
INDIGENOUS CONCEPTS OF GENDER, COMMUNICATION AND SPATIAL PROCESSES: A CASE OF
KASEPUHAN CIPTAGELAR, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

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Cultural factors arguably are significant concerning how humans, thoughts, and products progress and organize spatially. In terms of indigenous people, they carry a symbol of irreplaceable diversity where men and women have different gender roles and responsibilities compared to contemporary communities. Hence, this paper attempts to explore the indigenous understandings of gender in one of the most distinctive indigenous communities in Indonesia, known as Kasepuhan Ciptagelar. The authors conducted a qualitative case study to investigate how spatial processes are linked to gender identities and activism in the community. The Findings show that the traditional community has implemented a form of gender equity, unlike the standard practice in modern Indonesian society. The concept of gender equity was established as a form of social cooperation as a result of a geographical process where natural factors notably shaped their day to day life.

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1. Introduction

Throughout human history, spatial design has played a role in formulating the concept of gender to be its specific discourse. The discussion of gender and spatial issue was firstly recorded in the Middle Ages until the 19th century, where gender was studied based on its association with space and time (Price, 2009). The discussion expanded more in the 1970s, where feminist theories rose to address issues on spatial space, development, and capitalist industry. Price (2009) added that ontological and methodological approaches on gender studies had been a part of historical geography in the way of analyzing how the past impacted the present and its association with postmodern ideas about gender identity and representation. The discussion of gender in spatial context has been rapidly growing, from discussing gender based on the space within the house (Farooq & Kayani, 2014), discussion of gender in urban spaces (Peake, 2016) and even rural spaces (Little, 2009).

Spatial and architectural designs not only play a role in creating living spaces, but also in communicating and expressing values (Fahreza & Sastrosasmito, 2018). Additionally, these conditions play a role in shaping gender roles in indigenous peoples.

There is a common assumption from the biological point of view where women in indigenous communities are considered inferior in nature due to the harsh geographical, and cultural conditions require someone with a stronger physique to survive. However, Creanza et al, (2017) challenged the first assumption by emphasizing that the primary mode of human adaptation is the culture, not the biological anatomy. They added that in the geographical space of primordial indigenous peoples, it is male chauvinism that has created cultural conditioning that ultimately subjugates indigenous women to an inferior state.

This view of cultural conditioning is in line with Samovar (2009), who believed that gender identity is somewhat different from biological sex identity. Gender refers to how certain cultures differentiate feminine and masculine social roles. In short, gender identity refers to the interpretations regarding the expected image and impression of a man and a woman. Culture then influences what constitutes the image of gender and how it is represented across cultures.

Aside from the geographical and cultural influences on the indigenous people's values, external threats on geographic space have also affected gender roles in indigenous peoples. The American natives of *Haudenosaunee* and *Cherokee* tribes initially had more fluid and dynamic gender roles. However, they were pressured by the foreign settlers to have a binary gender by separating the roles of men and women to weaken the power of the indigenous peoples so that their land can be captured. (Kuokkanen, 2019). The geographic and cultural expansion brought about by the European imperialist at that time had brought a system of colonial perspectives, which is often in contrast with the way indigenous peoples view the world, including the roles of gender (Howitt et al., 2009).

In this paper, the authors would like to pinpoint an indigenous community in Indonesia that has an atypical case of gender roles compared to the general consensus of indigenous women in other communities. Amid the common view that indigenous women are always marginalized (Aikman & Robinson-Pant, 2019). An indigenous community was known as "Kasepuhan Ciptagelar" is actually able to live in harmony by accepting a more fluid role of men and women. Kasepuhan Ciptagelar is an indigenous community located in West Java, Indonesia, which relies on its agricultural way of living. The conditions in Kasepuhan Ciptagelar project a uniqueness since the women in the community play an arguably balanced role of gender, unlike the marginalized state of indigenous women, and this balanced role is also shaped by the way they acknowledge the geographical values of this agrarian society (Rahman & Kusdiwanggo, 2018).

Accordingly, Cornwall (2007) explained that Gender equity is essential for sustainable peace, and there is a growing body of empirical evidence suggesting that a lower level of gender inequality is associated with lower risks of conflicts within a society. Understanding these gender relations and the power dynamics behind them is a prerequisite for understanding individuals' access to and distribution of resources, the ability to make decisions, and the way gender roles are affected by political, geographical, and social development.

