

# DISASTER CULTURE FOR THE SCHOOL IN CISOLOK OF SUKABUMI REGENCY, WEST JAVA, INDONESIA

Dicky Muslim<sup>1\*</sup>, Evi Haerani<sup>2</sup>, Zufaldi Zakaria<sup>1</sup>, Raden Irvan Sophian<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Geological Engineering, Universitas Padjadjaran,

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Economy and Business, Universitas Padjadjaran,

Email : [d.muslim@unpad.ac.id](mailto:d.muslim@unpad.ac.id)

## Abstract

The importance of culture towards disasters was particularly highlighted during the Indian Ocean tsunami. When the tsunami hit the coast lines of the Southeast Asian countries in the year 2004, some communities with indigenous knowledge regarding tsunami were successfully survived such as the folklore of *Smong* in Simeulue Island. Survival of some indigenous communities as oppose to migrants and tourists were mainly based on the presence of “cultural” knowledge of people had on the tsunami. This paper aims to reveal a local belief in southern coast of Sukabumi Regency related to tsunami disaster risk reduction. Methods in this study consist of field work and interview of local people in the study area of Pelabuhan Ratu region. Results show that there is folklore about the existence of a queen as the ruler of southern ocean in the study area. The queen of *Nyi Roro Kidul* is believed to be a guardian of people to safely living and fishing around coastal area. Though there is no physical evidence of this culture but this kind of belief is potential to be used for increasing disaster risk reduction efforts among the people in the future. This folklore is usable for research and local government related to community-based disaster risk management.

Keywords: Disaster culture, local belief, folklore, Sukabumi

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Background

The importance of culture towards disasters was particularly highlighted during the Indian Ocean tsunami (Kulatunga, 2010). When the tsunami hit the coast lines of the Southeast Asian countries in the year 2004, some communities with indigenous knowledge regarding tsunami were successfully survived such as the folklore of *Smong* in Simeulue Island (Santos *et al.*, 2016). Survival of some indigenous communities as oppose to migrants and tourists were mainly based on the presence of “cultural” knowledge of people had on the tsunami. This knowledge of culture plays an important role in the disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities.

A big earthquake in 17 July 2006 on Indian Ocean was followed by tsunami in Pangandaran beach of West Java Province (Bird *et al.*, 2011). It claimed more than 600 lives and destroyed hundreds of houses and infrastructures. This tsunami event had alerted the danger of southern coast of West Java to face direct consequences of this geological hazard in the future, including Tasikmalaya, Garut, Cianjur and Sukabumi Regencies in West Java.

In the southern part of Sukabumi Regency, Pelabuhan Ratu is a small fishermen city. It celebrates an annual holiday to honor the spirit of Queen *Nyi Roro Kidul* on April 6. A memorial day for the locals is offering a lot of ceremonial "presents" to appease the queen. The local fishermen annually send the *sedekah laut* ceremony, offering gifts and sacrifices; from rice, vegetables and agricultural produces, to chicken, batik fabrics and cosmetics, to be *larung* (sent afloat to the sea) and finally drawn it to the sea to appease the queen. The local fishermen believed that the ceremony would please the Queen of Southern Sea, which in return would give them some good catches in fisheries and also would bless the surrounding areas with better weather, fewer storms and waves.

The fierce waves of the Indian Ocean on southern coast of Java Island, its storms and sometimes tsunamis, probably had raised in the locals awareness and fear of natural power, and locals attributed it to the spiritual realm of deities and demons that inhabit the southern seas ruled by their queen, a female deity, later identified as "Queen of South Sea" famous as *Nyi Roro Kidul*. This legend is also associated with coastal areas of Pelabuhan Ratu, Pangandaran, Parangtritis, Parangkusumo, Karang Bolong, Ngliep, Puger, Banyuwangi, and places all along the south coast of Java.



