

Preserving Faith and Tradition: The Role of Traditional Leaders and Mosques in the Socio-Religious Life of Coastal Communities

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Abstract

This research study investigates the crucial role played by traditional leaders and local mosques in preserving religious and cultural values in the Eretan Wetan coastal community in Indramayu, West Java. Utilizing a sociological approach and observational and interview-based data collection techniques, the study found that Eretan Wetan is a highly religious community where religious and cultural values influence and strengthen each other, despite the disruptions caused by modernity. The mosque serves as a center for both ritual worship and community empowerment, and traditional clerics resist modernity. The research highlights the importance of preserving coastal communities' religious and cultural values and recognizing the roles of traditional leaders and mosques in their socio-religious life. This study is expected to provide input and recommendations for policymakers in developing coastal communities sustainably while preserving their religious and cultural values.

Keywords: Coastal community; Eretan Wetan Indramayu; Mosques; Traditional leaders.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menyelidiki peran penting yang dimainkan oleh para pemimpin adat dan masjid setempat dalam melestarikan nilai-nilai agama dan budaya di masyarakat pesisir Eretan Wetan di Indramayu, Jawa Barat. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan sosiologis dan teknik pengumpulan data berbasis observasi dan wawancara, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa Eretan Wetan merupakan komunitas yang sangat religius di mana nilai-nilai agama dan budaya saling mempengaruhi dan memperkuat satu sama lain, terlepas dari gangguan yang disebabkan oleh modernitas. Masjid berfungsi sebagai pusat ibadah ritual dan pemberdayaan masyarakat, dan para ulama tradisional menolak modernitas. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya melestarikan nilai-nilai agama dan budaya masyarakat pesisir dan mengakui peran para pemimpin tradisional dan masjid dalam kehidupan sosial-keagamaan mereka. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan masukan dan rekomendasi bagi para pengambil kebijakan dalam membangun masyarakat pesisir secara berkelanjutan dengan tetap melestarikan nilai-nilai agama dan budaya mereka.

Kata kunci: masyarakat pesisir; Eretan Wetan Indramayu; Masjid; Pemimpin local.

INTRODUCTION

Coastal communities in Indonesia have unique characteristics in their social, cultural, and religious life (Choirunnisa & Giyarsih, 2018; Duncan, 2003; Supriati & Umar, 2020). As communities living in coastal areas, their daily lives are influenced by the sea and other natural resources. They have a close relationship with the sea, and activities such as fishing and maritime trade are essential parts of their lives (Adjei & Sika-Bright, 2019; Duli, Maryunani, & Sakti, 2023). Additionally, religious and cultural diversity is also a distinct feature of coastal communities in Indonesia. Besides Islam, there are also influences from Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity that are maintained in their daily lives. This creates a unique and interesting social and religious dynamics that are worth studying.

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Coastal communities that are considered underdeveloped often prioritize spiritual values in their social activities. Dadang Kahmad (2006) suggests that this is particularly true for fishing communities, whose livelihoods are closely tied to the sea and its unpredictability. During times of good catches, it is not uncommon for ceremonies to be held to honor the ruler of the sea. These sacred values are deeply embedded in the community's way of life, and they often look to the natural world for guidance in understanding religious teachings (Woods, 2022). As such, simple examples from their surroundings are often used to teach these values.

According to Dadang Kahmad (2006), religious leaders have a vital role to play in promoting comprehensive and harmonious human development that encompasses both physical progress and inner satisfaction. In this regard, their role extends beyond facilitating spiritual growth. Instead, they can motivate and guide individuals, provide ethical and moral principles, and mediate the development of readiness for growth in all aspects of life. Within a cultural context, the leadership style of religious figures is often seen as charismatic or traditional. Charismatic leaders, in particular, are highly respected and obeyed by their followers, which earns them the trust and respect of the community due to their outstanding personal qualities and credibility (authority), as noted by Hasan (2005).

