

Women Potters at Sambirata in Ecofeminism Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The Majority of pottery makers in Sambirata Village, Purbalingga Regency, Central Java are middle-aged women. Although their activities as pottery is often seen by community as a side job, in reality, it continues to exist amid competition for modern household equipment made of metal and plastic. The money that these middle-aged women pottery makers earn is more reliable as a routine source of family income, compared to the work of their husbands who work seasonally as farm labourers. In addition, pottery makers in Sambirata usually use the non-productive rice field in their village to get the raw material for making pottery. Here we see the peculiarity of this research, namely women who in Javanese culture are often considered as domestic workers are in fact capable of supporting their family and create a new value upon an unproductive rice field. Through qualitative research with participatory observation, researcher found the factors that made these women able to survive amidst modernity challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The existence of pottery that has existed since the Neolithic era as a cooking and ritual tool is still being produced today. The process of making pottery is very close to nature which is very interesting to study. In particular, the whole process is very close to nature, such as clay and simple tools made from materials found in nature. Especially the traditional pottery in Sambirata Hamlet, Purbalingga which is produced by the hands of artisans who are all middle-aged women. Women who work as housewives make pottery on the sidelines of their domestic work, namely taking care of the household. In Javanese society, the position of women is often referred to as *konco-wingking* (back friend), because their main job is to prepare food and drink for the family which is done in the kitchen. The position of the kitchen is usually located at the back of the house, because it is considered a job that causes dirty wood smoke as fuel in cooking. After finishing cooking and washing clothes in the morning, the women then began to switch to their side job as a pottery maker. Pottery work inherited from special ancestors to their daughters since childhood, an average age of 10 years.

This has been hereditary until now. Why specifically for girls? The work of making pottery is done at home, so pottery women can simultaneously control all household affairs, from preparing food for all household members, cleaning the house, raising children and even feeding livestock. Meanwhile, husbands usually leave the house with their activities as farmers or looking for firewood for cooking and burning pottery, so men are used to doing activities outside the home. The process of making pottery by women includes *ndudug* (looking for clay), *nggejrot* (mixing clay with sand), *muter* (shaping pottery), *notok*, *ngerik*, *mbatik to ngobar* (burning pottery). Even though the work of making pottery is done at home, the process of finding materials, making tools, and burning pottery is very close to nature. The long process of making pottery is very dependent on the weather. During the rainy season, the pottery requires a longer drying time because it depends on the sun. Pottery that has not yet dried will crack or break when fired, due to the traditional burning process used. Traditional burning is carried out in open fields or gardens, called field firing. The burning of the fields, namely the earthenware is arranged on top of the *teger* (wooden beam) then covered with straw on top and burned using a torch (dry twigs) which is inserted in the hole under the *teger*. The relationship between the women pottery artisans in Sambirata, whose activities are full of nature, is very interesting to study from an eco-feminism perspective. Eco-femism pioneered by Rachel Carson in 1962 emerged as a critique of the ecological movement that saw nature as an instrument to serve human needs. Meanwhile, eco-feminism was born to manage the environment and everything in it which is the source of life.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

However, due to the big flood of Kali (river) Gintung, it is now separated into two areas, Wanogarakulon and Wanogarawetan. So Sambirata pottery has been produced for hundreds of years. From archeological data, it is stated that pottery culture originated from the Sa-Huynh culture on the coast of Vietnam and Kalanay in the Philippines and Bau-Malay (East Malaysia). The decorative

varieties of earthenware found in Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia have similarities indicating that there was a trade relationship between the Sa-Huynh people and neighboring Southeast Asian people. Spread through Thailand and Malaysia then to Indonesia. The Sa-Huynh and Kalanay cultural discoveries of burial chambers for the burial of the dead flourished around 750-200 BC. The culture of pottery was brought by the first Champa people to Indonesia. Pottery skills are passed down from generation to generation by their ancestors to girls from when they were young, at the age of 10. Therefore, until now all pottery craftsmen in Sambirata Hamlet are women. Currently, traditional Sambirata pottery is circulating in markets outside the region, such as in Purbalingga, Purwokerto, Wonosobo, Pematang, Cilacap. In the midst of competition with the market for modern kitchen utensils made of metal and plastic, pottery made of earthenware type clay (with a low firing temperature) is still being produced because there is still market demand.

