

Research Article

Java North Coast Women's Contribution to Economic and Religious Dynamics: It Is Time to Be A Public Knowledge

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Abstract.

Pekalongan was one of the centers of the northern coast of Java in the past. The study of the Pekalongan community mostly focused on batik production and religious (Islamic) life. This study aimed to complement previous studies on the northern region of Java, particularly Pekalongan, with a focus on raising the women's contribution to the economic dynamics of batik and religious communities so that those studies became public knowledge. Very few studies emphasized it, which is the novelty of this study. This study used relevant literature searches and was supported by an in-depth conceptualization analysis. The results of the study showed that the availability of specific data and information regarding women's contribution to economic and religious dynamics was still limited. However, it did not mean that there were no figures and women's contributions in the production of batik and in broadcasting their religion. The existence of women as batik makers and batik traders was a strong sign that women were present to contribute to the economy, even though men dominated batik entrepreneurs in Pekalongan. In the field of religion, women also became preachers, Islamic boarding school managers such as Syarifah (Habibah) or Nyai, female students, and so on. It is time for public knowledge about the dedication of women, such as Pekalongan women in batik and Islam, to become mainstream knowledge, as Vandana Shiva emphasized.

Keywords: women, Java north coast, contribution, Pekalongan, batik, religion

1. Introduction

Research on Java's north coast people, especially in the Pekalongan area, was more about batik production and religious issues. Previous studies that examined Pekalongan as a batik-producing community so that Pekalongan received the designation as a batik city were carried out by Hayati (1); Next was a study on the dynamics of batik patterns and the Pekalongan batik industry by Salma (2). Other studies that were still

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related to batik were the study by Widyasari about the acculturation of the Pekalongan people's culture which was reflected in their batik products (3); as well as a study of the language used by the batik community in Pekalongan by Mahmudah (4). Furthermore, Savirani (5) examined political economy relations in the dynamics of the batik industry in Pekalongan; and Rismawati (6) examined the study of legal culture on the religious capitalism in the Pekalongan batik community's life.

The study on Pekalongan focused on the Pekalongan community's religious life including the study of the theology of the Sufi community in Pekalongan by Maulana (7). Another study was conducted by Haryati regarding the social representation of the Pekalongan community from the perspective of Islam and local culture (8). Furthermore, a study from Susminingsih (9) examined local cultural and religious values growing in the working relationship of the Pekalongan batik community. No matter how many studies talk about batik and the religion of the Pekalongan people, an infrequent study is a study emphasizing the importance of Pekalongan women's contribution to economic dynamics and religion to be the mainstream of public knowledge. This is the novelty of the study that is emphasized in this paper.

Pekalongan is one of the areas in the culture of Central Java's north coast which is called Koentjaraningrat (10) on the west coast. The name Pekalongan was ever mentioned in the Chinese Sung Dynasty government as an area in Java producing a lot of rice or Poe-Chue-Lang. This word was the absorption of Pekalongan in the local community's dialect, as quoted from the book of the Pekalongan Culture Service (11). At that time, Chinese traders had already penetrated the Java north coast by traversing from one port to another, along the coast of Vietnam, the Gulf of Thailand, the Philippines, Tuban, Gresik, Jepara, Demak, and so on (12).

The west coastal cultural area mentioned by Koentjaraningrat included several regencies in Central Java Province, along Central Java's north coast from Batang Regency to Brebes Regency. Pekalongan became the center of the region because of its status as the residency capital in the past. Therefore, this study chose the Java north coast with the Pekalongan site. The determination of Pekalongan as the residency capital was carried out by the Dutch colonial government in 1934. At that time, Pekalongan was a residency with a vast administrative area, namely Pekalongan Regency and Pekalongan City; Tegal Regency and Tegal City; Brebes Regency; Pemalang Regency; and Batang Regency.

Pekalongan was once an important part of trade on the north coast of Java. Pekalongan has been a maritime trading center since the 15th century when Chinese traders began to enter along the northern coast of Java. Even the entry of Chinese traders into

the region was possibly longer, in the 6th century. In addition to being a trading center, the Java north coast became the first target when Islam began to enter. Vlekke's study (13) shows that since the 15th century, the areas of Cirebon, Demak, and Jepara, which are located along the north coast of central Java, have been ruled by Muslim rulers. It includes the areas of Tuban, Gresik, and Surabaya on the north coast of eastern Java. At that time many Muslim traders came from Gujarat.

