeting in Cirebon, where one of the Stovia students, whose name is not known, justified polygamy as normal. He explained that male nature was destined to live in polygamy. The master of ceremonies then warned the young people present not to accept this doctor to be’s statement as the truth (Anon, 1915). Abdoelrachman as the commissioner of Poetri Mardika said that he firmly rejected the practice of polygamy, even though the Prophet Muhammad (in Islam) tolerated it. According to him, one woman is for one man and vice versa (Mardika, 4 April 1917). In addition, the organisation also advocated for health checks before marriage. At this meeting, Abdoelrachman also emphasised that a nation cannot progress in any way, unless men and women unite and fight for that progress. In order to realise this, men and women would play a role in education and training according to their respective parts. Poetri

Mardika formed a branch in Cirebon and immediately held a general meeting inviting all women. A preparatory committee consisting of 27 women and 4 men was formed (Mardika, 4 April 1917). The meeting will discuss the need for legal government action to regulate marriage and polygamy requirements. In addition to establishing a branch in Cirebon, Poetri Mardika provided education to women so that they could raise their status.

## **Conclusion**

Social stratification was the background to early marriage and the practice of polygamy during the colonial period. It can be seen from the explanation above, that customs and parents have an important role in marrying off girls, they feel that if their daughter has entered the age of 12 then immediately find a husband, regardless of whether the daughter likes the man or not. This kind of forced marriage led to the practice of polygamy because of women's powerlessness in the household, as the husband had full control. Based on data collected, in 1920 there were 7.011.357 cases of early marriage in Java, while outside Java there were 2.134.888. The practice of polygamy and early marriage places women in a marginalised position. Women were considered wives who served their husbands, and mothers who cared for their children. In addition, women were not allowed to appear in public and pursue modern education. Under such circumstances, the Poetri Mardika organisation tried to fight for women's movement by providing scholarships for education, expanding women's space by providing a forum for writing opinions, collaborating with other organisations, and providing reviews related to polygamy and early marriage in the Poetri Mardika newspaper. Based on the review of research findings, the Poetri Mardika organization is able to encourage the concept of modern feminism which is unique in changing roles, so it can be said based on the fact that it has an influence as a pioneer in escaping the polygamy system.

Based on previous research, many mentioned that learning history is considered boring and only memorizing. The material that is often taught is in the form of political and military studies, making students feel confined to that scope. In fact, many historical topics can be taught in the classroom despite the obstacles and surprises. The role of Poetri Mardika in reducing early marriage and polygamy during the colonial era can be presented in the classroom. Because this material is in line with Phase F history learning in class XI related to the National Movement Period. The national movement was not only radical, the struggle through the press and the association of women's organizations also contributed. Although this material is quite controversial, educators also have an obligation to present it in the realm of education so that women and men have a historical awareness regarding the negative impact of early marriage and polygamy. Future research can analyze the role of education, parents and the government in the practice of polygamy and early marriage, how parents force their daughters to get married immediately to be free from the burden of providing a living.

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