

The Government's Policy Support for the Resistance and Local Wisdom of Fishermen on the North Coast of Java

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Abstract

This research examines The Government's Policy Support toward the resistance and local wisdom of fishermen on the North Coast of Java. The phenomenon of fishermen's attitudes on the North Coast of Java in facing structural injustice uses an ethnographic approach. The research was conducted over six months in three different locations to explore four key attitudes summarized in local concepts: *received* (accept with resignation) the policy, *gave up* (give in) to the impact of the policy, *switch* (avoid/shift) from the impact of the policy, and *angry* (against) policies that are not pro-fishermen. Through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with 45 fishermen. The results of the study indicate that the impartial of government policies towards the resistance and local wisdom of fishermen on the North Coast of Java gives rise to injustices faced by fishermen originating from three main factors: impartial government policies, competition with industrial vessels, and exploitative marketing systems. The pattern of fishermen's attitudes moves dynamically from accept to *angry*, influenced by socio-economic conditions, education levels, and collective experiences. This study contributes to the understanding of everyday resistance in the context of Indonesian coastal communities and provides recommendations for fisheries policy reforms that are more equitable and pro-small-scale fishermen.

Keywords: the government's policy support, structural injustice, resistance, local wisdom

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji keberpihakan kebijakan pemerintah pada resistensi dan kearifan lokal nelayan di Pantai Utara Jawa. Fenomena sikap nelayan di Pantai Utara Jawa dalam menghadapi ketidakadilan struktural menggunakan pendekatan etnografi. Penelitian dilakukan selama enam bulan di tiga lokasi berbeda untuk mengeksplorasi empat sikap utama yang terangkum dalam konsep lokal: *nrimo* (menerima dengan pasrah) pada kebijakan, *ngalah* (mengalah) pada dampak kebijakan, *ngalih* (menghindar/beralih) dari dampak kebijakan, dan *marah* (melawan) kebijakan yang tidak pro nelayan. Melalui observasi partisipatif dan wawancara mendalam dengan 45 nelayan. Penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Keberpihakan Kebijakan Pemerintah pada Resistensi dan Kearifan Lokal Nelayan di Pantai Utara Jawa memunculkan ketidakadilan yang dihadapi nelayan bersumber dari tiga faktor utama: kebijakan pemerintah yang tidak berpihak, kompetisi dengan kapal-kapal industri, dan sistem pemasaran yang eksploitatif. Pola sikap nelayan bergerak dinamis dari menerima hingga menolak dan marah, dipengaruhi oleh kondisi sosial-ekonomi, tingkat pendidikan, dan pengalaman kolektif. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman tentang resistensi sehari-hari (everyday resistance) dalam konteks masyarakat pesisir Indonesia dan memberikan rekomendasi untuk reformasi kebijakan perikanan yang lebih berkeadilan dan berpihak pada nelayan kecil.

Kata Kunci: keberpihakan kebijakan, ketidakadilan struktural, resistensi, kearifan lokal

INTRODUCTION

Fishing communities on the North Coast of Java face the reality of structural injustice that has persisted for decades. Inequality in access to resources, political marginalization, and economic exploitation are part of their daily lives that they must navigate (Satria, 2015). In this context, fishers have developed adaptation strategies rooted in local Javanese wisdom, manifested through four main attitudes: accepting with resignation, giving in, avoiding/moving away, and angry (resisting). Contrary to the common view that often views these attitudes as forms of weakness or passivity, this study argues that these four attitudes represent a spectrum of consciously and rationally chosen strategies (Kusnadi, 2016). According to Sudarso et al. (2019), these attitudes reflect the agency of fishers in navigating unequal power relations, similar to the concept of "weapons of the weak" introduced by Scott (1985) in his study of peasant resistance in Southeast Asia. The concept of *nrimo* in Javanese tradition is often misunderstood as a fatalistic attitude indicating total resignation to fate (Endraswara, 2018). However, ethnographic research conducted by Beatty (2012) shows that accept has a deeper philosophical dimension—not simply surrender to circumstances, but a form of psychological resilience to accept things beyond human control. For fishermen on the North Coast of Java, *nrimo* allows them to maintain inner balance amidst the uncertainties of marine life and structural pressures. Field observations conducted by Widodo (2018) in the Rembang fishing community revealed that fishermen with a deep understanding of accept actually demonstrated greater resilience in the face of economic and ecological crises. This attitude serves as a coping mechanism that allows fishermen to conserve their emotional energy and direct it towards things that are still within their control, such as strengthening communal bonds and diversifying livelihood strategies. The attitude of giving in and giving in reflects the strategic flexibility of fishermen in facing injustice. *Give up*—which is often interpreted as giving in or surrendering, is actually a form of local diplomacy aimed at avoiding direct confrontation with parties with greater power (Raharjo, 2017). Meanwhile, *switch* Avoidance or switching strategies demonstrate fishermen's adaptability in responding to environmental and socioeconomic changes. According to a longitudinal study conducted by Pomeroy et al.

