

Exploiting Indigenous Women: Unveiling the Dark Side of Belis and Pesta Culture in the East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia

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Abstract

Traditions, norms, and laws restricting and criminalizing bad behavior keep a vernacular community safe and organized. Customary laws do this in East Nusa Tenggara.

This study examines the socio-cultural aspects of customary law and the steps taken to protect indigenous women. East Nusa Tenggara had the third-highest human trafficking rate in 2017, behind West Java and Central Java. Many women have been trafficked. Indeed, human trafficking starts with the exploitation of indigenous women. Scholars say indigenous women in East Nusa Tenggara have inadequate legal protection, especially within the customary law. It is unclear if East Nusa Tenggara is trying as best as they should, to stop the exploitation of indigenous women.

This paper raises the question if it is right to say that the socio-cultural characteristics of the people living in East Nusa Tenggara are to be blamed for the failures of the preventative efforts? It examines this issue by utilizing a socio-legal approach and many social and legal theories, most notably customary law.

The paper uses socio-legal studies. In other words, it employs sociology, law and other social sciences to explore the dynamic relationships of the community. This involves social, cultural, and political aspects affecting the legal events. Socio-legal studies examine the society and its legal issues at a deeper level of analysis.

The study examines East Nusa Tenggara's socio-cultural and legal issues: the paternalistic and excessively traditional *pesta* as a source of poverty and *belis*. Human trafficking—including indigenous women—causes this poverty. It seems that the law No. 21 of 2007 of Indonesia which prohibits human trafficking, is insufficient to deal with the situation. Thus, it is argued that the draught law on the recognition and protection of indigenous peoples must pass soon. Based on this law, the provincial government of East Nusa Tenggara can then enact a regional regulation in order to recognize and protect the indigenous people.

Keywords: Traditional Law, Indigenous Women, Prevention of Trafficking of Indigenous Women.

Introduction

This paper was inspired by a study published in 2021 named "Ethnographic Approaches to the Trafficking of Indigenous Women in East Nusa Tenggara Province". The term "trafficking" of women, especially indigenous women, is the appropriate one to use in the findings of this study. Nevertheless, the statistics that record the trafficking of indigenous women are insufficient and unfounded due to the fact that the rules of paternalistic customary law do not allow it. Despite this, human trafficking remains a serious topic of discussion in the East Nusa Tenggara's mainstream media. Except for the Ngadhu-bhaga people in the Ngada Regency and the Belu indigenous people in the TTU Regency, the indigenous people of East Nusa Tenggara adhere to a patrilineal form of kinship system. This contrasts the indigenous people of East Nusa Tenggara, who follow an alternating form of kinship system.

Both of them employ patrimonial or paternalistic systems in customary conduct because males do not dominate. This is because men are more authoritative. In order to dispel the widespread misconception that 'belis' is a cover for human trafficking, exploiting victims has become widespread. Because of the potentially lethal nature of this misunderstanding, it is regarded as an affront to the customary law.

Indeed, human trafficking is a global problem. It is estimated that as many as 40.3 million people are trafficked annually into forced labour circumstances, usually referred to as modern slavery (Boyd et al., 2018). A variety of methods can be used to engage in the practice of trafficking of persons. For example, some individuals who are led to believe that they will be working as sales promotion girls in shops actually end up being employed in the nightclubs, or in prostitution houses where children are sexually exploited. They may be recruited overseas as migrant workers or domestic workers who are either legal or illegal.

People desire employment in other countries for a variety of reasons. Many migrant workers who wish to get experience in other countries follow their desire to go abroad in the hope that they will be able to earn a salary significantly higher than the money they would earn at home. Nevertheless, in the actual world, not everything is how one might anticipate them to be.

Six thousand six hundred fifty-one people were victims of human trafficking in Indonesia between 2005 and 2014, with 82% of those victims being women working as domestic or international workers and the remaining 18% being men working as ship crew (Putri et al., 2022). Human trafficking in East Nusa Tenggara Majority are people at least 15 years old and have emigrated to Malaysia, the Middle East, or Taiwan to find work. According to the Institute of Resource Governance and Social Change (IRGSC), during January and December of 2015, there were 941 individuals netted in 7 corporate and individual networks. During the year 2015, there were 1,667 female employees from East Nusa Tenggara, and in the following year, there were 726 female workers who exhibited signs of having been trafficked (Daniel et al., 2017). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that the number is far higher, specifically 8,876 persons between 2015 and 2017 (Utami, 2019).

The social reality of the exploitation of indigenous women have led to the conception of this research project. Between the years 2013 and 2017, there were a total of 50,000 unauthorized Indonesian employees working outside the country. From 2013 to 2019, the number of Indonesian East Nusa Tenggara workers who passed away was as follows: according to data from the BP3 Indonesian Labor Force: Kupang: in 2013, 31 people died; in 2014, 21 people died; in 2015, 28 people died; in 2016, 49 people died; in 2017, there were 62 people; in 2018, there were 105 people; and in 2019, there were also 105 people who passed away. Even as late as 2020, the total number of victims of human trafficking in East Nusa Tenggara who had passed away was 119. By the middle of the year 2021, 83 indigenous women from East Nusa Tenggara had fallen victim to various forms of sexual exploitation (Suwarno et al., 2018).

On the other hand, there is a suggestion that in 2017, there were 137 incidents, and out of that number, 62 illegal Indonesian labourers hailing from East Nusa Tenggara who were working in Malaysia were killed there. Only one of the 62 Indonesian workers who passed away had left the country officially, as stated by the BP3 Indonesian Workers. The remaining 61 workers had departed the country illegally. There were 62 persons, 41 of whom were male

and 21 of them female. Poverty, *pesta* (party) culture, and *belis* are the most pressing issues in East Nusa Tenggara. These three causes are responsible for the financial burden passed on to the children and grandkids to pay off. They must find work, which may include migrating, to satisfy their financial obligations. This makes them susceptible to the exploitation of labour, particularly the exploitation of women, notably indigenous women. This is because they are not provided with proper education and skills.