METHODOLOGY

The method for describing in depth the research phenomenon with the object of female pottery artisans who are close to nature and their environment with an ecofeminism approach. The aim is to see how women in Sambirata in their daily activities make pottery in managing the environment and its contents which provide a source of life (family and social). This study uses a qualitative method that emphasizes the living reality of pottery makers, the process of making pottery and interactions with the natural environment and society (social). Qualitative research is used because of the observation of a pottery maker's behavior that cannot be separated from social construction and the institutions that shape it. In the interpretation of reality which is plural and subjective. The data collection technique uses participatory observation where the researcher goes directly to the field by living with (live-in) the pottery-making community to observe and obtain important information to build arguments. In-depth interviews through semi-structured open-ended interviews and story telling from the key person to get a general picture of the important things needed. Focus Group Discussion and literature study as a reference for obtaining secondary data in research and obtaining theory for analysis purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Sambirata Traditional Pottery

Sambirata is a small village that is called a traditional pottery-producing hamlet, the only one that still survives to this day in Rembang District, Wanogarakulon Village, Purbalingga Regency, Central Java. However, it is still not widely known in the city of Purbalingga, which is about 20 km away, let alone in the city of Purwokerto, which is 40 km away. According to the history of the existence of pottery in Sambirata hamlet, from the narrative of an informant named Mr. Agus, a resident of Wanogarawetan, that in the past the Wanogarakulon and Wanogarawetan areas were one land (region) of Wanogara which was known for producing pottery. From archaeological data, they are in the Limbasari and Wlahar areas. So Sambirata pottery has been produced for

hundreds of years. From archeological data, it is stated that pottery culture originated from the Sa-Huynh culture on the coast of Vietnam and Kalanay in the Philippines and Bau-Malay (East Malaysia).

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Plant Process and Environment

The process of making pottery takes a long time, it can't be done in a day, because the process of forming it to maturity goes through several stages. All pottery activities even depend on nature. Clay as a material for making pottery is taken by artisans from the surrounding soil. In order for pottery to be easily formed into valuable functional items, a mixture of sand and water which also comes from nature is needed. Sand is a filler so that the pottery is strong, known as a framework. The process of making traditional pottery in Sambirata consists of the following stages:

a. Ndudug

Activity to look for clay by digging non-productive rice fields whose surface has dried up to get soil that is still wet to collect. The ndudug tool uses bamboo width x length 4x50cm. Middle-aged potters between 34-80 years old have to walk long distances every evening to look for clay. Then they will be carried on their backs to be taken home. As a result of the weight of the soil being around 40-50kg, of course a technique is needed to lift onto the back, stand up and walk which is not easy because the surface of the dry paddy field is irregular with lots of lumps of earth mixed with gravel. From the house to the rice fields and back to the house, they will walk 1.5 km, mostly with bare feet.

b. Nggejrot

Mixing clay with sand and water to get a plastic soil mixture that is formed into the desired pottery. Nggejrot activities are usually done in the morning because at that time the energy is still fresh from sleeping last night and extra energy is needed so that sweat is pouring out in this process similar to exercise fitness. Currently, due to increasing age and physical decline, some pottery women are assisted by their husbands to mix the soil, which is called *nggejrot*. In addition to strength, it also requires the sensitivity of the feet to feel that the soil

has been thoroughly mixed with sand and water. If the mixture is not right, then many pottery products will fail, such as cracking or breaking when drying in the sun or when burning. The exact ratio of the three types of materials: clay, sand and water has been made without exact measurements, only 1 mound of clay (40-50 kg): 3 buckets of sand and enough water until it feels plastic enough to be spun.

