

Exploring Ecological Rituals of Indigenous People in Indonesia Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has far-reaching impacts on economic, political, and social aspects of indigenous communities worldwide, including those in Indonesia. This study delves into the often overlooked effects of the pandemic, exposing cases of poverty, hunger, and limited access to healthcare among indigenous peoples. Utilizing a non-systematic literature review method, the research aims to uncover the meanings and significance of ecological rituals for indigenous women in Indonesia. The study critically evaluates relevant literature, identifying key themes and patterns related to these rituals within cultural, social, and environmental contexts. Results indicate that indigenous women exhibit strong resilience during the pandemic, rooted in communal living and close community bonds. Social restrictions have minimal impact on their traditional activities, and various rituals serve as effective coping mechanisms, fostering psychological well-being. This research contributes to understanding the ecological knowledge, practices, and beliefs of indigenous women, offering insights for sustainable development and conservation efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Plagues in the world have existed since the existence of humans on the face of the earth, as recorded outbreaks of influenza (Spanish flu), bubonic plague, Justinian plague, Swine Flu and SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome). In Indonesia, extraordinary outbreaks that occur such as malaria outbreaks, folio outbreaks, smallpox outbreaks, cholera outbreaks, bird flu outbreaks, Ebola outbreaks and other infectious disease outbreaks even to HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) outbreaks and the Corona virus that today sweeps the world, including Indonesia. The resilience of local communities or indigenous peoples in Indonesia has various ways of responding to outbreaks in their respective territorial areas.

According to the UN, there are more than 476 million indigenous peoples in the world, which are found in all land areas of the world, where indigenous peoples live poorly in remote and isolated environments that are difficult to reach by health

services (United Nation, 2020). In response to the outbreak, most indigenous communities in Indonesia performed various rituals that were believed to be repellents. Rituals are performed with a specific purpose and maskud, some aimed at drawing closer to the creator to obtain protection and safety (Koentjaraningrat, 2009).

Indonesia is a country with rich cultural and ecological diversity, home to more than 300 ethnic groups and an array of ecological systems. Indigenous peoples in Indonesia have developed unique ecological knowledge, practices, and beliefs that have enabled them to sustainably manage and conserve their natural resources for generations (Niko et al., 2024). Among the many forms of ecological knowledge and practices are ecological rituals, which are often deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual traditions of indigenous communities (McGrath, 2024).

Despite the importance of ecological rituals in indigenous communities, little is known about the meanings and significance of these rituals for indigenous women in Indonesia. Women often play critical roles in the preservation and transmission of ecological knowledge and practices, yet their perspectives and experiences are frequently overlooked in research and policy. This article aims to fill this gap by exploring the attachment of ecological rituals of indigenous women in Indonesia.

The ritual was in ancient times to repel diseases that occurred in livestock in the village. At that time all farm animals such as chickens, ducks, pigs and others died from pestilence. During the kingdom's Hindu-Buddhist tradition in Indonesia, in the ritual of rejecting bala used offerings such as buffalo heads, roosters, rice and various other types of offerings to be washed away in rivers or seas. It has a close relationship with the beliefs of the people who are relics of the ancestors in the age of animism (Tylor, 2010).

This ritual itself is a response to anxiety, fear that envelops the local community. As Homans (1941) argues that there is a connection between a ritual and anxiety in society, where the ritual itself is carried out due to anxiety/fear. Therefore, Homans made a definition that rituals are born to overcome existing anxiety, although it has no direct effect on the achievement of goals.

Not only in Indonesia, Moeller & Pedersen (2020) [5] tells that indigenous tribes in the Amazon who live diverse lives, have knowledge in cultivating forests into sources of medicine and food, and they also perform special rituals in response to disease outbreaks. The same goes for the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. Fortunately for Aboriginal peoples and other indigenous communities, they are

equipped with special protocols to avoid the outbreak of coronavirus in isolated communities (Australia Health Government, 2020).

