

Salasika

**INDONESIAN JOURNAL OF GENDER, WOMEN,
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Production Modes and Roles of Home-workers in Batik Industry in Central Java**
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through Girls in Tech Indonesia: A Case Study**
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Women and Batik Conservation on Muria Slopes: A Study of Female Batik Crafters in Kudus

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ABSTRACT

The worsening condition of nature calls the critical attention of human beings to look for primary keys to deal with. Struggling with the same issue, the local government of Kudus promotes community-based development programs that concern with introducing environmental conservation and education, besides cultural understanding programs, which emphasizes local community awareness in environmentally friendly tourism hosting and management. The youth community is invited to join workshops and training to enrich the skills in some handy craft production, networking and society management, particularly related to batik. "Komunitas Batik Manjing Werni" (KBMW) is one of the community-based development centers that concerns in promoting a unique batik motif. This article aims to describe the role of female crafters of natural motif batik in batik conservation on Muria slope. The main objective is to identify how these female crafters in KBMW contribute to build public awareness around Muria slope conservation through religious teachings and education. The data in this descriptive-qualitative research were obtained through observation, documentation and interviews with key persons in KBMW, people living around KBMW and Kudus regency tourism office.

KEYWORDS: *batik, conservation, women*

BACKGROUND

The worsening condition of nature calls the critical attention of human beings to look for primary keys to deal with. The underlying problems of environmental issues are the decline of water resources, floral extinction and growing numbers of endangered animals that contribute to climate change and recurring disasters. Indonesia, as an island country, is rich with its natural resources and is well known as a

home of thousands of animals and varieties of plants. Unfortunately, the recent data shows that some kinds of protected animals are dying due to the sporadic human invasion and continuing deforestation that inflict their habitat. In addition, some local plants are vulnerable and in danger of extinction.

Kudus, one of the famous cities in Central Java, is also suffering from environmental damages that result in natural disasters such as floods and

landslides in its northern part highlands, Mount Muria. Throughout the history, Muria is well known as an ideal region for plantation where Wilhelmina, the previous queen of The Netherland, through VOC, established coffee plantations in the sixteenth century (Nugroho, 2014, p. 22). This choice was undoubtedly based on water availability, soil fertility and crisp air. Nevertheless, the growing population leads to unstoppable natural exploitations and new fields of livestock agriculture development that end up with serious water, soil and air pollution. Furthermore, as a common phenomenon, human abuse of natural resources is getting worse due to people's ignorance of a balanced agricultural system (GFM, 1995, p. 4). The latest natural disaster was a landslide that occurred in three regions around Muria slope, namely Rahtawu, Menawan and Kedungsari. The heavy rain during the rainy season deteriorates the natural condition in these three regions.

Should people think about Muria, they will deliberately link this mountainous area with Raden Oemar Said or Sunan Muria (one of The Nine Saints who were well-known for spreading Islam at Java Island). The tomb of Sunan Muria is located at the top of Mount Muria. His great efforts in spreading Islam attract many people, both Muslim and non-Muslim, to visit his tomb. Around one thousand visitors come to this mountainous area each day. This apparently opens wider chances for local people to rise their financial level by providing goods and services. However, this religious tourism is a kind of double-edged sword with its benefits and drawbacks. The financial benefits the

local people gain cannot outweigh the adverse effect such as the growing number of wastes, erosion, and overuse of water supply.

To deal with the declining natural condition, the local government of Kudus promotes community-based development programs that concern with introducing environmental conservation and education, besides cultural understanding programs, which emphasizes local community awareness in environmentally friendly tourism hosting and management. In this program, the local government prefers to invite the youth community since data indicate that the older members of society have already had well-established activities. The government invites them to join workshops and training to enrich their skills in some handy craft production, networking and society management. Since Kudus is well known for its embroidery production house rather than batik, one of the unique classes is batik class. After joining this class, the government supports the participants to promote their products through local exhibitions and national events.