In this context, it is imperative that every effort be made to put an end to the heinous crime of the exploitation of women, including indigenous women. After West Java and Central Java, the region of East Nusa Tenggara has the third-highest standard of living across the Republic of Indonesia. Within the Eastern Indonesia region, the province of East Nusa Tenggara holds the number one spot (Bolla et al., 2021).

On January 17, 2017, a group of mothers fought for justice on behalf of their children who were employed in Malaysia by going to the office of the Governor of East Nusa Tenggara. While praying in front of the office of the Governor of East Nusa Tenggara, they brought wreaths of flowers, candles, and stones (black/headstones) containing the names of the victims of trafficking. The two ladies are Yuliana Selan, who is 42 years old, and Metu Salak Selan, who is 47 years old. They are battling for justice on behalf of their daughter, Yufrinda Selan, who is also named Yuliana Selan (19 years). The words "suicide" were inscribed on the front of the casket containing their child's body.

Job searchers utilize strategies to get people into debt as quickly as possible. Accumulation of debt leads to poverty, which increases the number of children not enrolled in schools, lowering competitiveness and making labour more affordable and susceptible to exploitation. Unfortunately, academic studies have not been carried out adequately; hence, this study was carried out to unearth information that can be used as the basis for additional research actions on attempts to prevent the exploitation of women in East Nusa Tenggara.

Indonesia is a country that participates actively in the trafficking of migrant workers, and it is responsible for a significant portion of the undocumented migrant workforce in the Southeast Asian region (Piper, 2004). There is also the possibility of human trafficking taking place in Indonesia, particularly among indigenous women. Since traditional rites, known as *belis*, are the means through which women are coerced into performing exploitative roles, this research focuses on the traditional women; *belis*.

With *belis*, a man might include his new bride in his circle of relatives to carry on his family's heritage. With the return of the *belis*, a woman is obliged to move in with her husband and integrate herself into his extended family. These indigenous women are then forced into labour by their husbands, who are dressed in camouflage. They intend to exploit them. Labour recruiters utilize *Belis* as a point of entry since they marry (entrap) local women to force them to abandon their families and adhere to their husbands' wishes to relocate. Similarly, women who are looking for work use *Belis* in order to sell themselves to the labour agents.

As was indicated, East Nusa Tenggara is rated third in Indonesia when it comes to the problem of women being trafficked, and as a result, the region has been given the designation of an emergency zone. In order to respond to this primary issue, this research asks the following questions:

1. Is it right to say that very few attempts are being made to prevent the exploitation of indigenous women in East Nusa Tenggara?
2. Is it accurate to say that the paternalistic cultural practices of the people who live in East Nusa Tenggara are to blame for the inadequacies of the preventative measures taken?

This study aims to investigate and evaluate the existing programs and activities being undertaken to end the exploitation of indigenous women in East Nusa Tenggara. It aims to establish the degree to which preventative measures are being put into action by looking at the various programs, policies, and interventions already in place. The primary objective of this research is to give an accurate appraisal of the amount of attention and resources allocated to tackling this issue.

The study aims to analyze the impact of paternalistic cultural practices in the context of the inadequate measures taken to avoid the exploitation of indigenous women. It also aims to understand how the socio-cultural dynamics and traditional practice standards in East Nusa Tenggara may interfere with the efficacy of the preventative efforts by examining these factors. Its objective is to offer insights into the potential influence of cultural factors on the successful implementation of preventative measures.

Literature Review

As a product of social construction, customary law reflects a particular society's norms, values, and customs. It consists of the customary rules and regulations that have evolved and are enforced by the mechanisms of the community. In many communities however, customary law is characterized by the subjugation of women, regarded as an inherent aspect of socio-cultural production.

Wall (2014) presents a theory of social construction that places power dynamics at the center of patriarchal cultures. According to this theory, manifestation of power in such cultures is the underlying cause of masculine power abuse against women. Women's subjugation is profoundly rooted in social structures, perpetuated by socialization processes, and reinforced by cultural norms and beliefs. Due to the unequal power structures in these communities, women are frequently marginalized, disadvantaged, and subject to various forms of discrimination and violence.

Despite the prevalence and gravity of this problem, there has been a dearth of extensive academic research attempting to explain the subjugation of women in patriarchal cultures. This topic has received insufficient scholarly attention, preventing a comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes and potential solutions. Therefore, efforts to combat and eliminate gender inequality have been hampered.

Farrell and Pfeffer (2014) propose a formalist viewpoint that complements Wall's theory to illuminate this complex phenomenon. They contend that crimes against women result from profoundly ingrained cultural norms and misunderstandings of the legal system. This viewpoint emphasizes the role of formal institutions, such as the police and the legal system, in perpetuating the exploitation of women.

Farrell and Pfeffer (2014) argue that the absence of a distinct conceptualization of women's exploitation within formal institutions undermines the efficacy of the legal frameworks in providing women with justice. As a result, perpetrators frequently encounter minimal repercussions for their actions, perpetuating the cycle of abuse and inequality. The absence of a comprehensive comprehension of women's exploitation within the legal systems impedes the development of effective measures and policies to address this problem.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the subjugation of women is not merely a cultural issue but also a systemic one. Beyond cultural boundaries, patriarchal structures and power imbalances persist within legal frameworks, shaping societal norms and attitudes. Consequently, confronting the subjugation of women necessitates a multifaceted strategy that addresses cultural and institutional obstacles.