In line with the background, coastal communities with tough characters can implement Islamic teachings daily. On the other hand, local traditions and Islamic teachings are linked. Thus, the preacher's da'wah methods in the Indramayu coastal community are linked to this solid Islamic characteristic. Therefore, this research examines the socio-religious life of the Eretan Wetan coastal community in Indramayu, traditional figures' strategies, and the local mosque's role in spreading religious values.

Coastal communities have been the subject of numerous studies conducted by various scholars. Ivan Razali (2004), Dewi Fatmawati (2014), and Donna NP Butarbutar (2020) focused on the socio-economic development of these communities. Meanwhile, Mahfudlah Fajrie (2018), Yayah Nurhidayah (2019), and Citra Putri Dano (2022) explored their communication patterns, and Nendah Kurniasari (2011) and Casmini (2019) investigated their psychology. However, despite the extensive literature on coastal communities, there is a gap in knowledge regarding the socio-religious life of the Eretan Wetan coastal community in Indramayu, as well as the role of traditional figures and the local mosque in promoting religious values. Therefore, this study is highly relevant and necessary for advancing the field of coastal community studies, particularly with a socio-religious approach.

This research aims to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the socio-religious life of the Eretan Wetan coastal community in Indramayu and the role of traditional leaders and local mosques in instilling religious values. This research also aims to provide an overview of the level of religiosity among coastal communities and to understand how religious values influence and strengthen their cultural aspects. Furthermore, this research aims to investigate the role of local mosques in developing coastal communities, including in education, preaching, economics, and ritual worship. By identifying the roles of local mosques and traditional leaders in the socio-religious life of coastal communities, this research is expected to provide input and recommendations for policymakers in developing coastal communities sustainably, particularly in preserving their religious and cultural values.

METHODS

The object material of this research is the Eretan Wetan coastal community in Indramayu. The reason for choosing this object material is because coastal communities are often considered vulnerable to various social, economic, and environmental issues. However, coastal communities also have potential and local wisdom that is important to develop. Furthermore, the diversity of religion and culture in coastal

communities is a research focus because it can provide a better understanding of the diversity and complexity of coastal community life. In this context, Eretan Wetan was chosen as the research location because it is a coastal area that has uniqueness in terms of socio-religious life and the role of local mosques in community development. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to understanding the socio-religious life of the coastal community in Eretan Wetan, as well as the role of mosques and traditional leaders in maintaining their religious and cultural values.

This study employed a sociological approach (Connolly, 2011) in conducting field research (Gunawan, 2013) in Eretan Wetan Village, Kandanghaur District, Indramayu Regency, West Java. The village is located north of the Java Sea, with Wira Kanan Village, Karang Anyar Village to the south, and Cemara Village to the east. Meanwhile, Wira Panjunan Village and Pranti Village border the area to the west. Data collection for this study utilized observational methods (Hasanah, 2017) and interviews (Rosaliza, 2015). The author analyzed the data using a descriptive-analytical methodology (Sugiyono, 2017). By utilizing these methods and approaches, the study aimed to better understand the socio-religious life of the coastal community in Eretan Wetan and the role of traditional leaders and local mosques in instilling religious values.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Portrait of the Religious Social Life of the Eretan Wetan Villagers Indramayu

The Musyamina Eretan Wetan Indramayu Mosque Prosperity Council's activities led Muslims in Indramayu Regency to be considered hereditary Muslims before 2008. Muslims today are unsure of right and evil. Traders, drivers, and others often work during prayer time. Nowadays, many Muslims prioritize worldly matters over religious rituals. Thus, media, socializing, life, and environments erode every Muslim's faith (ES, Personal Communication, March 14, 2017).

Sociologically, Indramayu Residents are either rural or urban. In his 1950 essay *The Lonely Crown*, David Riesman claimed that this type of society is no longer isolated, open, and changes faster, has a bigger area and population, and is more technologically advanced. Several trading centers, a wide division of labor, diverse social classes, agriculture, and industry enhance rural and urban economies. Government institutions and economic activity became increasingly specialized and distinct (Soekanto, 2009).