Until now, a lot of information shows that the main structure of the Pekalongan people's life is the economic and religious dimensions. It is explained by the humanist Ibnu Novel and Ribut Ahmadi in Marwah et.al (14) and the book *Pekalongan Inspirasi Indonesia* (15). This is the main consideration of this paper to focus on these two aspects. Therefore, this study will focus on looking at women's contribution to the economic and religious spheres, although it may still be in the form of stories' fragments. It is very necessary to show fragments of women's stories in the dynamics of north coast society so that the narrative becomes the main public knowledge. This paper aims to explore it in a limitation.

The focus of the study on raising women's contribution is important considering that the same knowledge is still mainstream. Knowledge reduction which is considered to be inconsequential has marginalized women's abilities. Vandana Shiva (16) stated there is a need for knowledge based on women's ways of knowing or knowledge production methods based on the principle of femininity. Shiva is placing women as the main object of change, then at the center of the change process and the creation of knowledge. Therefore, Shiva's way of showing women's ways of knowing is important to adopt in seeing the women's contribution to the dynamics of society on the Java north coast.

2. Method

This article is a literature study, according to Bakker and Zubair (17). This research requires an in-depth investigation of the selected issues. This study focuses on the women's contribution to economic and religious dynamics in the Pekalongan people's life. Considerations for choosing Pekalongan as the main site on the north coast of Java is because Pekalongan had been the center of the area in the past. Information is collected from various sources, such as related research results, websites, documents, and so on. Then a dialogue is held with various relevant theoretical frameworks. Data processing begins with the data classification process and continues with the theoretical abstraction step from the information obtained. Many assumptions are used to explain phenomena and are explored to obtain findings. In this case, the theory as a

conceptualization framework helps to enrich the data meaning and information in the analysis carried out.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. A glimpse of Pekalongan women's faces in the dynamics of batik

The largest maritime kingdom in Java was the Majapahit Kingdom. They are known to have a powerful maritime fleet. In the coastal areas, the Majapahit trade was supported by the harbormaster. The harbormaster managed coastal trade strictly. In its development, the local coastal rulers did not provide positive support for the economic and political continuity of the Majapahit Kingdom. The presence of royal courtiers on the north coast was never wanted. This is still reflected in the modern life of Pekalongan society. As stated by a humanist, Ibnu Novel, the structure of the local community is mostly because of work relations, where the "traders or entrepreneurs" group is more respectable than the employees. The Pekalongan community typically is creative and independent with an extraordinary work ethic (14).

As a structure of entrepreneurs or traders community, batik is the main product with a lengthy history. The portrait and dynamics of Pekalongan batik are very complex to be fully presented in this paper. What is presented here is only a small part of the story of Pekalongan *batik* development. The history of batik in Pekalongan has started centuries ago, and until now Pekalongan is known as the world's batik city. From the book published by the Communication and Information Office of Pekalongan City (18), the history of Pekalongan batik has begun around the 14th century. At that time, people found the *gringsing* and *banji* motifs. As a coastal batik, Pekalongan batik has different motifs and colors from the Yogyakarta-Surakarta batik as the center of the Javanese palace. Like several other areas on Java island, the Pekalongan batik industry has mainly grown and developed rapidly since the end of the Diponegoro War (1825-1830) known as the Java war.

Until now, Pekalongan is known as an economic-driven city, a city whose origins and development are driven by the citizens' economic activities. Based on the study by Savirani (5), the structure of Pekalongan batik entrepreneurs consists of 95.1 percent of Javanese entrepreneurs, 0.9 percent of Arabs, 2.3 percent of Javanese Arabs, and 0.6 percent of Chinese. The number of batik entrepreneurs in Pekalongan who became Savirani's target was 349 companies. The actual number is much more. In the

Pekalongan City area alone, the number of batik creators (labor) reached 9,944 people spread over 632 business units. The data is from the Department of Industry and Trade of Pekalongan.

Pekalongan batik is generally called *batik pesisiran* (coastal batik), in addition to Cirebon, Tegal, Semarang, Juwana, Lasem, Sidoarjo batik. Pekalongan batik has various colors, influenced by local, Chinese, Gujarat, Indian, and European motifs influences. As a *batik pesisir*, Pekalongan batik has different batik motifs and colors from Yogyakarta-Surakarta batik as the center of the Javanese palace. Pekalongan batik reflects the influence of the various ethnic groups that exist in Pekalongan (2).