However, the customary rituals performed by these indigenous peoples are scientifically preventive as not credible. It may be brief, but untested as a prolonged preventive measure (Niko, 2020) [7]. It's just that the central government and local and village governments have not had any initiatives to form a COVID-19 prevention officer unit.

This research is guided by several key questions: How trend research on ecological rituals practiced by indigenous people in Indonesia? How do these ecological rituals influence the lives and identities of indigenous people, and what factors shape their attachment to these practices? Through this exploration, the study aims to shed light on the ecological knowledge, practices, and beliefs of indigenous people in Indonesia, as well as their potential contribution to promoting sustainable development and conservation.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, focusing on how indigenous communities in Indonesia have responded to the pandemic. The data collection process relies on secondary sources, including scientific journals and online news articles, which detail the rituals conducted by these communities during the Covid-19 pandemic. A non-systematic literature review was utilized to establish the research context, highlighting the meanings and significance of ecological rituals among indigenous women in Indonesia, thereby forming the basis for the research design and methodology.

The data collection involved a comprehensive search for relevant literature was conducted using appropriate keywords related to “ecological rituals” AND “indigenous people”. The literature was analyzed using qualitative techniques such as thematic or content analysis to explore the meanings and significance of ecological rituals for indigenous women, particularly their beliefs and values concerning the environment, community, and spirituality. The data also visualized using R-Studio.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study explores the attachment of ecological rituals among indigenous women in Indonesia, seeking to understand the meaning and significance factors that influence attachment to these rituals. Study by CIFOR (2020) examined the use of

traditional ecological knowledge by women in the Dayak community in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, and found that women play critical role in the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources through their participation in ecological rituals and practices.

Rituals attached to Indigenous women: How pandemic affect?

Indigenous peoples in Asia territories are in mountains, plains, river basins, forest, and coastal area. Basically, all indigenous tribal communities in Southeast Asia need help to work hand in hand to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (. Indigenous peoples who are in rural areas and are difficult to reach are actually very vulnerable to the severity of the COVID-19 situation, especially for those who are elderly and have congenital diseases (Eligh, 2020).

The development of the indigenous concept stems from the experience of colonialism, where indigenous peoples experienced marginalization due to colonialism. The process of marginalization is still happening today. Indigenous women in Asia over experience particular forms of discrimination because of their multiple identities, discrimination against them as indigenous people, and discrimination of a different form against their gender.