The argument emphasized by Duger (2015) suggests that the legal notion's ineffectiveness contributes to the implementation and enforcement of laws. According to Duger (2015), preventing trafficking of women and children goes beyond simply upholding the law. It also involves addressing broader human rights issues and meeting their fundamental economic, social, and cultural needs.

Duger's perspective implies that tackling trafficking requires a comprehensive approach that considers the legal aspects and the underlying social, economic, and cultural

factors that contribute to its occurrence. Merely having laws in place may not be sufficient to combat trafficking effectively. It is crucial to investigate the root causes and understand the context in which trafficking takes place.

By emphasizing the fulfillment of fundamental needs, Duger (2015) suggests that addressing poverty, inequality, and lack of access to education, healthcare, and other social services is essential. These factors can make individuals, particularly women and children, more vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. Thus, efforts to prevent trafficking should involve addressing systemic issues and creating supportive environments that promote human rights and well-being.

Duger's (2015) argument highlights the interconnectedness between law enforcement, human rights and social justice. It suggests that a holistic and multi-dimensional approach is necessary to effectively combat trafficking and ensure the protection and well-being of those at risk. By addressing the root causes and meeting the fundamental needs of individuals, communities can work towards creating safer and more equitable environments for all.

Bromfield (2016) supports and has further developed this theory, which states that although law enforcement is vital, it must also pay attention to many areas of human rights. According to him, the framework of thinking about work by social workers and its consequences for advocacy and law enforcement activities are the root causes of sex and labour trafficking, which in turn affects the trafficking of women. An in-depth investigation into the practice of trafficking women and children is motivated by cultural concerns and fundamental human requirements in economics and society.

Hossain (2016) has expanded upon and has developed the idea that the protection of women should be carried out in a holistic manner incorporating both their social and economic elements. An in-depth investigation into the practice of trafficking women and children is motivated by cultural concerns and fundamental human requirements in the areas of economics and society. The socio-economic problem of low income and poverty is the source of pest. It is to save debts which have an impact on poverty, which in turn results in the exploitation of women. Thus, Pesta to save debts are the sources of low income and poverty.

The circumstances in East Nusa Tenggara are strikingly similar to those in Bangladesh, particularly regarding the issue of trafficking of women. Hossain (2016) found that the problem of women's trafficking is complex and multi-dimensional: social, cultural, economic, and political. However, this complexity does not portend well for effective law enforcement and the protection of human rights, particularly concerning the welfare of women and children.

The deplorable practice of trafficking women devalues the inherent human qualities present in every person, including their corporeal bodies and organs. Those who exploit the desperate circumstances of those pursuing employment opportunities to escape poverty are frequently motivated by greed and a lack of moral integrity, contributing to this heinous act's persistence. Individuals with limited education and skills are especially susceptible to exploitation and are easy prey for human traffickers. This vulnerability can also be observed in East Nusa Tenggara, outside the borders of Bangladesh.

While researching traditional land disputes, I stumbled across a study in East Nusa Tenggara that illuminated the region's dire situation. Suwarno et al. (2018) discloses that a portion of East Nusa Tenggara's customary land had been lost due to various factors, including accumulating debts, Pesta ceremonies, and the practice of belis. These factors contribute to the economic difficulties of the local populace and foster an environment conducive to exploitation and human trafficking.

The loss of customary land threatens the economic stability of East Nusa Tenggara's communities and increases the vulnerability of individuals, especially women, to human trafficking. Displaced from their ancestral lands, individuals are compelled to seek alternative means of subsistence, frequently with limited opportunities and resources. This precarious circumstance creates a fertile ground for unscrupulous individuals and criminal networks to exploit the vulnerable by luring them into human trafficking schemes with deceptive promises of employment, improved lives, or financial security.

Moreover, the loss of land substantially impacts the cultural and social fiber of these communities. As people are uprooted from their ancestral homes, traditional practices and customs, which have long provided a sense of identity and cohesion, become increasingly eroded. The disintegration of social structures and support networks exacerbates the difficulties faced by those at risk of trafficking, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and isolation.

To address the issue of human trafficking in East Nusa Tenggara, it is necessary to take a comprehensive approach that targets the underlying causes and offers holistic support to the affected communities. This includes addressing economic disparities, promoting education and skill development, strengthening law enforcement and judicial systems, and educating the public about the perils of human trafficking. To break the cycle of exploitation, it is essential to empower individuals, particularly women, and children, to defend themselves and make informed decisions.

In order to effectively combat trafficking in East Nusa Tenggara, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, local communities, and international partners must collaborate. By collaborating, it is possible to establish a safe environment that not only prevents human trafficking but also aids in the recovery and reintegration of survivors..

Research Methods

This research used socio-legal methods: ethnography to study law. It provides a broader view (Natalis et al., 2023). This method helped understand East Nusa Tenggara's social context and the dynamics of women's exploitation and violence.

Primary data was collected from the victims, primarily women, members of the East Nusa Tenggara Trafficking in Persons Prevention and Handling Task Force Team, and volunteers, including Catholic nuns in Maumere and Labuanbajo. Further, secondary and tertiary data were found online. The Police, the Attorney, and the Volunteer Office also provided secondary data. After editing, the data is qualitatively analyzed.

Findings and Discussion

According to the findings of this investigation, the term "trafficking in women" encompasses treating female victims as commodities for exploitation, including their labor, sexual exploitation, and organ trade. The phenomenon of trafficking women in East Nusa Tenggara is influenced by various underlying factors, primarily economic, societal, and cultural.