Javanese batik in Pekalongan is known as coastal batik, while Chinese batik is called *encim* batik, and European-influenced batik is dominated by floral motifs known as bouquet *batik*. The influence of Chinese batik was also possible when around the 18th century when the Dutch colonials had succeeded in interfering with the Mataram Kingdom. At that time, the Dutch leased Pekalongan to Chinese businessmen and even later served as Governor of *Pesisir Kilen*. Meanwhile, Widyasari's study (3) mentions the influence of Islam and India on Pekalongan batik which is indicated by batik motifs that have Islamic characteristics, namely geometry and calligraphy or Arabic writing. This influence appears in the *jlamprangan* batik motif which is considered to be Pekalongan's original batik.

Ethnic diversity has also influenced the dynamics of batik motifs in Pekalongan. The dynamics of Pekalongan batik tend to be influenced by the creation of new motifs that do not represent Pekalongan's character so the original Pekalongan batik character is nearing extinction. This is stated by Ribut Ahmadi in Marwah et.al (14). Currently, batik makers have created new motifs by modifying the classic motifs in the central palace, such as *kawung* or *parang*. In this case, Central Javanese batik motifs may be more salable in the market, so many batik entrepreneurs produce Javanese batik motifs instead of Pekalongan motifs.

The batik industry for the Pekalongan people has become a habitus because batik is the main product as the result of the internalization of social structure in the Pekalongan community. Habitus according to Bourdieu (19) is a lifestyle, values, dispositions, and expectations of certain social groups. Habitus in batik then underlies the formation of social networks or Bourdieu (19) calls it a social network between certain positions in the social order. That may be the meaning of batik for the Pekalongan people. Producing batik has become an internalized lifestyle in the life values of the Pekalongan people. Even according to cultural expert Ribut Ahmadi, in Marwah et.al (14), batik production is "natural" for the Pekalongan people.

Lucas' study (20) explains that Pekalongan as the residency capital has been known as a wealthy area for a long time because it produces batik. In this modern era, it is undeniable that the batik industry has become the breath of life for the Pekalongan people. In fact, according to batik entrepreneur Arif, if the economic chain of the batik industry were cut, the impact on the local economy would be extraordinary, something that cannot be imagined at all, as explained in Marwah et.al (14).

Pekalongan people are already very dependent on the batik sector as the main lifeblood. Some Pekalongan batik village areas include batik villages Peta, namely Sugih Waras, Sampangan, Kauman, Krapyak, and so on. Batik production has become a lifestyle that is internalized in the life values of the Pekalongan people. Bourdieu (19) calls it a social network between certain positions in the social order. From the production stage to selling batik, it has involved a lot of batik makers to batik traders. The social network then formed automatically following the production flow to selling batik.

In Pekalongan batik entrepreneurs are mostly men. They are businessmen who have big brands in the batik industry. In this case, many Chinese ethnic take positions in selling batik, while Arabs ethnic play a major role in selling batik materials, *mori* cloths, and batik medicines, and the batik makers are Javanese. Local entrepreneurs are of Javanese ethnicity and are predominantly men. In general, the big batik entrepreneurs are still held by men. This is reflected in the dominance of men entrepreneurs who are members of the successful *Koperasi Batik Kopin Jasa*. In the organization, there is not a single woman involved in the committee.

However, in terms of the skills of producing batik, it is mostly done by women. From the production flow to the sale of batik, women play the most important role. This is also confirmed by a cultural expert from the Culture Service of Pekalongan Regency, Ismu Syamsudin, in Marwah et.al (14). Many women in Pekalongan take on the role of workers as batik makers. The batik makers, on average, consist of women, especially for written batik. Meanwhile, the stamped batik is mostly done by men because it requires more energy and than patience like written batik. In the process of making batik cloth, almost all of it is done by women. The stages of making batik cloth done by men are the stages of drying, dissolving wax on the cloth, and coloring.

The study from Hayati (1) also confirms this disaggregation. Of the 96 batik industry players he collected, 26 of them were men and 70 were women. In this case, 10 of them are business owners (men) and 6 of them are women business owners. A total of 62 women are batik makers and tailors, while men are the perpetrators of *ngeloret*, *nyelerek*, *nyablon*, *ngecap*, and *japlak*. The existence of women as batik makers is

a strong sign that women are present to contribute to the economic field. It is even possible that women in Pekalongan are very dominant in the batik industry. Their existence and contribution are mostly related to their abilities to decorate or make batik motifs patiently.