c. Kepel

To make the shape of earthen balls using hands by clenching. The sensitivity of the entire palm and fingers in forming balls of the same size without being weighed or measuring devices. The size of the balls depends on the type of pottery to be shaped as desired. The types of pottery produced include: *sangan rapet*, *sangan bolong* (*blengker*), *sangan kuping* (large frying pan), *kendil*, *kuali* (cauldron), *kekep* (pot lid), *layah* (mortar), small frying pan and *kern* (traditional cooking furnace). Each type is made with several sizes: large, medium and small. The form or type of pottery from the past until now has hardly experienced design development, namely in the form of cooking utensils for vegetables and water.

d. Muter

The process of forming clay dough into balls into pottery by using a small rotary tool that is operated by hand. This process requires sensitivity in balancing the left hand which functions to rotate the small table to achieve the required rotational speed in forming or raising and widening the wet soil using the right hand. Hand motor sensors, and high levels of concentration of the brain and taste (heart) are required. When the mind is not focused or the heart is not calm, failure to form pottery will occur. In turning, simple tools are needed such as bracelets made of *irat bamboo* which the craftsmen make themselves, rags from old clothes and threads for cutting pottery that are still wet from the turntable and then placed in a neat row on a board. Next, they will lift the board containing the pottery outside the house to air it or dry it to a certain level of hardness so that it is easy to proceed to the next stage.

e. Notok

Namely widening the stomach of a *kendil* or *kuali* (cauldron) using round stones they get in the river or in the yard around the house. *Notok* are also made on the *sangan rapet* and *sangan kuping* to achieve the desired concave depth as well as to thin the earthenware walls so that they are wider and not too thick because they can affect the length of time they dry or crack when dry or when fired.

f. Ngerik

Forming the bottom of the *layah* (mortar) type of pottery or the inside of the *kendil* and *kuali* (cauldron) or *sangan rapet* by thinning and smoothing it evenly in order to achieve a perfect shape. The tools used are simple bamboo bracelets.

g. Mbatik

Finishing process by smoothing the outer surface of the pottery using fine stones found from the Gintung River, until the surface of the pottery becomes smooth and shiny to return to drying and then waiting for the final stage, ngobar (firing).

h. Ngobar

Firing pottery in large quantities at once reaches 300-700 seeds, depending on the type of pottery produced, large or small in size. Traditional burning is often called field-firing, where open burning without a special stove uses wood or twigs and dry leaves and straw as fuel. In Sambirata there are several locations for ngobar because almost every corner of the hamlet has pottery makers so they can burn their pottery at the location closest to their house so they don't have to bother carrying the pottery that is ready to be burned, thus saving energy because the distance to carry (transport) is not too far.

Each process requires the craftsman's sensitivity both to his body's sensory and to the pottery itself, to the tools and to the weather. Even Yuriko Saito, a researcher on the Aesthetics of Everyday Life in her book *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, calls it "Sky Art" because the making of pottery depends on the weather. It takes the sun to dry several times in each process. Meanwhile, John Dewey, author of the book *Art As Experience*, said that Art as Experience, he criticized that aesthetics only sees art objects exhibited in museums or galleries. However, art is a moving experience, there is an interaction between the object and the viewer's subject. Like earthenware that looks simple, the technique is ndeso (traditional) but the process of making it is a continuous experience that has been carried out since childhood. Pottery that is often considered cheap is actually appreciated by connoisseurs (consumers) because it has a functional value. Dewey saw that art begins with purification of materials that look simple but produce something valuable through processing. Skills are acquired through experience. In experience there is a "rhythm" which is the result of the integration of humans and their environment such as adaptation to nature, there are also "emotions" such as joy, boredom, disappointment over failure, disputes and so on. This also happens in the process of making pottery which is monotonous, boring, fun because it is close to family and sometimes disappointing when it rains continuously in the rainy season, or fails to burn and so on.