One significant factor contributing to the prevalence of human trafficking in the region is the socio-economic context characterized by low levels of education, limited skills, and economic vulnerabilities. These conditions create a fertile ground for exploitation, as individuals facing poverty and limited opportunities may be lured into trafficking schemes to improve their economic circumstances.

Moreover, societal and cultural factors play a role in perpetuating the practice of trafficking. Social norms, gender inequalities, and cultural attitudes marginalizing women contribute to their heightened vulnerability to exploitation. Discriminatory practices and limited access to education and economic opportunities for women further compound their susceptibility to trafficking.

Migration patterns also intersect with the challenges mentioned earlier, particularly in the presence of low levels of education and skills. When individuals migrate for better economic prospects, their lack of education and skills can make them more susceptible to exploitation by traffickers who prey on their vulnerabilities.

These research findings shed light on the complex web of factors contributing to human trafficking in East Nusa Tenggara. The inter-connectedness of economic, societal, and cultural aspects underscores the need for comprehensive interventions that address not only the immediate manifestations of trafficking but also the underlying conditions that perpetuate this crime.

Efforts to combat trafficking in women should focus on addressing the root causes by promoting access to quality education, skills development, and economic opportunities.

Furthermore, it is crucial to challenge societal norms and gender inequalities, promoting gender equality and empowering women to reduce their vulnerability to exploitation. Strengthening law enforcement, improving victim support mechanisms, and raising awareness within communities are critical steps in combating human trafficking and protecting the rights and dignity of women in East Nusa Tenggara.

Research findings indicate that East Nusa Tenggara's economic background and geographical factors significantly contribute to the problem of human trafficking in the region. The limited economic opportunities, mainly due to poor income from the mountainous terrain and limited rainfall, create a challenging environment for agricultural activities. Most agricultural land is characterized by dry land, moors, and forests, making it difficult to cultivate crops.

The steep terrain in the region also poses challenges in accessing water sources, further exacerbating the difficulties faced in agriculture. As a result, the agricultural sector relies heavily on the rainy season, which is often characterized by low rainfall. This dependence on weather conditions adds to the local population's vulnerability, particularly in terms of income generation and livelihood stability.

In such circumstances, some individuals may turn to alternative means of income, such as hunting, to sustain themselves and their families. However, hunting contributes to the destruction of forests, perpetuating a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break. The depletion of natural resources further diminishes economic opportunities and exacerbates the population's vulnerability.

The connection between economic factors, geographical challenges, and the problem of human trafficking becomes apparent in this context. The lack of viable economic options, coupled with the perpetuation of poverty, increases the susceptibility of individuals, particularly women, to exploitation and trafficking. Desperate for economic opportunities, they may prey on traffickers who promise better lives or employment prospects.

Addressing the economic root causes of human trafficking in East Nusa Tenggara is crucial to combatting the issue effectively. It requires comprehensive interventions to improve income-generating activities, promote sustainable agricultural practices, and explore alternative economic avenues compatible with the region's geographical constraints.

Efforts to diversify the local economy and create employment opportunities can contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and reducing individuals' vulnerability to trafficking. Additionally, initiatives focused on enhancing education and skills development can empower individuals and equip them with the necessary tools to secure better livelihoods.

Furthermore, it is vital to implement environmental conservation strategies that promote sustainable resource management. Protecting and restoring forests can preserve the natural ecosystem and provide opportunities for eco-tourism and other environmentally friendly economic activities.

Addressing the intertwined economic and geographical challenges makes it possible to create a more resilient and sustainable socio-economic environment in East Nusa Tenggara. This, in turn, can significantly reduce the prevalence of human trafficking by providing individuals with viable alternatives and breaking the cycle of poverty that contributes to their vulnerability.

The traditional meal is the second most important component after the economy. It is not against the law to throw traditional pesta. As civilised human beings, we are expected to do so. Nevertheless, we must do it with discretion and good pesta management. Self-esteem and social standing are inextricably linked to social gatherings like pesta. Because of these two factors, the cost of throwing pesta can quickly add up. A pesta is usually considered an obligation because of its effect on one's self-esteem and social prestige, which might result in indebtedness. The weight of debt can be handed down from generation to generation, making it difficult for families to make ends meet.

Szablewska and Kubacki (2018) suggest that the exploitation or trafficking of people including women is a crime against humanity in which not only labour and sex but also the organs of the human body are exploited. They suggest that there is a requirement for a united

view and concept, that law enforcement, particularly prevention, must be carried out collaboratively from various perspectives (Iwantri, 2020). In addition, they argue for including a curriculum on awareness and enlightenment in all types of education, including formal, informal, and non-formal settings. It is essential to deconstruct these three components by bringing about a shift in the mentality and the pattern of conduct of the people living in East Nusa Tenggara.

East Nusa Tenggara is implementing an all-encompassing strategy to combat human trafficking there. This strategy will initially involve dismantling the situation before moving on to rehabilitation. During the deconstruction phase, an initial assessment and analysis of the current socio-cultural elements that contribute to the susceptibility of women to trafficking in the region will take place. This will be done so that the project's next phase may be more effectively planned.

During the deconstruction phase, many parts of the sociocultural framework of the local area are dissected and analyzed in detail. This includes investigating the conventional gender roles, cultural norms, economic conditions, educational levels, and the community's general social fabric. By deconstructing and gaining knowledge of these fundamental variables, it will be possible to uncover the primary reasons and the systemic problems that contribute to the continued trafficking of women.

Following the completion of the phase devoted to deconstruction, the next step in the process is the construction of the new structure. During this stage, we will put a socio-cultural construction model in place to reconstruct and reshape the norms and structures of the existing society. The reconstruction step is based on the conviction that it is possible to create a safe environment that prohibits the trafficking of women if the socio-cultural landscape is addressed and transformed. This belief forms the basis of the step.