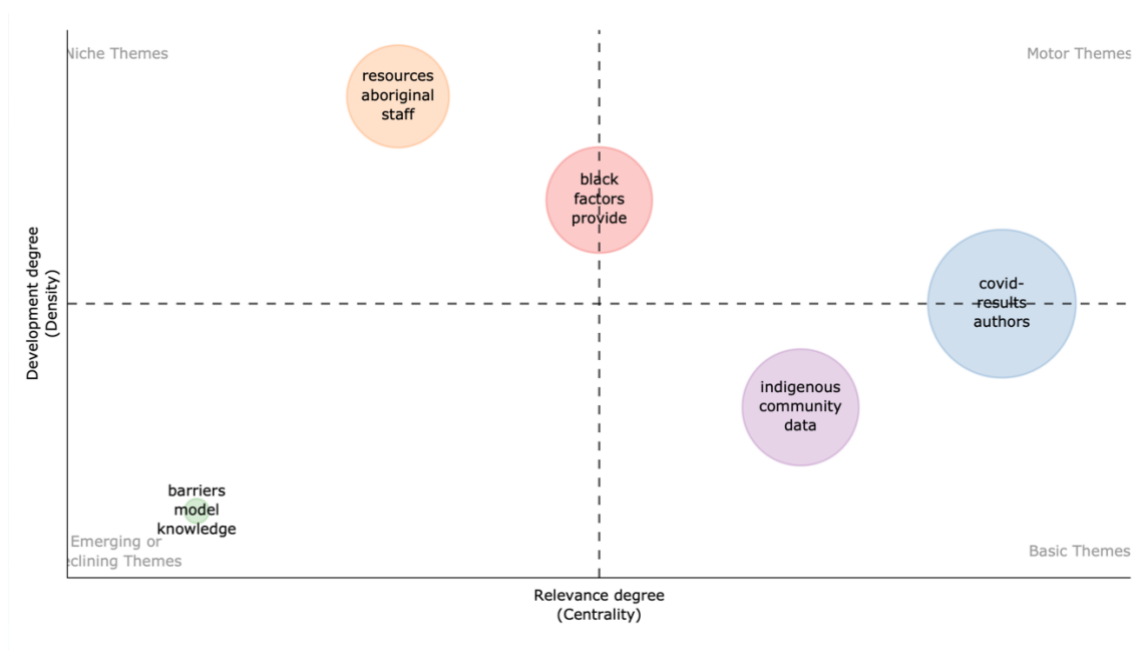


Figure 1. Thematic Map on Indigenous People and Ecological Ritual

Based on Figure 1, it can be observed that research topics related to indigenous people and ecological rituals indicate that the indigenous community is not positioned as a

driving force but rather at a foundational level. This suggests that the focus of research in this area tends to emphasize the fundamental aspects of indigenous communities and their ecological practices, rather than positioning them as key agents of change or leadership in broader environmental movements.

In Southeast Asia many indigenous peoples are not legally recognized as indigenous people with inherent collective rights. The alienation and marginalization of indigenous women in Indonesia can be attributed to the fact that they do not have a specific legal law for protect them as a community. This can be seen also in the subordination (marginalization) of women in accessing not only development, but also land tenure and use.

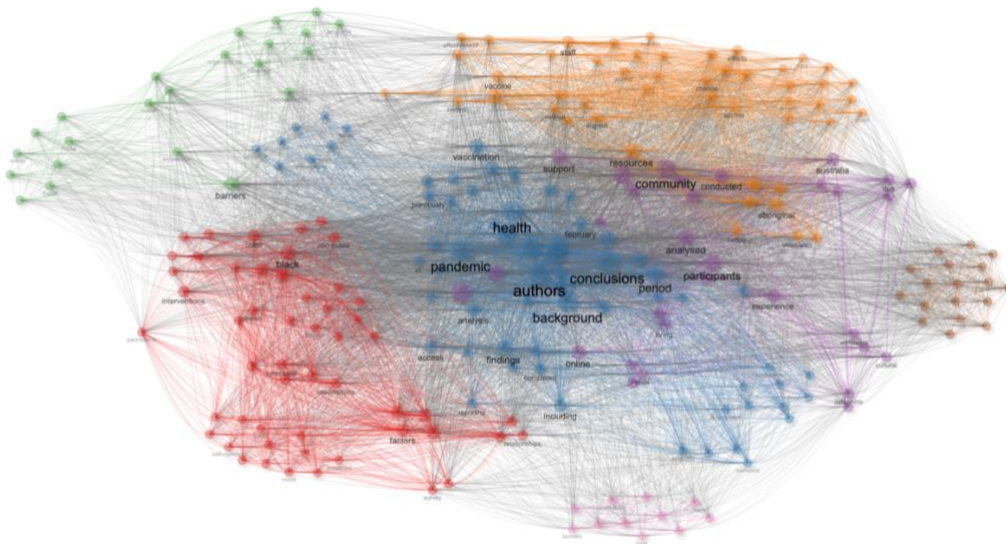


Figure 2. Thematic Network Research on Indigenous People and Ecological Ritual

Various rituals are carried out by Dayak tribes in West Kalimantan whose meaning is the same, namely the ritual of rejecting diseases in their respective areas, for example when responding to the COVID-19 outbreak that occurred in 2020 in the Indigenous communities of the Tampun Juah Community, Juah of the Dayak Desa tribe, Dayak Jalai, Dayak Meratus, Dayak Benawan, and Dayak Tae (Susanto, 2020; Niko, 2021).