Even so, women's contribution to batik production has not yet become the mainstream public knowledge in understanding Pekalongan batik. In this case, women are involved in producing and selling batik, which means they are involved as craftsmen and batik sellers. Many women in Pekalongan are batik workers, not only housewives. Women's choice to work is not a debatable matter in the household. This was confirmed by an expert from the Culture Service of Pekalongan Regency, Ismu Syamsudin.

The existence of women as batik craftsmen is a strong sign that women are present to contribute to the economic field. It is even possible that women in Pekalongan are actually very dominant in the batik industry. Their existence and contribution are mostly related to their abilities to decorate or make batik motifs patiently. It should be like referring to Shiva's thought (16), it is important and necessary to state knowledge based on women's ways of, namely women as a source of knowledge creation.

3.2. A Glimpse Portrait of Pekalongan Women in Religious Dynamics

In general, the Pekalongan people are known to have a strong religious system. Vlekke's study (13) shows that since the 15th century, the areas of Cirebon, Demak, and Jepara, which are located along the Central Java north coast, have been ruled by Muslim rulers. It includes the areas of Tuban, Gresik, and Surabaya on the East Java north coast. At that time, many Muslim traders came from Gujarat.

Ricklefs (21) stated that about the spread of Islam in Java, it is hard to know when, why, and how the Indonesian people began to embrace Islam. The dynamics of Islam in Java are best known through oral traditions and chronicles. All chronicles place the conversion of the first saints (*Walisanga*), around the beginning of the 16th century. Lombards said they were pious figures who went to coastal ports to enter the hinterland to convert people's faith to Islam(22). Since then, the people of Java's coastal areas have experienced Islamization directly by the saints. Unfortunately, there are no studies that show the pious women who made an important contribution at that time. However, it does not mean that women are not present and do not contribute to the spread of the religion.

After the fall of the Majapahit Kingdom, Islamic power began to grow and develop. The largest Islamic kingdom in Java is Mataram Kingdom which has ruled Java since 1587 AD. Mataram kingdom was also known as Islamic Mataram. During the heyday of Mataram, the main traders from Mataram also had great influence not only on the coast but also in the hinterland. In the capital city of Mataram Kingdom, there is a very active and dynamic trading elite. They mainly do business in the field of silver and gemstones and diamonds originating from Kalimantan. The business partners come from coastal area traders, including traders from coastal cities such as Pekalongan and Kudus. They are a lot of groups in the *Kauman* area, precisely around the Great Mosque. *Kaum* people are defined as people who belong to the chosen group.

When the movement to spread Islam in Java started from the coast to the hinterland, it is not surprising that until now, Kyai and Habib groups have gained respectable positions in the coastal areas, especially in Pekalongan. Kyai has a central position because they are always asked for consideration in many things. There is even an assumption that “people are not considered rich if they cannot provide facilities to a Kyai”, in Marwah et.al (14). There is a kind of symbiotic relationship because the children of entrepreneurs who facilitate Kyai will be Kyai’s students.

Unfortunately, when discussing the dynamics of Islam in coastal areas, there is little information about women. Studies of women in Islamic studies are very rare, for example, the studies that discuss the role of Nyai. Discussions on Islamic figures, who are generally called Nyai, are still rare amid the dominance of Kyai (male clerics) who develop religious life. Muslim women are more active in the domestic space. In fact, according to Burhanuddin (23), Nyai has a very large and strategic religious role. Another expert, Khadafi (24) also emphasized the importance of discussing the role of Islamic women leaders, to show the existence of female clerics, which scientists have rarely paid attention to so far. Khadafi notes, for example, the important role of Nyai Hasyim Asyari and Nyai Wahid Hasyim as strong women, playing a role in the family as well as managing the Islamic boarding school.