"Komunitas Batik Manjing Werni" (KBMW) is one of the community-based development centers that concerns in promoting a unique batik motif. The existence of this community cannot be separated from the training provided by the local government several years ago. Three key persons in this community joined batik classes together and tried to apply their new skills in commercial and educational ways. From 2013, they have raised funds from their own pockets to build their batik workshop. The well-known batik motifs in Kudus are Gebyok

Kudus (traditional house), tobacco leaves, Menara Kudus (Iconic building in Kudus located near Sunan Kudus' tomb), Lentog Tanjung (local food) and kapal kandas (the stranded ship). KBMW tried to promote new motifs based on natural resources such as Parijoto, a plant with mystical believes that refers to Sunan Muria (Raden Umar Said, one of The Nine Saints who were well-known as the main persons in spreading Islam around Java Island). It is believed that pregnant women will deliver a good-looking baby if they consume Parijoto during their pregnancy. Other local plants like Cycadaceae (*Pakis Haji*), commonly used as a pest repellent, and Pisang Byar (a local species of banana) are also promoted in batik crafting.

Many argue that education may have a big impact on reducing the detrimental effect of environmental damage. However, education is not merely transferring knowledge from teachers to students. It is more than character building, which, of course, takes a long time and involves all stakeholders including surrounding environments and policy. Before being involved with batik, one of the key persons of KBMW was a teacher in Raden Oemar Senior High School located near the workshop area. She dedicated her life to education for the sake of her society. When she joined the batik classes facilitated by the government, she realized that batik might become an effective medium in spreading educational values, especially in developing social awareness of local biodiversity, which seems to be endangered. The educational values she promotes are merely based on religious thought and local wisdom. When she campaigns against littering, for

instance, she does not only explain the adverse effect of littering for the environment but also link it with religious belief. Furthermore, she uses batik as her medium to explain more about this matter. This kind of effort is actually more effective than a formal explanation in classes.

With the government's support, this community starts to settle and prove its existence. For now, there are five active batik crafters in this community (all of them are female) besides several students who join weekly batik classes as their extra-curricular activity. Even though it is not a kind of direct conservation, the effort to revive local biodiversity in the model of batik motif has a great impact on the local community's paradigm of their environment. In addition, their activities also level up their incomes and help the local community to be more independent.

Based on the previous description, this article aims to describe the role of female crafters of natural motif batik in batik conservation on Muria slope. The main objective is to identify how these female crafters in KBMW contribute to build public awareness around Muria slope conservation through religious teachings and education. The data in this descriptive-qualitative research were obtained through observation, documentation and interviews with key persons in KBMW, people living around KBMW and Kudus regency tourism office from May to July 2017.

WOMEN AND CONSERVATION

Environmental issues merely relate to women. The discussions on and criticism of the relationship

(both the one that is socially constructed and naturally reflects the essential similarity) between women and the environment exist up to these modern eras¹. The data show that women are the most affected parties in many cases of environmental damage; this is because the victims of any disaster are those who live under the poverty line. Surprisingly, 70% of impoverished people are women. The more indigent they are, the more serious their burdens are (RECOFTC, 2014; Eaton and Lois, 2003, p. 2). Moreover, women's low level of education positioned them in two-third of the world's 876 illiterate people (Ruether, 2003, p. viii). However, the burdens women face result from both environmental degradation and social design, which position them as the primary caregivers of the whole family member who are responsible for their food, water and well-being. What worse is that access to economic resources such as proprietorship of land or commercial business remains limited (Eaton and Lois, 2003, p. 2; Kelly, 1997: 113). Since the close relationship between women and nature is inevitable, women may have greater expertise and knowledge to find the appropriate solution to minimize environmental problems (Eaton and Lois, 2003, p. 2).

Human domination and exploitation over nature present in the forms of abuses, immoral and unethical deeds. Religious teachings about respecting nature and conservation do not necessarily reduce environmental abuses. Yet,

religion is still supposed to be tricks of the trade to solve environmental degradation. Indeed, all religions' concern in the cosmos and its significance to human life are manifested in their teachings and practices. Each religion has its religious ethics of nature and its functions to guarantee human safety (Nasr, 1996, p. 21; Dwivedi, 1990, p. 201; Tucker and John Grim, 2003, p. xxvi).