(2016), fishermen who mastered the art of *ngalih*, the ability to shift fishing areas, change fishing techniques, or even temporarily switch professions, showed greater economic resilience than those who rigidly adhered to traditional patterns. Adli and Suprpto (2018) identified various patterns, *switch* developed by fishermen on the North Coast of Java, ranging from diversification of fishing gear, exploration of new fishing areas, to seasonal migration to non-fishing economic sectors, demonstrates high adaptive intelligence in facing structural pressures.

At the other end of the spectrum of fishermen's attitudes toward injustice is rage, a form of open resistance that emerges when the threshold of tolerance has been exceeded. Ferse et al. (2014) noted that mass protests, policy rejection, and even direct confrontations with commercial vessels are manifestations of rage that develop after accumulated disappointment and frustration. However, Putra and Cottrell (2017) show that rage is not an impulsive, uncalculated act, but rather a collective strategy that emerges when hidden channels of resistance are deemed ineffective. Cases of fisheries conflicts in Rembang, Pati, and Jepara over the past decade demonstrate how fishermen can move from a stance of *received* the *angry* when threats to their livelihoods reach critical levels. Factors triggering the transition to a violent behavior include territorial violations by commercial vessels, policies that threaten livelihood sustainability, and inequities in the distribution and marketing systems of catches.

The interaction between these four attitudes is not linear or exclusive, but rather forms a dynamic and contextual pattern. A fisherman may demonstrate an attitude of acceptance toward weather conditions, yield to large vessels, shift when catches decline, and so on *angry* when their basic rights are violated (Zamroni & Yamao, 2013). This complexity reflects the adaptive intelligence of fishing communities in navigating various structural pressures. According to Ferrol-Schulte et al. (2015), this fluidity of attitudes is also influenced by factors such as age, life experience, education level, and the social networks of the fishermen. A comparative study by Nurlaili and Nugroho (2018) in three fishing communities in Central Java showed that fishermen with strong communal ties tended more flexibly between these four attitudes, increasing their collective resilience in face of various forms of evolving structural injustice.

This research uses an ethnographic approach to uncover the nuances and complexities of these fishermen's attitudes. Through six months of participant observation in three different locations Juwana (Pati), Tanjung Mas (Semarang), and Gebang (Cirebon), the researchers sought to understand fishermen's attitudes within the context of their daily lives. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of the "tacit knowledge" and cultural logic underlying fishermen's choices (Geertz, 2017). Data collection methods included in-depth interviews with 45 fishermen of various ages and experiences, focus group discussions with community leaders, and ethnographic documentation of everyday practices in the face of injustice. As Creswell and Poth (2018) argue, ethnography provides space for marginalized voices to be articulated and understood within their own values, enabling an in-depth exploration of the logic underlying fishermen's attitudes, which are often misunderstood by outsiders.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to enriching the understanding of everyday forms of resistance in the context of Indonesian coastal communities. Unlike previous studies that often focused on the economic and technological aspects of fisheries (such as those by Fauzi, 2017; Hidayat, 2019), this research provides a new perspective by integrating the cultural, psychological, and political dimensions of fishers' attitudes. The findings of this research are expected to bridge the gap between policymakers' perspectives and the lived realities of fishers, contributing to the formulation of more inclusive and equitable policies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Government Policy and Partisanship

Public policy is seen as a state instrument for regulating, protecting, and empowering communities. According to Dye (2017), public policy is whatever the government chooses to do or not do. In the context of fishers, fisheries, environmental, and economic policies should favor vulnerable groups and be oriented toward social justice. However, policies are often top-down and pay little attention to local conditions (Anderson, 2014).