Unfortunately, this study also has not found the main Nyai figures in Pekalongan. The existence of dominant figures is still on man religious figures, especially the figures of the Habibs. The past figure found with the title of Nyai is Nyai Singabarong and she is a trader (entrepreneur). YB Mangunwijaya (25) said, Nyai Singabarong is a big and wealthy trader, who has trade relations with Malacca businessmen. As mentioned in the story of Rara Mendut and Pranacitra, Nyai Singabarong is Pranacitra’s mother. The story of Nyai Singabarong’s success is in line with the statement by Lombards (22) that women had an important role in the markets in the archipelago at that time, as well

as in managing money exchange kiosks. In his book, Lombards (22) also mentions the existence of Nyai Singabarong by revealing her important role. It is also possible that she is a Syarifah (Habibah) because Pranacitra has an Arabic name.

The ethnic diversity in Pekalongan people's life makes the focus of women's discussion in the religious dimension in contact with cross-cultural interactions between Javanese, Arab, and Chinese ethnicities. In this case, the Arabs in Pekalongan consist of 2 groups of descendants, namely Habib and Syarifah (Habibah) and non-Habib Arab descendants and Syarifah (Habibah). According to a Syarifah explanation in Marwah et.al (26), women of Arab descent have recitation groups. Arab women are also involved as well as preachers, not just the Habibs. They have recitation congregations groups who regularly hold recitations.

Indeed, in people's lives, there are still many traditions that separate Javanese, Arab and Chinese ethnicities, but these differences do not cause a fragmented community. They live with their respective cultures and traditions, living side by side with mutual respect. Traditions that are still alive for Arab descent include dances, regulating the presence of men and women in celebrations, and so on. Arab descent women also must marry those of Arab descent. As if it is forbidden for an Arab woman to marry a non-Arab. For the celebration tradition, Arab descent women generally celebrate the event with the Zafin dance, but they are grouped separately for women only.

In terms of contact with various ethnicities, according to Syarifah's explanation, they are a group of Arab descendants whose direct line of the Prophet (Habib-Habibah) has a more receptive point of view to local culture and traditions. Until now, in the Pekalongan region, Javanese culture and traditions are still alive, such as the *sintren* dance, nyadran or sea alms, the tradition of counting good days for sailing or making ships, and so on. Likewise, the Chinese ethnic community also has local traditions that are still alive today, such as the lion dance or *duk duk jeng, pohtehi*, and so on (15).

As a coastal area supported by a strong Islamic religious cohesion, Pekalongan has many Islamic boarding schools. According to the Central Java BPS record (27), the number of pesantren in Pekalongan Regency is 85, with 85 Kyai and 9034 students. As for the Pekalongan City area, the number of Islamic boarding schools is 33, 39 Kyai, and 4187 students. Furthermore, data from Laduni NU (28) shows that each of these Islamic boarding schools also has female students. The existence of Islamic boarding schools managed by Kyai should also involve Nyai, especially if they have female students. Unfortunately, the existence of Nyai as a female leader in the Islamic boarding school is not recorded or mentioned. Studies conducted by Bianca Smith (29) show that Nyai is an active agent in the constitution of Islamic boarding schools and the wider community.

There is a contestation around the leadership and authority of women in the Islamic boarding school area, not just the image of Nyai, the wife or daughter of the Kyai who is subordinated or isolated in the household. Perhaps a similar study conducted by Smith is still very rare, especially in the context of the Pekalongan community. For this reason, it is time for Nyai role in dedicating her life to educating students, developing Islamic boarding schools, serving her family, religion, and country, to fill the mainstream of public knowledge widely in the community.

4. Conclusion

A search of coastal women in the Pekalongan region in the dynamics of economic and religious life has shown that women have an important role and contribution. It must be admitted that there are very few data and sources of information regarding female figures. However, this does not mean that women's contributions do not exist. In the economic field, women may be the main pillars of the batik industry and trade. Even their involvement in the batik industry and trade, was very possible from the beginning when the Java northern coastal areas began to be visited by traders and later by religious broadcasters. The existence of women as batik makers is a strong sign that women are present to contribute to the economic field.

Even in the religious field, when religious symbols are the main thing for the believers, women are present there too. They are part of female preachers, Muslimah batik entrepreneurs, Nyai, female students, and so on. It's just that the portrait of the dynamics of society does not provide much information on this matter. In science, the study of the position of women in the economic and socio-cultural fields needs to be encouraged to place women's positions as holders of roles that are equally important to men. This study of Pekalongan women's contribution to the dynamics of economic and religious life is expected to show that many women in the dynamics of society can take on an important role.

Conflict of Interest

The team of authors hereby declares that the team does not have any conflict of interest with any party regarding the articles compiled.

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