Before 2008, the difference among Islamic organizations in Indramayu Regency, especially around the Eretan Wetan coast, made other Islamic organizations reluctant to worship together. They do not pray together because they think their prayer is different. This thought can break Muslim unity (US, Personal Communication, March 14, 2017).

In 2008, when H. Haryanto led the manager of the Mosque Prosperity Board (MPB) of the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan, there was a change in the community. For example, before he led it, the congregation could not add *qunut* prayer to the *tarawih* prayer on the 15th of Ramadhan. However, when he became the Head of it, he allowed it. He left such matters to the *Imam*. Adding *qunut* or not depends on the Imam's identity during the prayer (US, Personal Communication, March 14, 2017). Muslims there progressed from 2008–2014. Many mosque programs directly engaged the fishermen community in Eretan Wetan and its surroundings during the cooperation and MPB of the Musyayamina mosque led by H. Haryanto, improving Islam. Many studies strengthen faith and piety. Before many studies activities, the worship community only practiced without theory. Thus, their worship may not be valid (US, Personal Communication, March 21, 2017).

In Indramayu Regency, sociological goals regarding religious behavior give religion meaning as a bond in the community's value system. However, the sacred and secular environments can be distinguished. The religious value system in society emphasizes integrating individual behavior or constructing a group image. Spreading religion and expanding socio-political structures can create a certain atmosphere (Koentjaraningrat, 240 C.E.).

The Eretan Wetan community is a very religious society in which religious and cultural values impact and strengthen each other, even though modernity causes values to change. Thus, urban crime, social disorder, secularization, and materialism are the results of modernization because change puts people in new scenarios that can cause socio-economic pressures, cultural shocks, moral damage, or religious deviation.

Religious activities in Indramayu Regency can accommodate the community's existence to overcome social religion due to changing circumstances. As one of the agents of the religious movement, the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan must be revitalized and its activities expanded to provide spiritual and social bargaining power to guide people's understanding and behavior, which tends to be fatalistic and destructive towards positive and constructive.

The Power of Traditional Ulema: Instilling Religious Social Values in Eretan Wetan Coastal Community

According to local village apparatus monographic data, most Eretan Wetan villagers are Muslims. There are 9664 Muslims. The places of worship are usually near where they live, but the quantity of worship is not proportional. There are two mosques and 13 prayer rooms. Christian Eretan Wetan villagers total 71, but there is no church. They do services in sub-districts or districts (The source of information was obtained from the Ministry of Religion of Indramayu Regency based on information up to 1996, on Thursday, August 10, 2006).

Eretan Wetan Village emphasizes Islamic schooling and religious facilities. There record 80 students attend 2 Islamic boarding schools with 8 Ulema. 15 religious assemblies include the Kandanghaur District Islamic religious leaders' group.

In the Eretan Wetan Village community, the social strata based on age are classified into three parts. First, elders or older people are usually aged 50 years and over; second, young people are usually those who are still not married, even though they are already 40 years old. If they are not yet married, they are not classified as older people; third, children are those who are still not *aqil baligh* (sensible and mature). The role of parents or elders is a place for people to ask questions because they are considered intelligent people with natural and supernatural abilities and knowledge. Elders in the Eretan Wetan Community, Kandanghaur District, are usually called Kyai (Dhofier, 1982).

In Eretan Wetan Village, AJ is one of the elders with insight, knowledge, and ability on religion. Many residents ask for advice in determining an auspicious day if they will hold a wedding or congratulations. Likewise, they often invite AJ to lecture at religious events such as great Islamic commemorations. At the time of the rejection of the pigs, he served as Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council in Kandanghaur. He lives on Karang Sinom Kandanghaur and has a Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding School Foundation.

Mama S, another elder with magical powers, His home has supernatural objects like gemstones, swords, rings, and others. Mama S's mom stated these magical items need prayers and dhikr to stay calm and have supernatural powers. Not everyone can be trusted to provide food and dhikr, so they must be able to do light practices like meditation and fasting. That is why Eretan Wetan's people trust Mama Solihin

as a wise person who can connect with the supernatural. Many residents gather at his house on Friday nights *kliwon* to conduct a ritual procession of magical objects and do dzikr.