Social Resistance

Resistance arises when government policies conflict with the interests or values of society. Scott (1985) in *Weapons of the Weak* explains that community resistance often emerges in the form of everyday resistance to perceived oppressive powers. For Pantura fishermen, resistance can take the form of protests against detrimental regulations, rejection of certain modern fishing gear, or collective action to defend their living space.

1. **Local Wisdom**

Local wisdom is traditional values, norms, and practices passed down from generation to generation and serves as guidelines for managing natural resources. According to Geertz (1983), local wisdom embodies strong cultural, ethical, and solidarity elements within traditional communities. Among the fishing communities of the North Coast of Java (Pantura), local wisdom is evident in fishing traditions, customary rules regarding marine use, and rituals that maintain the balance between humans and nature.

2. **Marine and Fisheries Policy**

Previous studies have shown that maritime policy is often dominated by a macroeconomic perspective, focusing on fisheries industrialization (Satria, 2015). However, traditional fishers require policies that protect access, resource sustainability, and cultural continuity. Therefore, the relationship between state policy and the resistance and local wisdom of fishers is an important area for research.

Theoretical Framework

1. **Public Policy Theory**

Refers to **top-down vs bottom-up policy implementation models** (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983). This theory is used to analyze whether government policies in the maritime sector truly favor traditional fishermen or actually benefit certain interests.

2. **Resistance Theory**

Using perspective **James C. Scott (1985)** about community resistance to the domination of power. This theory is relevant to explaining the form of resistance of Pantura fishermen when policies are perceived as threatening their livelihoods and culture.

3. Local Wisdom Theory

Based on the concept of cultural anthropology (Geertz, 1983) and a local wisdom-based development approach (Sartini, 2004), this theory emphasizes that the values, norms, and traditions of fishing communities serve as social capital in facing changes in government policy.

4. Integrative Framework

Relationship between can be analyzed using an interactive approach. Unimpartialed policies give rise to resistance, while local wisdom becomes the basis for communities to maintain their existence and bargaining power.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses an ethnographic approach to deeply understand the attitudes of fishermen on the North Coast of Java in responding to the social and economic injustices they face. This method focuses on participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis to obtain an emic perspective from the fishing community (Spradley, 2016). Participant observation was conducted by living with fishermen for a minimum of three months to understand their social interaction patterns in dealing with conflict and injustice (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). In-depth interviews were conducted with fishermen, boat owners, and other stakeholders to explore the meaning behind the concept. *accept*, *give in*, *move*, And *angry* in their daily lives (Geertz, 1973). Furthermore, document analysis of fisheries policies and social conflicts in coastal areas was conducted to understand the structural context that shapes these attitudes (Scott, 1985). The data obtained were analyzed using a thematic method with an interpretive approach to uncover patterns of attitudes that emerge in the face of injustice (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources, methods, and researchers to ensure the validity of the research findings (Denzin, 2017). In the analysis process, everyday resistance theory was used as a lens to understand fishermen's strategies in dealing with external pressures (Scott, 1990). Thus, this study not only describes the reality of fishermen's lives but also reveals patterns of cultural resistance that are often hidden in their daily actions (Turner, 1980).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of North Java Province

The North Coast of Java, stretching from Banten to East Java, is a coastal region with unique geographical, social, and economic characteristics. This area is known as a center of maritime activity, with coastal ecosystems consisting of shallow waters, mangrove forests, and estuaries that are the main source of livelihood for fishing communities (Arifin et al., 2021). In addition to being a fishing hub, this region has also been a major trade route since colonial times, shaping a sea- and port-based economic structure (Reid, 2014). Fishermen on the North Coast of Java generally depend on their catch for their livelihood, using various types of vessels, ranging from traditional boats to larger motorboats (Satria, 2015). However, industrial development and exploitation of marine resources have posed significant challenges for small-scale fishers, including declining fish stocks, marine pollution from industrial waste, and competition from larger, more modern vessels (Bailey & Pomeroy, 1996). In the face of these pressures, fishermen employ a variety of social and cultural strategies that reflect their attitudes toward injustice, ranging from accepting the situation (*nrimo*), avoiding conflict (*ngalah*), seeking alternatives (*ngalih*), to resisting (*angry*) when their limits of patience are exceeded (Scott, 1990). The social structure of fishing communities on the North Coast of Java is also heavily influenced by patron-client relationships, where boat owners and middlemen often control the distribution of catches and fishermen's access to resources (Pelras, 2000). Although fishermen's lives are often considered marginal, they possess a complex economic and cultural system, with strong social networks for mutual support in difficult conditions (Murray, 1980). Thus, the North Coast of Java is not merely a geographical landscape, but also a social space that reflects the ongoing dynamics of injustice and resistance in the lives of coastal communities.