The socio-cultural building model incorporates several tactics and procedures to bring about long-lasting transformations. These may include educational programs that empower women and promote gender equality; awareness campaigns that challenge harmful cultural practices and beliefs; educational programs that empower women; economic initiatives that provide sustainable livelihood options; and the establishment of support networks and community resources for individuals who are at risk.

The reconstruction step tries to cultivate a community-wide dedication to the fight against trafficking by actively interacting with the community and involving numerous stakeholders. These stakeholders include local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community leaders, and individuals. It tries to reinvent social norms and values while advocating respect for human rights and equality between the sexes.

In the end, the deconstruction phase, followed by the reconstruction step, represents an all-encompassing and proactive strategy to address women trafficked in East Nusa Tenggara. By addressing the underlying socio-cultural causes and actively working towards their transformation, it will be possible to establish a safer and more inclusive atmosphere for women to be protected, empowered, and free from exploitation.

Weak Law Enforcement Against Exploitation of Indigenous Women

In East Nusa Tenggara, the variety of customs and traditions is so extensive that more than observation is required to comprehend the region's essence. This Indonesian province is distinguished by the coexistence of numerous communities, each adhering to its traditional legal system and indigenous customs. Within these communities are fourteen indigenous groups and numerous subgroups, with populations ranging from tens to hundreds of individuals. Each indigenous society in East Nusa Tenggara has its distinctive customs, just as each group is governed by its own set of customary laws and regulations. Frequently, the enforcement of these laws involves the imposition of sanctions or the implied threat of them. In the context of matrimony, this is particularly evident. The marriage law within these communities establishes certain guidelines for "belis," a term used by the Kerinci community of South Sumatra to describe the practice of being truthful.

The notion of "belis" revolves around honesty and openness within marriage. It entails the expectation that those involved in a marriage will be honest and forthright with one another, nurturing an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding. The customary law of the Kerinci community stresses the significance of upholding this practice, which promotes harmony and stability within the marriages.

The abundance of customs and traditions in East Nusa Tenggara is evidence of the region's cultural diversity and historical heritage. To truly appreciate the depth and complexity of East Nusa Tenggara's cultural tapestry, one must investigate these indigenous societies' complexities and customary laws. People of East Nusa Tenggara are famous for their beliefs because of their heights. 'Belis' is an institution of conventions, culture, and customary law rather than an economic institution. The term 'mahal' should not be used in this context, even though the goods used to provide 'belis' are economically valued objects. In addition to the word "expensive", there is another word that should not be used: "paying" (Laudasi et al., 2020). The term "belis" refers to a collection of material possessions that are "given over" to a female relative by a male relative of the potential husband or the potential wife. This is consistent with Wall's theory of social construction, which predicts such an outcome.

Duger, Bromfield, and Husein have shown that the issue of the exploitation of women is very complicated. These theories provide an explanation for why economic difficulties are the primary source of the problem of indigenous women being exploited for their labour. Several variables, including topography, geography, demography, and the social culture of the people of East Nusa Tenggara, characterised by a strong emphasis on social gatherings have contributed to the poor standard of living in this society. The upkeep of one's dignity and the accrual of debt both contribute to the high costs associated with the traditional festivals. They are forced to sell land in order to satisfy their financial obligations.

These items include ivory from elephants (Sikka and Maumere), horses (Ngadhu-bhaga and Ngada, Sumba, Manggarai, and Lio), and bokor (Alor and Pantar). Instead of the term "payment," it would be more suitable to use the term "delivery" (Jw. Seseherahan) in the setting that is being described. This term is extremely demeaning to the dignity of women since it is equivalent to the buying and selling of women. Payment is a concept that comes from the world of economics and commerce. However, it is also not incorrect if this term is found in East Nusa Tenggara. This is because the term "expensive" is found and used daily in East Nusa Tenggara; for example, dowry is expensive, belis is expensive, or pays for belis, pays dowry, regardless of whether or not the user is aware that the term has a pejorative connotation. Examples include: dowry is expensive, belis is expensive.

This study focused only on female participants, in particular indigenous female participants. It is very difficult to trace the exploitation of indigenous women in East Nusa Tenggara because their departure is not reported to the East Nusa Tenggara Task Force for the Prevention and Handling of Trafficking in Persons. This is one of the reasons why there is such a high rate of human trafficking in East Nusa Tenggara. Why is it the case? As the theory by Farrell and Pfeffer shows, the exploitation of indigenous women in East Nusa Tenggara is not only a matter of adat (social construction) but also a matter of weak law enforcement. This is shown by the fact that the exploitation of indigenous women in East Nusa Tenggara occurs.

In some of the investigated cases, it was discovered that these ladies had left their spouses to follow them. A method of recruitment in East Nusa Tenggara exploits the weaknesses of the local customary legal system. Her family believe that their daughter would be protected and cared for no matter where they went as long as she stayed by her husband's side.

This is related to Article 3 of the Human Rights Protocol of the United Nations. In that case, it states that human trafficking is any act of recruiting, transporting, transferring, receiving, selling, or purchasing human beings by force, fraud, deception, or other tactics to place victims in forced labour, practises resembling slavery or servitude. If this is related to Article 3 of the Human Rights Protocol of the United Nations, it states that human trafficking is any act of recruiting, transporting, transferring, or receiving (Arifin et al., 2021).

Many people have been unable to complete their education due to a lack of resources and the influence of traditional celebrations. As a result, they have been forced to look for career prospects in other nations, which has caused them to accumulate debt. These people are put in a difficult position because they want to preserve their dignity, sense of self-respect, and social status, which frequently makes them feel compelled to participate in costly traditional celebrations. They will even sell their ancestral estates or take out a second mortgage on them to finance these events, adding even more strain to their financial situation. Unfortunately, this already precarious situation is even worse when the mortgaged land cannot be redeemed or sold due to its bad state, which leads to a loss of work opportunities for many women. Consequently, people are forced to seek shelter in other countries since they cannot relax in their own homes without experiencing distress.