Gluckman (1965) mentions that there is a symbolic bond between social and psychological in a ritual, therefore ritual is mentioned as a reactionary expression of a group that involves behavior in social relations, religious actions and cults with mystical working ways (Stuckrad, 2002).

Ritual is actually a community behavior that conforms to certain customary norms that are used as ethical standards that are binding on certain social situations (Turner, 1969), with the expectation that behavior according to these customary norms brings a certain good to the community (Bigger & Turner, 2009).

Traditionally, the indigenous women have played an important role in preserving nature for the survival of their children (Rupita & Niko, 2020; Niko, 2020). Significantly, traditional ecological knowledge contributes to maintaining biodiversity and building resilience of environmental ecosystems in the face of global change. Unfortunately, the natural ecosystems in are being degraded by the massive expansion of palm oil and mining companies in Indonesia.

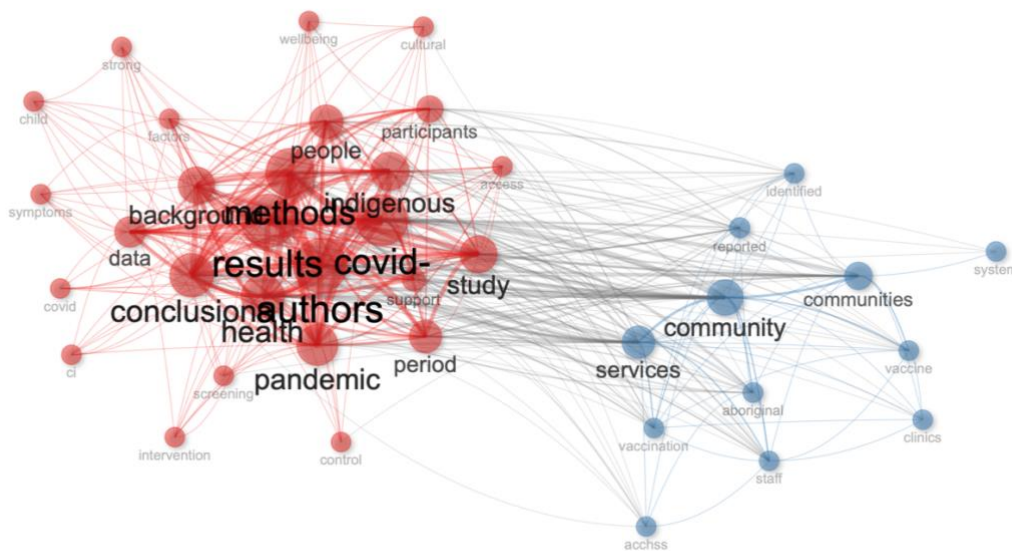


Figure 3. Co-occurrence Network on Indigenous People and Ecological Ritual

The study of attachment to ecological rituals of indigenous women in Indonesia can help promote cultural preservation, environmental conservation, gender equality, and community empowerment. It is important to approach this research with sensitivity and respect for the cultural practices of these communities, and to involve members of these communities in the research process.

The implication that researcher can imply is that indigenous ecological rituals have been passed down through generations and are an important part of the cultural identity of many communities in Indonesia. By studying these rituals, researchers can help preserve and document the cultural practices of these communities. Indigenous communities in Indonesia often face marginalization and discrimination, and the study of their ecological rituals can help empower these

communities by highlighting their cultural heritage and promoting their unique practices.