Islam experts are another element. *Ustadz* (religious teacher) is the Islamic religious leader in Eretan Wetan, Kandanghaur District. As a leader in marriage, salvation, death, and other life cycle rituals, the *ustadz* is vital to society. *Ustadz* teaches morality to youth in Islamic religious education. The *ustadz* teaches small children religious lessons in the afternoon after praying at the mosque or prayer area. Eretan Wetan's Muslim residents prioritize religious schooling. Even though he is young, *Ustadz* Ali is one of Eretan Wetan's most respected *ustadz*. His devotion to improving morals in his village is admirable, and the younger generation often turns to him for advice.

Another respected public figure is the Hajj, who performs the fifth pillar of Islam in Makkah Al Mukaromah. The pilgrims usually have a great deal of wealth. Imam Usman is respected in Eretan Wetan. He is a landlord who owns much land, a big home, and fishing boats. He is a philanthropist who builds mosques and prayer rooms in Eretan Wetan Village. They do not hesitate to help with school fees, medical expenses, road repairs, and traditional ceremonies. The annual rituals are *Ngunjung Buyut* (Visiting Ancestors), *Nadran* (Beach Party), and *Mapag Sri* (Rice Harvest Ceremony). Indramayu's term, stated by Haryanto Harhara, is that pilgrims must be wealthy, "people who go on pilgrimage must be people who are rich and have enough money" (HH, Personal information, August 9, 2020).

Based on the description above, the Eretan Wetan community in Kandanghaur District's religious rituals are dominated by Muslims because Christians only attend church on Sundays and have to make the trip (sub-district or district). Non-Muslims have no sites of worship in Eretan Wetan Village.

Mosque as a Center of Empowerment: Instilling Religious Social Values in Eretan Wetan Coastal Community

Da'wah activities cannot be separated from mosque activities. Consequently, da'wah can also be considered the essence of mosque activities. The definition of da'wah derives from the Arabic word for *da'a-yad'u-da'wan-du'a*, interpreted as invitations, calls, and appeals (Munir & Ilahi, 2012). Da'wah can also be understood as a continuous effort to transform human thoughts (ideas), feelings, and actions until an Islamic society is established (*al-mujtama al-islam*).

Da'wah has a broad dimension. There are at least four main activities of da'wah, namely:

1. Reminding people of the values of truth and justice verbally.
2. Communicating Islamic principles through his writings.
3. Being a role model of good behavior or morals.
4. Behaving decisively with physical abilities, wealth, and soul in upholding Divine

Da'wah's oldest institution is the mosque since Prophet Muhammad PBUH. The Messenger sent congregations for da'wah by the Prophet's mosque and gave them orders. When the pilgrims return to Medina, the preaching pilgrims will first enter the mosque and report their results to Rasulullah PBUH. Descriptively, da'wah focuses on altering citizens' inner attitudes and behavior toward individual and group piety. With religious and social themes, da'wah also encourages *istiqomah* (consistent) (Munir & Ilahi, 2012).

The Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan promotes education, da'wah, and economic empowerment in addition to ritual worship. Cooperation activities as an economic stronghold for fishermen and the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan are expected to be centers for Muslim activities in Eretan Wetan, including Islamic education, da'wah, worship, *muamalah*, economic empowerment, and religious activities (EH, Personal Communication, March 17, 2017).

Cooperative banks are based on strengthening fishermen's economic foundations so they do not waste resources, whereas the mosque represents the power of the Islamic brotherhood. The Eretan Wetan fishermen group is encouraged to utilize it. Cooperation and the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan do not belong to the same understanding group or Islamic community organization. However, the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan is the center of religious understanding under Islamic law principles, in the form of da'wah and Islamic literary activities.

The Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan is the focus of Islamic da'wah in the religious realm. In 2008, the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan played an essential role in Islamic Da'wah. Many Islamic organizations gathered there to participate in recitations, including the Asy-Syifaa Wal Mahmuudiyah Islamic Boarding School, Nahdatul Ulama (NU) (EH, Personal Communication, March 17, 2017). The weekly and monthly schedule for each organization's activities includes:

Tahsin Al-Qur'an Recitation at the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan on Monday

Monday is the reading of *tahsin* at the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan's religious assembly. This study teaches the Qur'an differently to avoid saturating it, making it easy and fun to memorize. Other Qur'anic materials, such as *faqofah*, Islamic jurisprudence, faith, morality, and *marhaban* prayers, are also recited. Speakers vary at each meeting. Reciting the Tahsin Al-Qur'an helps Muslims follow Allah's commands, such as reading the Quran correctly and to lead Muslims to be together with people whom Allah Almighty glorifies (FM, Personal Communication, April 3, 2017).

In 2008–2009, the Tahsin Al-Qur'an recitation was conducted with only a 10–15 women congregation. When traditionally studying the Qur'an, many people memorize the theory but do not practice it. Others have good practices but flawed theories (AS, Personal Communication, April 7, 2017).

The Javanese principles: *ilate kuddu muni* (speaking loudly), *awake gerak* (the body must move), and *ikhlas nampane* (must be sincere) were used to give Tahsin Al-Qur'an from 2010 to 2011. After these three actions, reading the Qur'an aloud can improve recitation. The word "the body must move" refers to relaxing and making facial expressions to read the Qur'an fluently. Since we only want Allah's pleasure, we must be sincere when learning and worshipping (AS, Personal Communication, April 7, 2017).

From 15 to 20 congregations in 2011–2012, now, 70 congregations attended this Tahsin Al-Qur'an recitation. H. Atep Saepullah, the initiator of Tahsin Al-Qur'an recitation, formed a team to teach it so that the congregation could become teachers or instructors after 20 meetings. H. Atep Saepullah taught the Musyayamina Eretan Wetan Masjid congregation to promote Tahsin Al-Qur'an Recitation. The Tahsin community learns Al-Qur'an Tahsin from the beginning (AS, Personal Communication, April 7, 2017).

There are no obstacles in Tahsin Al-Qur'an Recitation. The number of congregations that participate in the recitation shows it. The difficulty in reciting the Tahsin Al-Qur'an may be the fluctuation of the congregation number in each recitation schedule, ranging from 70 congregations to 30 or 40 congregations on occasion since they have their activities, such as family gatherings, etc (FM, Personal Communication, April 3, 2017).

Sunday and Saturday dawn lectures

Men and women attend weekly Sunday and Saturday dawn lectures. After the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan was renovated in 2006, the lectures were scheduled 13 times for four months with 4 schedule changes. Depending on the weather, the congregation's involvement in Sunday and Saturday dawn lecture activities increases or decreases. At least 300 people attend dawn lectures on Sunday and

Saturday at Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan, 100 men and 200 women (FM, Personal Communication, April 3, 2017).

In 2007–2008, Sunday and Saturday dawn lectures were done indoors or outdoors at the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan. After the morning prayer in the congregation, they gather and pray. Then, the preacher opens it and begins the lecture for almost an hour. The congregation only listens to the preacher's material and has no question-and-answer session. In the end, the preacher and the congregation shake hands. Since 2009, Sunday and Saturday dawn lectures have had a question-and-answer session. Then, it is continued by shaking hands (FM, Personal Communication, April 3, 2017).

Before 2010, only MPB of the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan and nearby residents attended the Sunday and Saturday dawn lectures. From 2010 to 2011, NU, Persis, Muhammadiyah, PUI, and others could participate. Sunday and Saturday dawn lectures are pre-scheduled and delivered at the same hour, so there are no rules. The Musyayamina Mosque, Eretan Wetan management, has prepared places, loudspeakers, the congregation, and a replacement preacher if the assigned preacher is ill or has obstacles.

The community demanded that this activity be held at dawn for many reasons, especially for parents. First, to enable it more possible for the community to attend. At dawn, there are already many vehicles, and people who walk are not worried because the sky is already bright. The preacher focuses on lecturing because there is no other Islamic teaching at dawn. Due to the schedule, the preachers of dawn lectures always attend on time. Second, to reach 500–700 people if this activity is held at dawn (FM, Personal Communication, April 3, 2017).