Characteristics of Fishermen on the North Coast of Java

Fishermen on the North Coast of Java have distinctive social, economic, and cultural characteristics, shaped by their interactions with the coastal environment and the dynamics of the maritime economy. Economically, most fishermen in this region

fall into the category of small-scale fishermen who rely on traditional fishing gear such as gillnets, handlines, and traps, although some medium-scale fishermen use larger-capacity motorized vessels (Satria, 2015). This dependence on increasingly limited marine resources causes fishermen to face high economic uncertainty, particularly due to weather factors, fisheries policies, and competition with larger vessels using modern technology (Bailey & Pomeroy, 1996). Socially, the lives of fishermen are characterized by strong patron-client relationships, where ship owners or bosses often act as capital providers and economic guarantors for small-scale fishermen, but on the other hand, create structural dependencies that limit their economic freedom (Pelras, 2000). Fishing communities also have a high level of solidarity, especially in the face of economic hardship and natural disasters, which is reflected in the practice of mutual cooperation and the profit-sharing system that is still applied in distributing profits from fishing catches (Murray, 1980). From a cultural perspective, fishermen on the North Coast of Java have a value system influenced by local wisdom and religious teachings, which is reflected in the concept of *received* (accept the situation with resignation), *gave up* (avoiding conflict), *switch* (looking for other alternatives), and *angry* (fighting when the situation becomes more stressful) (Scott, 1990). This attitude is not only related to how they deal with injustice in the fisheries economic system, but also reflects their adaptation strategies to social and political pressures (Adhuri, 2013). Furthermore, the existence of traditions and rituals such as sea alms shows that fishermen see the sea not only as an economic resource, but also as a spiritual entity that must be respected and maintained in balance (Susanto, 2017). Thus, the characteristics of fishermen on the North Coast of Java are the result of a combination of economic, social, and cultural factors that shape their survival strategies in facing various challenges coming from outside and from within their own communities.

Government Policy Support

Fishermen's attitudes toward injustice on the North Coast of Java are the result of the interaction between socio-economic conditions, local culture, and the ever-evolving dynamics of maritime politics. Fishermen in this region are often in a

vulnerable position because they depend on dwindling marine catches due to overexploitation and changes in fisheries policies that do not always favor them (Satria, 2015). This economic uncertainty is exacerbated by a fisheries distribution system that tends to favor large investors over small-scale fishers, leading to structural inequalities within coastal communities (Bailey & Pomeroy, 1996). In facing this situation, fishers do not simply react in the same way, but have different strategies, which can be categorized into four main behavioral patterns: *received* (accept the situation), *gave up* (avoiding conflict), *switch* (looking for other alternatives), and *angry* (resistance) (Scott, 1990). These four attitudes are a form of adaptation to external pressures of an economic, political, and social nature.

Attitude *received* often appears as an expression of resignation to difficult circumstances, where fishermen choose to accept existing conditions without actively resisting them. This attitude is often associated with Javanese cultural values that emphasize patience and resignation to fate (Magnis-Suseno, 1997). For some fishermen, accepting difficult conditions is seen as a form of piety and devotion to God's will, especially when faced with uncertain catches or injustice in the fish distribution system (Adhuri, 2013). However, this attitude can also be a form of powerlessness due to limited access to capital, technology, and policies that support their well-being (Pelras, 2000). In this context, *received* not just a form of passive resignation, but also a survival strategy in difficult conditions, even with the consequence of limited social and economic space for movement.