Figure 1. Location of Pelabuhan Ratu in the southern part of Sukabumi Regency

### Purpose of Paper

This paper aims to reveal a local belief in southern coast of Sukabumi Regency related to tsunami disaster risk reduction.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Jordaan (1997) mentioned that according to the mythology of Javanese and Sundanese people, *Nyi Roro Kidul* spirit has many different names, which reflect the diverse stories of her origin in different sagas, legends, myths and traditional folklore. Other names include *Ratu Laut Selatan* ("Queen of the South Sea," meaning the Indian Ocean) and *Gusti Kanjeng Ratu Kidul*. The royal house of Keraton Surakarta Kingdom revered her as *Kanjeng Ratu Ayu Kencono Sari*. Many Javanese believe it is important to use various honorifics when referring to her, such as *Nyi*, *Kanjeng*, and *Gusti*. People who invoke her also call her *Eyang* (grandmother). One Sundanese folktale is mentioned about Dewi Kadita, the beautiful princess of the Pajajaran Kingdom, in West Java, who desperately fled to the Southern Sea after being struck by black magic. The black magic was cast by a witch under the order of a jealous rival in the palace, and caused the beautiful princess to suffer disgusting skin disease. She jumped into the violent waves of the ocean where she was finally cured and regained her beauty, and the spirits and demons crowned the girl as the legendary Spirit-Queen of the South Sea. A similar version of the story above mentions that the King of Pajajaran (at the time), having her as the only child, who is planning to retire from the throne, remarries. Having a queen (instead of a king) was forbidden. The king's new wife finally gets pregnant, but, because of jealousy, forces the king to choose between his wife or his daughter. There was an ultimatum. If he chose his daughter, then his wife would leave the palace for real and the throne would be given to what would later become the queen. If the wife was chosen, the daughter would be banned from the palace and the new, yet to be born child, would be the king. The king solves this by ordering a witch to make his daughter suffer a skin disease. The daughter, now banned from the palace, hears a voice that tells her to go to the sea at midnight to cure her disease. She did, and vanished, never to be seen or heard from again.

*Nyi Roro Kidul* is often illustrated as a mermaid with a tail as well the lower part of the body of fish. The mythical creature is claimed to take the soul of any who she wished for. According to local popular beliefs around coastal villages on Southern Java, the Queen often claim lives of visitors that bathe on the beach, and she usually prefers handsome young men. Another pervasive part of folklore surrounding her is the color of aqua green, which is favored and referred to her and forbidden to wear along the south-coast of Java. She is often describes wearing clothes or *selendang* (silky sashes) in this color (Becker, 1997)

Olthof *et al.* (1987) mentioned that the 16th century Javanese legends connect the Queen of Southern Seas as the protector and spiritual consort of the kings of Mataram Sultanate. Panembahan Senopati (1586-1601 AD), founder of the Mataram Sultanate, and his grandson Sultan Agung (1613-1645 AD) who named the *Kanjeng Ratu Kidul* as their bride, is claimed in the *Babad Tanah Jawi*. According to Javanese legends dated from 16th century CE, the prince Panembahan Senopati aspired to establish a new kingdom Mataram Sultanate against Pajang overlordship. He performed ascetic acts through meditating on the beach of Parang Kusumo, south of his home in the town of Kota Gede. His meditation caused a disturbing powerful supernatural phenomenon in the spiritual kingdom of Southern Sea. The Queen came to the beach to see who had caused this menace in her kingdom. Upon seeing the handsome prince, the queen immediately fell in love and asked the prince to stop his meditation. In return the deity queen, who ruled spiritual realm of the southern seas, agreed to help Panembahan Senopati in his political effort to establish a new kingdom. In order to become the spiritual protector of the kingdom, the Queen asked to be held by the

prince in hand of marriage, as the spiritual consort of Panembahan Senopati and all of his successors, the series of Mataram kings.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Methods in this study consist of field work and interview of local people in the study area of Pelabuhan Ratu region.

### 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results show that there is folklore about the existence of a queen as the ruler of southern ocean in the study area. The queen of *Nyi Roro Kidul* is believed to be a guardian of people to safely living and fishing around coastal area. Though there is no physical evidence of this culture but this kind of belief is potential to be used for increasing disaster risk reduction efforts among the people in the future.

In the study area, it is found a famous four stars hotel preserving the existence of the queen's legend into a special private room dedicated only to worship the goddess. It had been established since the era of President Soekarno.

The Samudra Beach Hotel in Pelabuhan Ratu beach of Sukabumi Regency, West Java Province, keeps room 308 furnished with green colors and privately only reserved for *Nyi Roro Kidul*. The first president of Indonesia, Soekarno, was involved with the exact location and the idea for the Samudra Beach Hotel. In front of the room 308 there is the Ketapang tree where Soekarno got his spiritual inspiration. The painting of *Nyi Roro Kidul* by Basuki Abdullah, a famous Indonesian painter, is displayed in this room.