About 50 preachers gave Sunday and Saturday morning lectures at the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan on morality, Islamic jurisprudence, monotheism, hadith, interpretation, and general topics. The preachers include US, CFM, MH, AS, ES, S, MH, and UR, etc. The criteria set for becoming a preacher are being competent in terms of religious knowledge, such as monotheism, Islamic jurisprudence, interpretation, moral hadith, etc. The preachers are used to delivering material either at Islamic boarding schools or in the community. These lectures help people apply religious knowledge to their daily lives, especially in worshipping God.

Fishing Mosque Youth Studies

Youth studies are held at the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan, where the youth are fishermen. Because of ideas to make the younger generation meaningful, anyone who wants to join the congregation can attend mosque youth studies and participate in mosque activities (IL, Personal Communication, May 14, 2017). This study began in 2000 and aimed to educate young people about religion, life, and spiritual knowledge. From 2000 to 2007, these studies grew from 30 to 50 congregations.

In the meantime, in 2008–2009, the youth activities did not operate as usual due to degradation or decline. The activities are limited, not as many as before. There has been no growth in youth studies at the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan for some time (IL, Personal Communication, May 14, 2017). From 2010–2012, the discussion of the study shifted to the primary discussion of *fardu ain*, monotheism, jurisprudence, morals, *siyasah*, and management of the mosque youth, and *musaqofah* or insight into religiosity (IL, Personal Communication, May 14, 2017).

One of the purposes of conducting mosque youth studies is to encourage the mosque's expansion with activities to accommodate youth so that there will be positive activities in the future for facilitating youth in the mosque. The mentors or teachers are the scholars in the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan neighborhood, including the younger teachers. After Friday prayers, youth lectures are conducted from approximately 14:00 until Asr. The advantages of holding this activity at the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan

Wetan are to foster the growth of the mosque and prepare the younger generation for a life of service to religion, nation, and state. BM initiated the youth studies at this mosque and promptly addressed the younger generation (BM, Personal Communication, May 14, 2017).

The studies of Wednesday, third Sunday, and Sunday evening

MPB of the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan holds a Wednesday recitation. The study of Hijbu Tahrir is on the third Sunday. Salimah is in charge of the Sunday afternoon study. The three studies begun in 2008 were public studies containing monotheism, Islamic jurisprudence, and morals, among other topics. 15 to 20 congregations join in each of these recitations (S, Personal Communication, May 14, 2017). In 2009, the congregation grew from 20 congregations to 40 or 50 congregations. Because society is aware of the significance of religious knowledge in today's era of globalization, particularly among Muslims, a large majority of people now prioritize it. On the other hand, the media, socializing, and other factors erode every Muslim's faith. Therefore, Islamic discourse or spreading Islamic teaching is essential in modern life to defend faith and monotheism (S, Personal Communication, May 14, 2017). Participating in these studies were the congregations of the Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan, the congregations of the Districts of South Eretan Wetan, the congregations of East Eretan Wetan, and so on. KH. Drs. Sobana was one of the preachers who always delivered Islamic da'wah about Islamic jurisprudence. The presented Islamic teaching varies, such as monotheism, religion, etc.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing and understanding the socio-religious life covered in this study, the author concludes. First, the socio-religious life of the Eretan Wetan community is characterized as a highly religious society in which religious and cultural values influence and strengthen each other, even though modernity causes changes and shifts in their values as they start moving. In order to lessen the impact of modernity, therefore, traditional scholars must play a role. Second, the mosque should not only serve as a place for ritual worship but also as a center for empowering people. The Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan demonstrated it as a center for empowering people in education, da'wah, economic empowerment, and *muamalah* (transaction) activities. The Musyayamina Mosque Eretan Wetan has shown its capacity to become the pride of the Eretan Wetan community and a central part of the da'wah policy perspective in Eretan Wetan.

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