These conditions primarily contribute to the exodus of indigenous women from East Nusa Tenggara, who have left their homes searching for better opportunities elsewhere. Because they do not have access to higher education or skills training, these migrant women are at risk of being exploited, making them more likely to be subjected to various forms of violence and other sorts of mistreatment.

In addition, the lack of effective law enforcement in East Nusa Tenggara is a significant factor contributing to the ongoing issue of sexual assault and other forms of violence against indigenous women. This sad information was presented to Commission III of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia by the East Nusa Tenggara Trafficking Crime Unit. Incredibly, even though there have been instances of human trafficking and the exploitation of the labor of indigenous women, the perpetrators of such crimes frequently avoid arrest or receive low terms of up to seven years in prison, even after escaping authorities for extended periods. This is a shocking reality. According to Abbas (2018), detained people face a maximum sentence of seven years regardless of the offense. In addition, it has been discovered that seven distinct networks are engaged in this reprehensible trade; nonetheless, the government has not yet taken any effective legal action against them. Consequently, the people who live in East Nusa Tenggara are very eagerly awaiting the implementation of policies that are firm and efficient, which will be able to combat the crime of human trafficking in the region effectively (Daniel et al., 2017).

To address this problem, a multi-faceted approach is necessary. First and foremost, law enforcement agencies must prioritize efforts to apprehend and prosecute individuals involved in trafficking crimes, ensuring that they face significant penalties commensurate with the gravity of their offenses. Additionally, there should be increased coordination and cooperation between law enforcement agencies, government bodies, and civil society organizations to gather intelligence, investigate cases, and support victims.

Moreover, it is crucial to raise awareness among the local population about the rights and vulnerabilities of indigenous women, as well as the criminal nature and consequences of human trafficking. Education and outreach programs can play a pivotal role in empowering communities to recognize and report instances of trafficking and violence, enabling them to contribute to the fight against these crimes actively.

Ultimately, the government must prioritize strengthening law enforcement institutions, ensuring that they have the necessary resources, training, and capacity to effectively combat human trafficking and protect the rights of indigenous women. This includes providing specialized training for law enforcement personnel, establishing dedicated units to handle trafficking cases, and implementing measures to enhance coordination and cooperation among relevant stakeholders.

By addressing the issue of weak law enforcement and implementing comprehensive measures, East Nusa Tenggara can begin to tackle the problem of sexual assault and violence against indigenous women. Only through a concerted effort involving all levels of society can meaningful progress be made to end these vulnerable populations' exploitation and victimization.

It is crucial to approach the analysis of a region's mentality with caution, as it can be overly simplistic and potentially reinforce stereotypes. While it is true that the region of East

Nusa Tenggara faces challenges related to its topography and geography, such as arid conditions and limited resources, it would be unfair to attribute the exploitation of women solely to the mentality of the people.

The factors contributing to the exploitation of women in East Nusa Tenggara are multifaceted and interconnected. It is essential to consider the broader socio-economic context, including low levels of education, limited skills, and a lack of competitiveness. These demographic challenges can hinder the region's development and create vulnerabilities that can be exploited.

The complexity of economic, social, and cultural issues, as well as inadequate law enforcement and insufficient protection of human rights, further compound the challenges the people of East Nusa Tenggara face. Poverty, in particular, plays a significant role in exacerbating the exploitation of women. When individuals and communities are trapped in cycles of poverty, they become more susceptible to exploitation due to their limited options and desperation for economic opportunities.

However, it is crucial to recognize that the circumstances faced by the people of East Nusa Tenggara result from various systemic factors and historical contexts rather than reflecting their inherent creativity or innovation. Stereotyping the mentality of a region's population can oversimplify complex issues and fail to address the root causes of problems. To effectively address the exploitation of women in East Nusa Tenggara, comprehensive and targeted interventions are required. These interventions should include strategies to alleviate poverty, improve access to education and skills development, promote gender equality, strengthen law enforcement, and protect human rights. It is essential to empower individuals and communities to break free from cycles of poverty and vulnerability through initiatives that promote economic opportunities, social support systems, and education.

Furthermore, fostering an environment that encourages creativity and innovation can contribute to the region's overall development. This can be achieved by investing in infrastructure, technology, and educational resources and promoting entrepreneurship and local industries. Creating opportunities for diverse economic activities and encouraging the participation of marginalized groups, including women, can help address the underlying issues and empower communities to overcome their challenges.

It is crucial to approach analyzing a region's challenges with empathy and understanding, recognizing the interplay of various factors contributing to the issues. By addressing the structural and systemic barriers, promoting inclusive development, and upholding human rights, it is possible to create a more equitable and just society in East Nusa Tenggara, where the exploitation of women can be effectively prevented and combated.

Belis: Main Factors Exploitation of Indigenous Women

Although Belis is not the primary cause of the trafficking of women, it is one of the primary mechanisms by which women are exploited, and it is also the entry point for trafficking in humans. Aspects of cultural customs in East Nusa Tenggara include that a girl who wants to marry must have her future husband hand over several assets to the wife's relatives, referred to as belis in Kerinci, Lampung, or win in Maluku. This obligation is placed on the husband-to-be in East Nusa Tenggara. During the application process, the man's family, who would eventually marry the applicant, hands over the *betel nut* (proposal) as an introduction to the proposal. After the exchange of the betel nut, the potential husband is invited to the prospective bride's home in East Nusa Tenggara, where there are a number of traditional ladies from different parts of the province. The soon-to-be husband approaches the girl's (future in-law's) parents and asks for their blessing to accompany him on a shopping trip and to meet the potential wife's family. In order to justify temporarily removing the girl from the situation, several justifications are presented. Nevertheless, in some instances, the girl never returns home. Several years later, the parents are told their daughter had passed away while travelling in another country. The investigation into the deaths of Silvina Usboko, Metilia Usboko, Marselia Nenobota, and Amelinda Takentanu.