Furthermore, religions may evoke people's consciousness of their limited control over both human natures and nonhuman natures, and that overexploitation can backfire. According to Dwivedi, religions provide three pivotal mainstays to help people adapt to the recent technological society, which destroys nature. First, they protect the individual against the depersonalization of technology. Second, they concede individual mistakes and combine realism with idealism. Third, in contradiction to technology, which allows people to destroy the world, religions provide the moral strength to live in virtue through the liberation of self-centeredness (Dwivedi, 1990, p. 201).

The role of religions to respond to the environmental crisis is challenged. There are countless appeals from environmental groups, parliaments and scientists to engage the world's religions to provide solutions to a more sustainable and better future. In response to these growing calls, many conferences, dialogues and alliances all over the world are established to investigate the potential contribution of each

¹ Some eco-feminists posit that the relationship between women and environment is merely social construction, while others see that women are closer to nature than men and possess the innate attribute to care and serve the earth (Eaton and Lois, 2003, p. 2; Mellor, 2003, p. 17)

religion to mitigate the environmental crisis (Tucker and John Grim, 2003, p. xxviii). It is important to include environmental awareness issues in religious teachings, both in the formal and non-formal educational system. KBMW as one of the community-based development centers plays a significant role in promoting community awareness of nature, especially Muria's local biodiversity.

BATIK AND WOMEN

It is not easy to track the origin of batik. Many argue that batik was from India and was later brought to Egypt. However, the tradition of batik was found in China, Japan, Thailand, East Turkestan, Europe and Africa hundreds of years ago. This means that batik is not new in the history of human civilization (Elliot, 2013, p. 22). Since the United Nations recognized batik as Indonesian Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009, the world has suggested that Indonesia is home for this traditional craft. To celebrate this recognition, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has asked all Indonesians to wear batik on October 2. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was the leading witness to the development of batik when he was the lieutenant governor of the island at the beginning of the eighteenth century. His masterpiece book entitled *History of Java* described how batik was made and how Javanese people wore batik in various ways besides many different patterns or motifs of batik (Elliot, 2013, p. 38)

The motif of batik in the classic period (ninth century) seemed to be influenced by religious belief. Lereng motif, for instance, describes the

cloth of God Shiva depicted near Dieng temple (Kusrianto, 2013, p. 3) The motif of batik may vary from one city to another. There are thousands of batik patterns with typical colors and motifs that reflect the philosophy or even certain beliefs of each community. Javanese batik, for instance, different from Balinese or Sundanese batik. Moreover, various batik patterns can be found in Java since every city has its characteristics of batik. Batik in Kudus is recognized as something new compared to batik in coastal areas along the northern part of Javanese islands such as Pekalongan, Tegal, Semarang, Pati, Lasem or Tuban. However, it is hard to decide the precise era of batik in Kudus as none can find any evidence indicating the initial existence of batik in this city. According to Djoemena, Arabic calligraphy batik found in Cirebon, Jambi and Bengkulu was originally from Demak and Kudus. It was dated back when some prosperous Chinese people in Demak and Kudus invited batik crafters from Pekalongan to make batik based on the motifs they proposed at the beginning of the twentieth century. Maybe, this is the beginning of batik tradition among Kudus community. At that time, the famous motifs of batik were flowers, birds and butterflies. However, as batik is not a common tradition among Kudus community, the workshops built by those Chinese people were on the road to abundance (Ishwara, 2011, p. 163)

There is no doubt that the heyday of batik in Indonesia cannot be separated from the royals of Surakarta. Among the royals, royal batik is known as keraton batik (the word keraton refers to Surakarta and

Jogjakarta, the two Javanese royals). Keraton batik maintains the meaningful symbol and color blends of batik. Data shows that the use of batik in the Javanese tradition is full of meanings, philosophy or even myth. Moreover, batik used to be special and worn by the royal family and the respected people of that period. For Javanese people, batik is an expression of belief in the relationship between microcosms (human beings), macrocosms (nature) and metacosmos (God). Batik, therefore, is a symbol of their belief and faith. As they were not accustomed to thinking abstractly, they used the symbolic way of thinking through batik. In addition, the choice and blend of colors should express the beauty and harmony of those three main pillars of the cosmos.