Based on the rationale above, the current paper attempts to gain more understanding by studying the way the community in "kasepuhan Ciptagelar" constructed their concept of gender roles. Moreover, the paper focuses on exploring this concept of gender construction by considering cultural, geographical, and internalized gender values within the indigenous community

2. Method

The study was based on a qualitative study approach by using the case study method. In collecting the data, the authors conducted in-depth interviews and observation protocols at *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar* indigenous village. As the key informants, eight of the village's central figures were selected. The authors conducted semi-structured and non-structured interviews that took place in the informant homes and common space within the village. The Interviews were conversational and lasted about 1-2 hours. Open-ended questions were asked by using *Sundanese* (the local language). The interview questions were based on a predefined list of interview topics that covered broad questions regarding their concept of gender roles, its association with spatial processes, and how do they communicate the principles to the next generation.

The non-participatory observation was conducted at an interval of six months to collect further information and data confirmation. The observation was focused on how the indigenous community implemented their perspective on gender and spatial processes on their daily basis. The data were then coded, interpreted, and then analyzed by using thematic analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By performing this process, emergent themes were collectively reviewed and formulated as the study findings. In enhancing the validity of the findings, the authors performed data triangulation (Denzin, 2012) by gathering more data from related documents and confirming the findings to expert informants. The latter have relevant knowledge in the studies of Indonesian indigenous communities.

3. Results and Discussion

Agricultural Values as the Foundation of the Community's Concept of Gender

The findings of the study found that agrarian society principles contribute to balancing the roles between men and women in "Kasepuhan Ciptagelar." Since Kasepuhan Ciptagelar is widely known as a more traditional *Sundanese* ethnic group, their teachings, traditions, and ancient *Sundanese* ideals are nationally recognized, and their way of living in harmony with nature to continue to preserve the environment.

In Ciptagelar society, women and men traditionally have a clear division of roles, rights, and obligations, and it is depicted within their social activities and spatial arrangements. The daily activities that are divided based on roles, rights, and obligations determine the distribution and domination of gender space. The findings indicated that as an agricultural society, the Kasepuhan Ciptagelar acknowledges and glorifies rice as well as women's roles and sights as the primary pillars of life.

This aligns with the ancient *Sundanese* culture that symbolizes the environmental features as female personifications (Adimihardja, 2004). *Sundanese* female-derived ancestral names (Matronymic) such as 'Nyi,' 'Sri,' and 'Nini' are used in many traditional rhymes used in the traditional procession of the Kasepuhan Ciptagelar traditional agricultural cycle. Those matronymic names are used to symbolize their ancestors and environmental characteristics.

Generally, the development of agrarian culture in Indonesian society is socially built through legends and mythology that have integrated into their belief systems and religions. The Personification of Dewi Sri (Goddess of Rice) in ancient Indonesian beliefs and Nyi Pohaci (Sundanese Goddess of Rice) serve as the example of how the cultural roles of rice are viewed and respected as a shared belief in a larger scale of Indonesian indigenous communities (Kusdiwanggo, 2012).

Kasepuhan Ciptagelar is widely known for its agrarian culture and how the cultural roles of rice are reflected in their way of living. Their respect toward the female personifications in their agrarian culture also seen in the way they put women in their social and spatial processes. Women in Ciptagelar in their daily activities and ritual activities are seen prominently in several elements of building and space, especially in the domestic space and in a specific public space such as ricefield. As described by the village's spokesperson, the role of the Ciptagelar women in most of the rice related ritual activities is essential. Rice milling and processing becomes women privilege, and even in rice harvesting or planting ceremonies, women have the honor to take the first line along with the parade leader (Study Interview, 2019). In relation to this concept, Kusdiwanggo (2012) added that essentially, all activities ranging from daily domestic space to rice culture rituals throughout a rice-growing cycle become women's obligations as well as their rights. Hence, all of the spatial processes associated with *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar's* rice culture activities are considered as the priority space for women.

Egalitarian Cultural and Traditional Values

Equity, integration, and justice have been inherent in the values and history of "Kasepuhan Ciptagelar." Based on the study findings, they often identify their community as descended from "Pancer Pangawinan" society. This term refers to philosophical concepts of "to become full, let yourself be empty" and to be able to balance their life with nature as well as the current development. Adimihardja (2004) stated that this concept is an ancestral doctrine to apply the following harmonious value; "to be able to unite the earth with the sky, human with humanity that is the true meaning of *pancer pangawinan*."