The circumstances surrounding Metilia's disappearance were shrouded in intrigue. She had expressed her desire to work alongside her cousin in Kupang, and one fateful day, a stranger claiming to be from Soe arrived at their doorstep. With enticing promises of a high-paying restaurant job in Malaysia, this man convinced Agustina to let Metilia venture abroad. As a token of his persuasive powers, he even handed over a significant sum of IDR 1.5 million in betel cash.

Despite the financial temptation, Agustina staunchly refused to let her young daughter embark on such a perilous journey. Metilia was still a child, after all. Nevertheless, driven by an insurmountable desire for independence, she pleaded with her mother to contact her cousin again. However, fate took an unexpected turn as Metilia vanished into thin air, leaving no trace of her whereabouts.

Weeks later, Metilia reached out to her older sibling, who was employed in Kalimantan. In a bewildering revelation, she informed her sibling that she had found herself in Jakarta, taking on her challenges and struggles. "I have to make my way, especially since I am not old enough to work," she confided.

What adds to the heart-wrenching ordeal is that Metilia never provided further updates about her circumstances or current location. Agustina, burdened by the weight of uncertainty, feels utterly helpless. She cannot approach the authorities for assistance without concrete evidence or knowledge of who took Metilia to Jakarta. The grief is amplified by the fact that Agustina's husband had passed away the year before, leaving her alone in her desperate search for answers.

Despite the overwhelming hardships, Agustina clings to a glimmer of hope. Through her tearful eyes, she speaks of her unwavering optimism that one day her beloved child will find her way back home. The longing for Metilia persists, even after all these years of separation. Agustina holds onto the belief that fate will eventually reunite them, bridging the chasm that has kept them apart for so long.

The negative effects of buying are significant, including the increase in spinsters, eloped couples, debts, and the facts that women are seen as a source of labour. There are several locations in East Nusa Tenggara where social ranking, also known as social class, is still considered (Rodliyah, 2019). The higher the social class, the higher the *belis* that will be requested, regardless of whether it is due to aristocratic descent or education. This is something that presents a great deal of cause for concern. If the amount of *belis* asked is extremely great, then men do not dare to marry the women they love, resulting in many elderly virgins or runaways. Due to the psychological impact of such an image, these women can no longer find solace in their homes, making them more vulnerable to being taken advantage of.

If these couples already love one another, but the male relatives cannot afford the high *belis*, an additional option is to elope or marry outside of the area; however, the girl and her husband will not dare to return to their village after their marriage. If they return to their hometown, they will be held accountable according to the local customs. Both "parrot sao" and "ancient parrot" are names for it that are used among the Ngadhu-bhaga community. Because this husband and wife do not appreciate the traditional house as a symbol of their mother's history, the phrase "beo sao" (which translates to "know the traditional house") is appropriate here. Because they do not respect the women's parents, this couple has old parrots, which is another way of saying, "know your in-laws" (Wati & Nong Hoban, 2021).

There is also a relative concern that their offspring will become extinct, and as a result, they are in desperate need of offspring from the woman (future daughters-in-law) to whom their sons will be married. The continuation of the position of women as the bearers of offspring is connected to the *Belis*. If the *belis* is given up, the woman, her sons and daughters, and the progeny of her sons and daughters (grandkids) become the heirs to the husband's relatives and the successors to the genealogy (the fathers of their children). Indigenous people who have a patrilineal family structure have this trait. Hence, relatives who are on the verge of extinction but still hold out hope for lineage and the possibility of preventing extinction will have their *belis* requests, regardless of what they are, attempted to be filed in several different ways (Soares et al., 2020).

There are a few instances in which people donate *belis* not just because they need offspring but also because they are frightened of being humiliated (to take care of *go waka* or defend dignity and self-esteem), which results in debts being incurred. In the village of Ngadhuhbaga, the land will be transferred to female relatives who do not already possess cattle or money in the form of *belis* if they request these resources. This type of terrain is referred to as *ngora tere bere*. Taking on debt is the activity that people try to avoid the most, but they nevertheless do it the most. If the land were transferred to the wife's relative, the male relative would have lost the land and, as a result, his primary source of income. If the relative has a daughter, the *belis* of the daughter in question will serve as the basis for the attempt to acquire land in its place (guarantee).

Thus, it has been argued that the most important aspect is not only economics but also the complexity of socio-economic life, which includes the human mindset. A mindset similar to that of a *pesta* is the maintenance of one's self-esteem independent of one's position or performance and the calibre of one's human resources (educated and skilled). As a result, the problem of mental revolution needs to be addressed as a primary prerequisite for the initiatives that are being taken to stop the exploitation of indigenous women in East Nusa Tenggara.

Farrell and Pfeffer (2014) show, as was mentioned earlier, that the exploitation of indigenous women in East Nusa Tenggara is not only a matter of *adat* (social construction) but also of weak law enforcement, particularly against migrant workers. This is especially true in the case of the exploitation of indigenous women in East Nusa Tenggara. It is possible to say that migrant workers are the primary reason that opens up prospects for the trafficking of humans, particularly employees who do not have formal documentation. According to government and non-government sources, the growing use of expensive biometric documents lead to an increase in the number of migrant workers who do not have proper documentation.