In keraton batik, there are four main dominant colors: brown, blue, white and black. The brown color depicts the fertile soil, which is believed to transfer the positive energy of soil, such as humility, modesty and simplicity. The blue color represents the serenity, confidence and loyalty, while the color of white reflects the eastern direction, which creates an impression of purity, bravery and forgiveness of whoever wears it. The other common color in keraton batik is black. Many recognize black as a symbol of death and negativity; however, according to Javanese people, this color reflects strength, luxury, sensuality, mystery and gracefulness (Kusrianto, 2013, p. 3-36; Elliot, 2013, p. 66)

Besides the color's reflection that is firmly identical to keraton batik, the motif of keraton batik also reflects the social status of the people

who wear it. Moreover, every motif brought mystery and meaning to the forms and uses of batik. The Sultan of Surakarta and Jogjakarta have their sacred pattern that no one can copy and wear. There are eight forbidden patterns or motif of keraton batik: *kawung*, *parang*, *parang rusak*, *cemukiran*, *udan liris*, *sawat*, *semen* and *alas-alasan* (Elliot, 2013, p. 68). However, when the industrialization flourished, those mystical meanings and restrictions of batik faded. Batik then becomes a commodity people all over the world may wear daily.

Another specific batik is Vorstenlanden (coastal batik) that refers to the coastal areas along the north part of Java, from Banten in West Java to Banyuwangi in the eastern part of East Java. Compared to the southern parts of Java, the coastal areas of Java were quite dynamic since they were located at the gate of Java where many traders came and go. This condition also influenced the characteristics of pattern and color picking of batik developed in these areas. Chinese and European influence is strongly visible in coastal batik; moreover, the bright colors used in batik also reflect the character of a coastal community such as bright red, green, yellow and purple, which are not found in keraton batik (Elliot, 2013, p. 100-120)

Batik in Kudus is actually part of Pekalongan batik, which is rich in colors and motifs. The production of batik in Demak and Kudus started when some wealthy Chinese family proposed a specific pattern of batik to batik crafters of Pekalongan. Those crafters were invited to Demak and Kudus to finish their work. Nevertheless, after a long time of absence, the tradition of batik in Kudus begins to bloom along with the

support of the local government to level up community income and maintain batik as a national heritage of Indonesia. There are more than ten batik workshops in Kudus with special patterns and motifs.

The history indicated the involvement of women in batik tradition since the majority of batik crafters were female. Researches are convinced that the majority of batik crafters are female, except a few workshops where men have a dominant role, such as batik's workshop in Cirebon. Since men had more opportunities to join batik workshops, the motif of batik in Cirebon had masculine characteristics. When the industrialization of batik flourished all over the country and the use of cap was widely accepted, men became more involved in batik production as they were stronger than women in carrying heavy blocks used in cap; however, women were still needed to produce handwriting batik (*tulis*). When the Dutch imposed expensive tax regulation, men had limited opportunities to be involved in batik activities; thus, women replaced them. From that period onwards, batik production seemed to be a female area. Moreover, some production houses of batik allowed crafters to bring their works home, and women can finish their work while doing household duties (Elliot, 2013, p. 54-90)

BATIK MANJING WERNI: CONSERVATION AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

As mentioned above, KBMW is a batik workshop in Kudus that considers local biodiversity as its main motif or pattern of batik. One

of the main popular patterns is Parijoto. Recent researches point out the level of antioxidants in Parijoto as well as its function as chemoprevention in breast cancer (Tusanti, Johan and Kisdjamiatun, 2014). However, for generations, people in Kudus and its surrounding communities believe that Parijoto can increase fertility hormone in women playing a role in maintaining the condition of babies in wombs; thus, babies will have handsome or beautiful faces. This belief refers to the history of Sunan Muria, who planted Parijoto in Muria slopes after *Dampo* Awang ship was stranded and damaged. It is believed that the wife of Sunan Muria craved for Parijoto during her pregnancy. She consumed it, and the baby was delivered in clean skin and healthy condition (Widjanarko, 2008). As one of the endemic plants in Muria, it is easy to find Parijoto around Muria slopes. The local roadside sellers will offer Parijoto to the visitors who pass by their stalls. The name, Parijoto, is derived from a popular Javanese song, *Sinom Parijoto*, used by both Sunan Muria and Sunan Kalijaga to spread Islam in Java (Hanum, Prihastanti and Jumari, 2017).