Furthermore, the community leader, Abah Ugi, described that the *pancer pangawinan* philosophical value means an obligation to integrate "two things" for mutual safety for the sake of the community. It has been the primary value that the Kasepuhan Ciptagelar indigenous people hold firmly (Study Interview, 2018). In another manuscript, Sudjatna (2018) further described that This "two things" integration concept is applied to their way of living, such as the acceptance of certain technological advancement, formal education, and balancing the roles of gender. The Males in the community could not survive without the women and vice versa. Thus, based on this integration of philosophical value, the concept of harmony between men and women must be appreciated, reflected, and implemented in the community's traditional rituals. In terms of preserving this culture, Abah Ugi (the community leader), in an interview with the authors, explained that performing rituals periodically and oral narratives are the primary strategy in preserving the concept. The rituals can help in ensuring that the shared understanding of Kasepuhan Ciptagelar's traditions, including their shared view on gender roles, can be passed on to the next generation.

Based on the study observation, the equity values in their traditional rituals can be seen in the "nutu rasul" and "nutu nganyaran" rituals. "Nutu rasul" is a procession of pounding rice towards the end of the year. Meanwhile, "nutu nganyaran" is the process of pounding rice to welcome a new planting cycle. Both rituals can only be performed by the women and led by *Mamah Alit* as the first lady of the community. A similar role happens in other rituals; women are still positioned to have a prominent role. For example, in the ritual "turun nyambut", a ritual of reading and greeting the constellations which indicate the arrival of a new planting season. In this ritual, men and women are both standing on the same ground. The men wear white clothes, while the women wear "samping" traditional cloth and the white "karembong"

(wrapped cloth). This ritual indicates the harmonious value as well as reinforces the equity of women's position in society.

Community Awareness of Geographical Needs and Division of Labour

The discussion above has indicated that clear and mutually respected gender roles are reflected in the community values, social structure, and rituals. The study found a common thread where geographical conditions have contributed to the way the community shapes their concept of gender. The "Kasepuhan Ciptagelar" is an agrarian community; they consider the role of women as essential in social wellbeing.

According to Sumardjo (1996), this gender point of view is closely related to cultural values built from ecological, technical capabilities, namely the importance of rainfall for cultivators. The community put a female personification with the name of "Sunan Ambu" to the sky as one of the most critical factors in their agrarian society. Hence, it can be argued that they valued and cherished women's role in the community.

As an illustration, the gender appreciation can be seen from the important role of women in the division of living space. In managing "pandaringan", or the home rice granary is can only be accessed by the Ciptagelar women. Another example is also reflected in the divorce case; a divorced man cannot occupy his house alone unless he has a daughter. The division of space shows that women have an important role in the survival of indigenous peoples (Sudjatna, 2018).

The mutual bond between Men and Women is indigenously known as "Sakuren." Our study informants had a shared perspective about this concept; they all believed that "Sakuren" is a concept of fill each other and work together according to their respective abilities and roles. Thereupon, this concept has also shaped the community's division of labor. The geographical conditions also force community awareness to consider the division of labor in the Ciptagelar community. As described by one of the elders who has been living in the village for more than 70 years, "people here have always been taught and demanded to work together, because they have to work on difficult terrain. Since ancient times, the tradition to work as a unity have been passed down from generation to generation for more than 648 years, whether it is for domestic or plantation labor, both men and women should contribute to the work, and that's just the way we live" (Study Interview. 2019).

The concept of cooperation and gender equity between men and women is not new in Kasepuhan Ciptagelar, perhaps much longer than the feminist movements that are being echoed (Rahman & Kusdiwanggo, 2018). The role of this collaboration is absorbed as a pearl of local wisdom and has been preserved since the dawn of the Kasepuhan Ciptagelar community. These particular gender roles between men and women are constructed to mutually coexist with the environment where natural factors still influence life, especially on livelihoods.

4. Conclusion

Understanding these gender relations and the division of labor behind them is a prerequisite for understanding people's access to and distribution of resources, decision-making, and the impact of women and men on democratic processes and social progress. In conclusion, the indigenous community of "Kasepuhan Ciptagelar" constructed their concept of gender roles on traditional agrarian values and perceived egalitarian views towards gender

roles. This construction is communicated and passing down to the next generation by hereditary communication in the form of oral narratives and spatial features, especially concerning the "Kasepuhan Ciptagelar" ancestral values.

The enculturation of the role of indigenous women in the "Kasepuhan Ciptagelar" community is mostly applied by the application of traditional values in both rituals and daily practices. It is expected that the findings of the study could provide an alternative insight in a way that there is an indigenous community in Indonesia where the dominant gender-neutral concept of equality can be negotiated in order to resolve the many disadvantages of indigenous women.

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