Women Potters and Ecofeminism

The leader of the ecofeminism movement was Rachel Louise Carson (1907-1964) who criticized the damage to nature caused by the use of pesticides on agricultural land to eradicate pests that were enemies of plants, written in her book *Silent Spring*. Damage to nature occurs because of human behavior that exploits nature for human gain. So, natural resources are only useful instruments for humans. The ecofeminist movement sees that nature is the same as women who are dominated by the patriarchal system for the benefit of men. This is as stated by the thoughts of a North American philosopher named Karen J. Warren

who saw the domination of men over women. This is what happened to the women pottery artisans who worked hard in every process of making pottery, thus supporting the family's economy, because husbands with erratic incomes worked as farm laborers or livestock labourers. As a livestock worker, it is not uncommon to take care of feeding and cleaning the cattle stables for the wife because the husband goes looking for pottery fuel. Other natural damage is caused by technological advances, machines with high energy power capable of drilling deep into the ground to extract natural mining products or dredging the ground to extract coal and much more.

A female activist in Soe (NTT), Aleta Braun, opposed the marble company in her village. In Amungme (Papua) Yosepha Alomang opposed river pollution due to pollution produced by the Freeport gold mining company. Meanwhile, traditional pottery artisans in Sambirata are still limited to their ability to use clay in non-productive paddy fields that have been abandoned by their owners because they are considered to be no longer profitable. The women who are not young in age even just use a bamboo stick to find wet clay, and walk barefoot on the soil so it won't kill the microbes in the soil that help loosen the soil again. It turns out that women pottery artisans work very close to nature, from looking for materials, drying the pottery for each further process, to ngobar. Not to mention having to pay attention to the weather when you have clothesline for all family members. The mutual cooperation system, both with the family and fellow pottery craftsmen, always appears in every work process and other activities. The results of the pottery that are made will be useful for maintaining the continuity of the families who use it, because pottery cooking utensils are made of clay, which is safer than metal, especially plastic, which will be contaminated with food or drink and become toxic to the body.

Perhaps this is the reason why women inherit the job of making pottery, because pottery is done at home, while taking care of the house, including taking care of the children. Husbands work in the fields or go to the forest to look for torches (firewood). Traditionally, women are considered weak creatures, so they have to stay at home and cook in the kitchen, women as sidekicks of their husbands. While the husband is considered more powerful and strong so that the one who works outside the home. In ancient times, men hunted animals to feed their families. However, what about the women in Sambirata who are known as pottery artisans? Are they weak creatures? The women pottery artisans in Sambirata, who are mostly illiterate, do not start their work with grandiose grandiose works, but depart from simple understandings in their daily lives as women where humans and nature live interdependently and need each other. Pottery women have given birth to life, their closeness to nature can produce pottery which provides a source of life for their families.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Women and nature are actually very close and there is even the term "Mother Earth", but there is no Father Earth, what is there is "Capital City" not Father City, "Mother Earth", not Father Earth. Likewise, there is Dewi Sri as the Goddess of Rice, a symbol of prosperity, Dewi Saraswati, a symbol of intelligence

and others. So, women who are likened to the earth show that women who are humble and patient, compassionate, caretakers of the life of the universe remain harmonious. Pottery women are powerful human beings, they are heroes in the family, creators of harmony in family life, each other and their natural environment.

FURTHER STUDY

Therefore, until now all pottery craftsmen in Sambirata Hamlet are women. Currently, traditional Sambirata pottery is circulating in markets outside the region, such as in Purbalingga, Purwokerto, Wonosobo, Pemalang, Cilacap. In the midst of competition with the market for modern kitchen utensils made of metal and plastic, pottery made of earthenware type clay (with a low firing temperature) is still being produced because there is still market demand.

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