Figure 2. The Samudra Beach Hotel in Pelabuhan Ratu City to face the Indian Ocean





Figure 3. Disaster awareness culture in the school through brochures

Pajajaran Kingdom lied in West Java from 1333 AD to 1630 AD and it was conquered by the Islamic kingdom of Mataram from Central Java. Pajajaran's greatest ruler was Prabu (King) Siliwangi. He had a bride in his harems and a very beautiful daughter was born between he and the bride. The girl was called Dewi Kadita and the beauties of Dewi Kadita and her mother made other harems jealous, and they had a conspiracy against them. The harems used some kind of black magic to make the bodies of Dewi Kadita and her mother to be filthy and they turn to be so ugly and disgusting. Prabu Siliwangi got angry against the mother and the daughter and forced them to get out of the palace, as they were thought to be bad luck for the kingdom. They were wandering around the country and one day the mother died. Dewi Kadita was walking in deep sadness, until she reached the Southern Shore (the shore of Indian Ocean). She sat above a rock in a stove shape and when she was sleeping, she had a vision that she must have to jump into the water to help herself out of the curse. When she woke up, with no second thought, Dewi Kadita jumped into the sea. She returned to a beautiful lady as she was but then she realized that she was not a human anymore. She turned into a supernatural form of life. Since then, she ruled all creatures in the southern coast of Java Island, and she was known as *Nyi Roro Kidul* (Javanese of "Lady of South Sea"). To avenge her father, she became the primary bride for Mataram kings, the rival of Pajajaran kingdom. It's believed for centuries, even until now. Although her legends are mostly linked to the 16th century Javanese Mataram Sultanate, the older manuscript traced her legendary origin to the era of the Sundanese kingdom of Pajajaran and the legend of the ill-fated princess Dewi Kadita. However, Javanese and Sundanese anthropological and cultural studies suggest that the myth of the Queen of Java's Southern Seas probably originated from older prehistoric animistic beliefs in the pre-Hindu-Buddhist female deity of the southern ocean (Mudjanto, 1986).

*Nyi Roro Kidul* in a significant amount of the folklore that surrounds her - is in control of the violent waves of the Indian Ocean from her dwelling place in the heart of the ocean. In the disaster event of Tsunami, many people believe that violent waves from the ocean are considered to be controlled by the queen.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This folklore is usable for research and local government related to community-based disaster risk management. Failing to address cultural aspects could lead to increase the vulnerabilities of community towards disasters and the development of unsuccessful DRR strategies. The role of cultural values and attitudes as obstacles to or facilitators to progress of DRR activities have been ignored by governments and aid agencies. Following this study, it is recommended to consider the behaviors of communities and individuals when subjecting to disastrous situations along with the underline cultural aspects of them.

This paper highlighted how culture could influence DRR activities and vice-versa. It was evident that in some instances, culture has become a factor for the survival of the communities from disasters whereas in some instances culture has acted as a barrier for effective DRR activities. Therefore, it can be concluded that culture has the power of increasing or reducing vulnerability of communities towards disasters.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to convey sincere gratitude to Prof. Yamaoka, Dr. Kondo and Dr. Matsumoto for the opportunity to present this paper in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Join Conference of Utsunomiya University and Universitas Padjadjaran, held in Utsunomiya campus in Japan.

## REFERENCES

- Jordaan, Roy E. (1997) *Tara and Nyai Lara Kidul* - Asian Folklore Studies, Volume 56, pp 285-312
- Becker, Judith (1997) *Gamelan Stories: Tantrism, Islam, and Aesthetics in Central Java*, The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 56, No. 1, pp. 246–247
- Olthof W.L. J.J. Meinsma, J.J. Ras (1987) *Babad Tanah Jawi*. Foris Publications Dordrecht-Holland/Providence-USA. ISBN 90-6765-218-0
- Mudjanto, G. (1986) *The Concept of Power in Javanese Culture*. Gadjah Mada University Press, 1986. ISBN 978-979-420-024-7
- Santos A., Tavares A.O. & Queirós M. (2016) Numerical modelling and evacuation strategies for tsunami awareness: lessons from the 2012 Haida Gwaii Tsunami, *Geomatics, Natural Hazards and Risk*, Vol.7, No.4, pp 1442-1459.
- Deanne K. Bird, Catherine Chagué-Goff & Anna Gero (2011) Human Response to Extreme Events: a review of three post-tsunami disaster case studies, *Australian Geographer*, Vol 42, No 3, pp 225-239.
- Udayangani Kulatunga (2010) Impact of Culture towards Disaster Risk Reduction, *International Journal of Strategic Property Management*, 14:4, 304-313