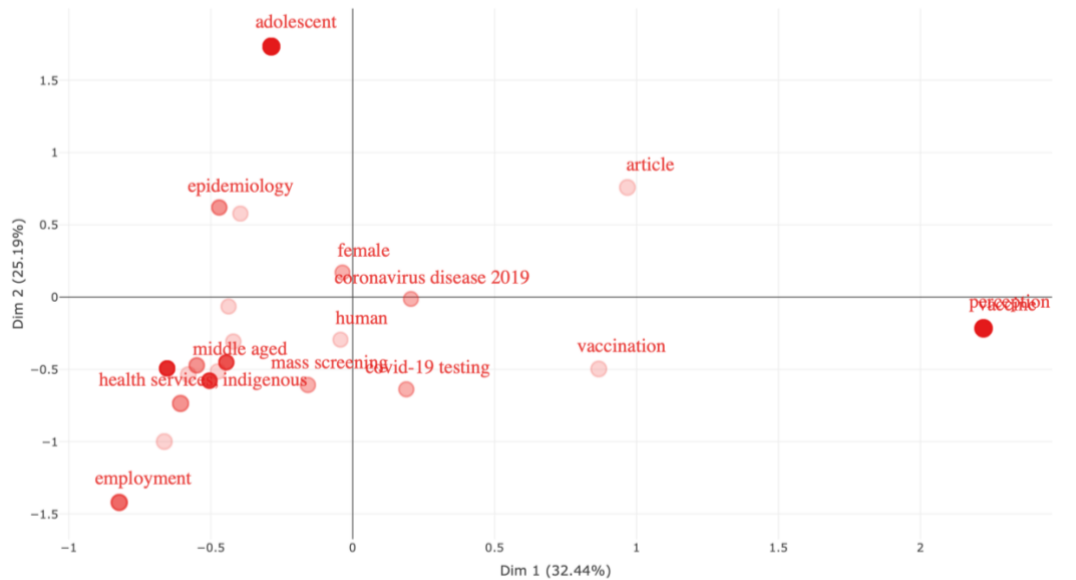


Figure 4. Factorial Analysis Research on Indigenous People and Ecological Ritual

Furthermore, many indigenous ecological rituals in Indonesia are centered around the conservation of the environment and the sustainable use of natural resources. By understanding the cultural significance of these practices, researcher can help promote environmentally sustainable practices and raise awareness about the importance of preserving the natural environment. Indigenous women in Indonesia play a critical role in the ecological rituals and practices of their communities. By studying their attachment to these rituals, researcher can highlight the important role that women play in environmental conservation and promote gender equality.

Based on the the discussion above abut ecological rituals of indigenous communities have been passed down through generations, and understanding the attachment of indigenous women to these rituals requires a long-term perspective. Future research can conduct participatory research to ensure that the study of ecological rituals of indigenous women in Indonesia is respectful and sensitive to the cultural practices of these communities, researcher should engage in participatory research approaches that involve community members in the research process. This can help build trust and ensure that the research reflects the perspectives and needs of these communities. Furthermore, the study of attachment to ecological rituals of indigenous women in Indonesia can have important policy implications for environmental conservation and gender equality.

CONCLUSION

The indigenous women still maintaining their knowledge to caring for nature. Caring for the environment with this tradition of women's knowledge has existed in the life of the indigenous women in the past and present. This psychological bond between women and nature shows how women are an important element in sustainable environment. The study of attachment to ecological rituals of indigenous women in Indonesia has important implications for cultural preservation, environmental conservation, and gender equality.

To fully understand the role of these rituals in lives of indigenous women, future studies should adopt a participatory approach. Such studies can help promote a deeper understanding of ecological knowledge and practices of indigenous communities and inform policies that support their culture heritage and sustainable use of natural resources. The local knowledge that are part of the lives of the indigenous women indirectly maintain the balance of the natural ecosystem; where there are humans that respects nature, and maintain a good relationship with nature. Today's indigenous women continue to participate in nurturing and preserving the tradition despite the large amount of expansion in their land and their sea. Pandemic not even help them from the massive expansion in their home.

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