Besides *receive*, attitude *gave up* is also a key strategy in dealing with conflict and injustice in the fisheries sector. Many fishers choose to avoid direct confrontation with large vessel owners or government authorities for fear of greater social and economic consequences (Scott, 1985). For example, in conflicts over fishing grounds between small-scale fishers and trawlers, small-scale fishers often choose to give in and move to other areas rather than face the risk of criminalization or violence (Satria, 2015). This attitude *gave up*. This can also be found in patron-client relationships, where small-scale fishermen tend to avoid disputes with financiers or middlemen because they are highly dependent on the credit system or market access mediated by

these parties (Murray, 1980). Although seemingly passive, this attitude actually reflects a shrewdness in managing risk to survive in an unfair system.

Meanwhile, *switch* be a more active strategy compared to *received* and *give in*, where fishermen seek alternatives to cope with difficulties. This adaptation can include moving to other fishing grounds, temporarily changing professions, or adopting more efficient fishing technologies to increase catches (Bailey & Pomeroy, 1996). For example, some fishermen on the North Coast of Java, experiencing difficulties due to declining fish stocks, have begun shifting to aquaculture or other land-based jobs, such as dock labor or small-scale trading (Adhuri, 2013). This strategy demonstrates flexibility in responding to economic challenges, but also indicates that the existing fishing system does not guarantee sustainability for small-scale fishermen. In a social context, **ngalih** can also be interpreted as a form of silent resistance to an unfair system, where fishermen seek to escape dependence on patrons or middlemen by seeking more independent distribution channels (Scott, 1990).

As economic pressures and injustice mount, some fishermen no longer choose to accept or avoid, but instead take a stand *angry* or openly resist. This attitude often manifests itself in protests, demonstrations, and even acts of violence against parties deemed detrimental to the interests of small-scale fishermen (Turner, 1980). For example, conflicts between traditional fishermen and trawlers in several areas of Java's North Coast often result in boat burning or physical clashes as a form of anger at the injustice they experience (Satria, 2015). This resistance is not only a spontaneous expression, but also the result of accumulated long-held disappointment in a system that does not favor them. In many cases, this attitude *angry* is the only way for fishermen to get attention from the government or authorities so that fairer policies can be implemented (Scott, 1985).

Despite the high risks, the resistance carried out by fishermen through their attitudes *angry* often brings about policy changes that favor them. For example, various demonstrations and protests by fishermen against detrimental fisheries policies, such as the ban on certain fishing gear without alternative solutions, have forced the government to review the regulations implemented (Adhuri, 2013). In this context, the

attitude of fishermen *angry* It is not only a form of expression of anger, but also a political strategy to gain recognition and fairer rights in the fisheries sector. However, without strong institutional support, this resistance often does not produce sustainable change, as the larger economic and political system continues to benefit those with greater capital and power (Pelras, 2000).

By understanding the dynamics between *accept*, *yield*, *shift*, and *angry*, we can see that fishermen's attitudes toward injustice are not static, but rather a form of response that continues to evolve according to the social, economic, and political conditions they face. These four attitudes demonstrate how fishermen on the North Coast of Java are not simply victims of an unfair system but also have their own strategies for dealing with external pressures (Scott, 1990). In the long term, these patterns may change along with policy changes, technological developments, and increased collective awareness among fishermen in fighting for their rights. Therefore, understanding fishermen's attitudes within the context of their culture and social structure is key to designing more inclusive policies that support the well-being of coastal communities.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that government policy support for fishermen on the North Coast of Java remains very weak, giving rise to various forms of resistance. Fishermen face structural injustice stemming from impartial policies, the dominance of industrial vessels, and an exploitative marketing system. In facing these conditions, fishermen's attitudes shift dynamically, ranging from *received* (receive), *gave up* (give in), *switch*(avoid), until *angry*(resistance). This dynamic is influenced by socio-economic factors, education levels, and the collective experiences of fishermen, which reflect the existence of adaptive strategies as well as forms of daily resistance (*everyday resistance*) in maintaining their survival.

Thus, this research emphasizes the importance of local wisdom as a basis for public policy in the fisheries sector. The existence of local values among fishermen is not only a tradition, but also a social capital for facing injustice and structural pressures.

Therefore, fairer fisheries policy reforms that favor small-scale fishers are urgently needed, by integrating local wisdom, strengthening protection for traditional fishers, and creating a more equitable marketing system. These efforts will not only reduce resistance but also build sustainable and competitive fisheries governance for coastal communities.

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