Consequently, work has begun to put into effect Law No. 21/2007 concerning the Elimination of the Crime of Trafficking People. One good example is the workshop that can be found in Makassar. Both the Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Justice (AIPJ) and the South Sulawesi Provincial Development Planning Agency worked together to organise this event.

The South Sulawesi regional government has issued a regional regulation on forming a task force to carry out early detection or prevention of human trafficking to combat the practice of trafficking in persons. This move was made to prevent human trafficking.

Despite the introduction of measures intended to prevent it, the practice of human trafficking is nevertheless widely practiced today. The challenge that law enforcement officials confront in retracing the steps of the entire process back to the beginning when they were first hiring people is one of the primary reasons why this problem persists. Because of the complex nature of labor transfers, it might be difficult to pinpoint the individuals directly responsible for the exportation of workers to other countries. This haziness surrounding the roots of labor trafficking is one factor that adds to the pervasiveness of the issue, which appears to be impossible to resolve.

New rules and regulations have been enacted due to efforts to prevent human trafficking. These laws and regulations are intended to safeguard potential victims, particularly Indonesian workers looking for jobs outside the country. However, these legal restrictions have not been able to provide sufficient protection for the public. The fact that people looking for work can connect directly with potential employers, skipping around the intermediary of the government, is the primary source of the problem. The burden of assisting Indonesian employees in finding employment outside of the country falls not only on the shoulders of the government but also on private placement service operators. This dual obligation has resulted in gaps in the system, which has allowed for the continuation of exploitative practices and trafficking.

The government in the past has created regulations to deal with this problem. It was specifically stated that it was prohibited for private persons or entities to engage directly with potential workers for deployment in the Instruction of the Ministry of Labour for the Central Office for Placement of Personnel No. 169/2-15-2, dated January 8, 1951. This instruction was given to the Central Office for Placement of Personnel. Those who violated this law could face

criminal prosecution and repercussions. Instead, those looking for work were required by the government to report to the Manpower Placement Office, and they were prohibited from communicating with other individuals or organizations. The purpose of this legislation was to ensure that potential employees were subjected to a comprehensive evaluation, during which it would be determined whether or not they were seeking employment voluntarily or whether or not they were being bullied, misled, or pressured into doing so by others. By doing background checks on potential employees, the goal was to reduce the number of opportunities for human trafficking, making it simpler to uphold the law.

Nevertheless, unfortunately, despite the laws and safeguards already in place, human trafficking is still going strong. When workers are dispatched to other countries, they encounter many difficulties, particularly female workers, who are confronted with many problems. It is common practice to use deception throughout the recruitment process, with weak individuals being lured in with false assurances of improved career prospects. Once they are in their new country, these employees frequently discover that they are forced to endure difficult conditions, such as being held in isolation in shelters and having their identities stolen. Tragically, some people pass away due to the hazardous conditions in which they are working. These incidents bring to light the horrifying scope of the problem and emphasize the pressing necessity of finding methods that are both efficient and successful in ending human trafficking.

In order to solve this ongoing problem, it is essential to strengthen the implementation and enforcement of the laws and regulations already in place. For law enforcement agencies to be able to track down and dismantle the networks responsible for human trafficking, they should be provided with proper training and resources. In addition, international collaboration and the exchange of information between governments can play an important part in the fight against the global aspect of this criminal activity. In order to support victims, increase awareness, and lobby for better anti-trafficking laws, collaboration with non-governmental organizations and civil society groups is also necessary.

In addition, it is of the utmost importance to address the underlying causes of human trafficking. Reducing poverty, education, and empowering disadvantaged people should be the primary focuses of our efforts. Individuals are less likely to fall for the false promises made by traffickers if there are more prospects for economic advancement, improved access to educational options, and strengthened social support networks. Providing all-encompassing victim support services, such as housing, legal aid, counseling, and rehabilitation, is necessary to ensure survivors' well-being and reintegration.

Conclusions and Recommendations

According to the findings of the investigation, the economic factor, and more especially poverty, is the critical factor that leads to the exploitation of indigenous women. Nevertheless, it admits that economic forces cannot adequately explain the problem by themselves. The economic component is just one of many other factors that provide support for and interact with it; as a result, it is a link in a convoluted chain of events.

In East Nusa Tenggara, one of the most important contributors to the problem of indigenous women's exploitation is the social construction of the problem, which originates in patriarchal norms. The patriarchal structure of the society ensures that women are treated unequally and contributes to the precarious situation in which they find themselves in. It is essential to acknowledge that tackling this problem necessitates adopting a holistic perspective beyond only economic factors.

In addition, the investigation emphasizes the impact of additional elements like the state of the economy and advances in information technology. Indigenous women in East Nusa Tenggara have benefited from the modernization of the outside world and technological improvements, which have opened up new opportunities and raised their expectations for the future. As a result, several women have left the island searching for employment elsewhere, motivated to achieve financial independence and stability.

In the light of these facts, a suggestion has been made to improve the legal protection afforded to indigenous women in the province of East Nusa Tenggara. To protect these women's

rights and ensure their well-being, consistent law enforcement and a focus on human rights are necessary. The goal is to offer a protective framework that tackles the societal, economic, and cultural obstacles indigenous women encounter. This will be accomplished by ensuring that legal procedures are in place and will be implemented.

In addition, the suggestion strongly emphasizes the importance of synergy between the many different parts and components of society. This includes working together amongst members of the general public, members of native communities, and religious institutions like churches. These various stakeholders can improve the amount and quality of accessible human resources and the empowerment of individuals by cooperating. This all-encompassing strategy acknowledges the significance of approaching the problem from various vantage points and encouraging collaboration among many parts of the community.

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