Image of Parijoto

Another pattern is *Pisang byar*, a local species of banana. The communities around Muria usually cook this kind of local banana in sweet coconut milk during the "baby shower", a banquet held in the seventh month of the pregnancy. During this feast, the family of pregnant women invites relatives and the surrounding community to pray together for the health of those pregnant women and their babies (Sa'adah, 2015). This banana also becomes a commodity for the local community due to the increasing number of people who visit Muria, especially during Maulid, the third month of the Islamic calendar, the birth of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The other motifs are Muria coffee bean, *Siyem* (a kind of vegetable), *Plontang birds* (one of the local birds found in Muria), and *Pakis Haji* (Cycadaceae). *Pakis Haji* is hereditary used as a rat repellent. It is a kind of wild plant that can be found in the forest. The farmers around Muria usually take this plant and put it in the corner of their rice fields. *Pakis Haji* is also used as the raw material for souvenirs such as sticks and prayer beads (Wibowo, Wasino and Setyowati, 2012).

The choice of the community in KBMW to craft batik in these

patterns is a kind of indirect conservation effort. For them, humans are the most responsible beings to look for a solution to environmental issues. The current generation inherits the rich nature from their ancestors, so they have to pass on the same nature to their descendants. This community believes that every single effort will reveal good news in the future. Those students who attend batik classes will have embedded environmental awareness and will continue the same efforts. Moreover, this community believes that this effort is also a form of gratitude to Allah for all His immeasurable mercy. For them, batik is only a media to internalize religious values of gratitude, love and responsibility for nature. They realize that both men and women should stand hand in hand to respond based on Islamic teachings that they are in the same position. In addition, the financial values they got from batik may increase the income of the community. Economic independence will lead to the readiness of the generation to play their roles in the community. For them, the existence of the tomb of Sunan Muria is a blessing; thus, they have to maintain this blessing including preserving local biodiversity. It is a symbolic relationship of which they depend on the blessing of Sunan Muria as well as biodiversity.

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ABOUT

SALASIKA etymologically derived from Javanese language meaning 'brave woman'. SALASIKA JOURNAL (SJ) is founded in July 2019 as an international open access, scholarly, peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary journal publishing theoretically innovative and methodologically diverse research in the fields of gender studies, sexualities and feminism. Our conception of both theory and method is broad and encompassing, and we welcome contributions from scholars around the world.

SJ is inspired by the need to put into visibility the Indonesian and South East Asian women to ensure a dissemination of knowledge to a wider general audience.

SJ selects at least several outstanding articles by scholars in the early stages of a career in academic research for each issue, thereby providing support for new voices and emerging scholarship.

AUDIENCE

SJ aims to provide academic literature which is accessible across disciplines, but also to a wider 'non-academic' audience interested and engaged with social justice, ecofeminism, human rights, policy/advocacy, gender, sexualities, concepts of equality, social change, migration and social mobilisation, inter-religious and international relations and development.

There are other journals which address those topics, but SJ approaches the broad areas of gender, sexuality and feminism in an integrated fashion. It further addresses the issue of international collaboration and inclusion as existing gaps in the area of academic publishing by (a) crossing language boundaries and creating a space for publishing and (b) providing an opportunity for innovative emerging scholars to engage in the academic dialogue with established researchers.

STRUCTURE OF THE JOURNAL

All articles will be preceded by an abstract (150-200 words), keywords, main text introduction, materials and methods, results, discussion; acknowledgments; declaration of interest statement; references; appendices (as appropriate); table(s) with caption(s) (on individual pages); figures; figure captions (as a list); and a contributor biography (150 words). Word length is 4,000-10,000 words, including all previous elements.

TIMELINE AND SCHEDULE

Twice a year: February and July.

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