

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Textiles are often subjectively associated with the world of females. Like in Sumba, producing the exquisite woven textiles, which is globally known as *Ikat*, is the skill women have to master (Soeriadiredja, 2013). In 2018, the researcher had an opportunity to personally observe the *Ikat* textile production in Sumba. The researcher was impressed by the fact that *Ikat* textile is very intricately beautiful. When the researcher heard about the indigo dyeing that can only be done by women, she was most intrigued with the gender labor division that might exist in the production of Sumbanese *Ikat* textiles. Its extremely intricate process has made much sense for people to see this as more like women's work instead of men's for it requires patience, dedication, tenacity, and months or even years of work. Taking a closer look at the process of production in printed books, journals, catalogues, and articles, nearly none of the Sumbanese men seem to ever contribute themselves in the process of production, particularly in the weaving process. Although females dominate this work, that does not necessarily mean that men have never contributed themselves in the production. As Jill Forshee (2000) demonstrates in her book *Between the Folds: Stories of Cloth, Lives, and Travels from Sumba*, in former days, men would help women travel to market textiles in larger cities or even other islands, while the women would stay behind and weave textiles at home with other female weavers as women were not allowed to leave the house to market the textiles.

They believed that there would be a tendency for the women to be sexually harassed or spelt by black magic (Forshee, 2000, p.10). In the past, men were the ones who would have the easy access to travel around. From what she explains, both men and women took a role in the production; however, it can be clearly seen that labor is determined by gender.

The researcher believes that gender labor division found in the production may go through some changes from time to time seeing the rapid globalization. This statement is strengthened by what Forshee (2000) says about how this may go through some changes. Unlike in the former days, women are now able to go outside and market their products. Meanwhile, men would no longer be the only ones who could market yet they can get involved in the designing process and some other steps. From what the researcher has illustrated previously, it can be concluded that there are some changes made at the present times within the production. Not only being produced as ceremonial textiles, but *Ikat* textile has also become an industry that promises more profit than agricultural business for people in Sumba (Quincey, 2001). The rising primary income from *Ikat* textile industry becomes the main reason for the labor division changes in production and marketing among the locals.

To the researcher's knowledge, several scholars have raised the issue of gender labor division in general as Forshee (2000) and Nichols et al. (2017) have carried out. The other studies mostly only focus on the functions and the history behind the textiles and their intriguing motifs (Quincey (2001); Adams (2014)) rather than the gender labor division. Though Nichols et al. and Forshee have discussed some issues regarding the gender labor division, the researcher would like to dig up deeper on it. On one hand,

Forshee (2000) highlights the gender labor division found within men and women in the production of textiles. However, the discussions seem to be limited and left undetailed as she talks more about it in general. On the other hand, the other book entitled *Women's Work* has discussed the same issue, yet, Nichols et al. (2017) only put the women to the spotlight as the book aims to discuss women's work only. What women were capable of doing and what they are now capable of doing without any help given by the men are the main focus of the discussion. Based on these discussions, the researcher would like to conduct further research on gender labor division in the process of production. In this case, the researcher would also like to prove several statements stated in these two books, *Between the Folds: Stories of Cloth, Lives, and Travels from Sumba* and *Women's work*, along with seeing the changes made over time.

The researcher intends to fill the gaps left by other scholars in terms of gender labor division in the production of *Ikat* textiles. Gender labor division in the researcher's definition is the works shared by women and men, single sexed or both, in the production of Sumbanese woven *Ikat* textiles. In discussing gender labor division, the researcher will also talk about the changes that happen over time. The researcher will try to reveal the reasons for the changes in the roles between women and men in the production of Sumbanese *Ikat* textiles.

1.2 Field of the Study

The field of the study is Gender Studies as it deals with the gender labor division in the production of Sumbanese *Ikat* textiles.

1.3 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on gender labor division among Sumbanese in the production of Sumbanese *Ikat* textiles, starting from raw materials to final product viewed from a gender perspective.

1.4 Problem Formulation

The researcher has two significant problems in this research:

1. What are the differences between past and present of the gender labor division in the production of Sumbanese *Ikat* textiles?
2. What makes the changes of gender labor division in the production of Sumbanese *Ikat* textiles?

1.5 Objectives of the Study

From the problem formulation above, the researcher has two objectives:

1. To find out the differences found between the gender labor division in the production of Sumbanese *Ikat* textiles: past and present.
2. To discover the reason behind the changes in gender labor division in the production of the Sumbanese *Ikat* textiles.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The researcher attempts to give readers a deeper insight into the production of Sumbanese *Ikat* textiles which is assumed to be dominated by Sumbanese women.

1.7 Definition of Term

1.7.1 Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are beliefs and views widely held by society that males and females possess different characteristics and psychological traits. Apart from being commonly used as a standard to evaluate others (Basow, 1980), gender stereotypes may limit the capacity in developing the ability of both males and females pursuing their careers and making choices (Helwig, 1998).

1.7.2 Gender Roles

Gender roles are roles that expect women and men to enroll themselves or to perform different tasks based on the stereotypes created by society (Williams, 1995). Not only in realms of family where males would be the wage earner and the women would dedicate themselves in domestic spaces, but also in realms of work where they are expected to perform and occupy different tasks based on their sex (Kanter, 1977).

1.7.3 Sumba

Sumba is an island that lies in Eastern Indonesia. It is in the province of East Nusa Tenggara which is 300 kilometers away from Bali. Unlike Bali, Sumba is seen to be remote, poor, isolated and off the grid to the increasingly globalized world (Vel, 2008). Most of the people there live from agriculture, raising livestock and producing woven textiles. This island has a population of 755.849 (Indonesia: Eastern Lesser Sunda Islands Province, 2015) and most of them still hold the ancient belief Marapu. Sumba itself is divided into four regencies; West Sumba, Southwest Sumba, Central Sumba, and East Sumba. The most populated regency of Sumba is in the East of Sumba, particularly in the city of Waingapu. Waingapu has been the central hub for trading textiles in Sumba (Soelarto, 1976).

1.7.4 Sumbanese Textiles

For centuries, Sumba has been globally recognized for the produced woven textiles. *ikat*, as it is derived from the Malay word “to bind” or “to tie” simply summarizes the technique used of the ornamentation for these well-known produced textiles (Forshee (2000); Coleman & Hann (2008); Quincey (2001)). The textiles made represent how the previous generation passes on its message to the future generation behind the various motifs, designs, symbols and images emblazoned in textiles, so the history remains (Quincey, 2001). It is also used as the locals' media to show the pride and identity of their caste. It is frequently used as either part of a ceremonial dress or traditional exchange practices, such as wedding and burial ceremonies (Warming & Gaworski, 1981). To make such a good quality of products, the process of production takes months or even years, starting from finding and collecting the raw materials, dying, weaving, binding, resting, and other complicated steps as parts of production (Iverson, 2017, p.7)