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# The Power of Kajang Indigenous People from Covid-19

Muhammad Syukur<sup>1\*</sup>, Bahrul Amsal<sup>2</sup>, M. Ridwan Said Ahmad<sup>3</sup>, Arifin Ibrahim<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1234</sup>Departement of Sociology Education, Universitas Negeri Makassar

**Abstract.** The principle is a teaching of simplicity to avoid excessive life influences through modernism, technology, and globalism. The world has been encountering a Covid-19 pandemic for the last two years; however, Kajang indigenous people become one of the communities that could endure exposure to the Covid-19 virus. The study aims to disclose the following: first, what type of ethnic wisdom that makes Kajang community still survive the aggression of changes in their surrounding communities, and second, how could the ethnic wisdom of the Kajang community become an antidote for Covid-19 exposure, which is the fruit of modernism, so that it has almost no effect on the community. The study employs a qualitative descriptive approach. **The data analysis is carried out in three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.** The research finds that first, Kajang's ethnic wisdom known for their tightfistedness in interaction with their surrounding world has local wisdom that becomes a cultural paradigm in managing its behavioral relationship and social interaction. Second, the ethnic wisdom of kamase-masea life principle that forms behavioral and interaction systems indirectly creates herd immunity that has implication on less exposure to Covid-19 among the Kajang indigenous people.

**Keywords:** Indigenous People, kamase-masea, Covid-19, Ethnic Wisdom, Herd Immunity.

## 1 Introduction

For the last two years, there are no changes that are more obvious at global and local levels than those due to the Covid-19 virus. Men experience a radical change due to the virus. Changes are always deemed to be caused by human factors; however, recently the determinant factor of the change is non-human, which is Covid-19 [1].

Covid-19 is a threat not only to the modern world but also to indigenous people who prefer to live in a different way than modern society. In Indonesia, at present, there are 70 million indigenous people that consist of 1,100 tribes, and the largest spread of the indigenous people is on Borneo Island, which is 772 communities. Sulawesi is the second with 664 indigenous communities and is followed by Sumatera with 392 communities, Bali and Nusa Tenggara with 253 communities, Maluku with 176 communities, Papua with 59 communities, and Java with 55 communities. One of the fundamental characteristics of the existence of indigenous people is their subsistence way of life that relies on the forest as part of their sacred belief.

A study by Ahmed Goha dkk [2], **Indigenous People and the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Tip of an Iceberg of Social and Economic Inequities**, stated that Covid-19 has entered and exposed the indigenous people all over the world, such as those in Brazil, Peru, US, Canada, up to Australia. According to the record, about 57 percent of Covid-19 cases in New Mexico, 50% of which led to death occurred among indigenous

people. In the "football" country, such as Brazil, the virus has reached Manaus, the capital city of Amazonas, and attacked the Yanomami indigenous group.

outbreak occurs in the indigenous people where the customary territories are close to natural resource extraction activities conducted by corporations that still operate during the pandemic.

Nevertheless, indigenous people, unlike the modern society that tends to be open and dynamic, are able to endure Covid-19 exposure since they have local wisdom that becomes an antidote for the spread of the disease. Local knowledge of the indigenous people has a significant contribution to how they respond to the spread of Covid-19.

In South Sulawesi, the known indigenous people are Kajang indigenous people in Bulukumba Regency. The Kajang indigenous people are an ethnic community who inhabit a forest area of 331.17 ha in the east of Bulukumba that becomes an important area for their life. Similar to other indigenous people, Kajang indigenous people possess ancient wisdom that helps them to circumvent the negative impact of exposure to the corona virus.

Several studies [3]; [4]; [5]; [6]; [7]; [8]; [9]; [10] have examined Covid-19 spread patterns that have occurred so far including in remote communities such as in indigenous people in Indonesia. Based on previous studies, the following elucidation will describe how could the Kajang indigenous people in Bulukumba Regency anticipate the negative impacts of the Corona

\* Corresponding author : [m.syukur@unm.ac.id](mailto:m.syukur@unm.ac.id)

outbreak through their life wisdom known as the life principles of tallasa kamase-masea from the perspective of victims and socioeconomic so that they receive no negative impact of the Covid-19. Next, how does the principle form a group resilience culturally that leads to the minimum victim of Covid-19 in the community.

## 2 Research Method

The research employed a qualitative-descriptive approach to generate a more natural and accurate explanation of the power of the Ammatoa customary holders in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. The data collection technique used included in-depth interviews with Kajang indigenous leaders and observation to gain primary data and document searches such as journals, books, and pictures related to the research focus to generate secondary data.

The data analysis was conducted in three stages. First, the data reduction process focused on the selection, simplification, abstraction, and transformation of raw data from records in the field. In this process, data that were relevant to the research focus and those that did not meet the exclusion-inclusion criteria were selected. The second stage was data presentation, which was arranging information into statements that allowed conclusion drawing.

Data were presented in the form of narrative text. The data were spread and separated into various information sources. The data were then classified according to the themes and analysis requirements. The third stage was conclusion drawing based on data reduction and presentation. Conclusion drawing was carried out in stages from a general conclusion in the data reduction stage followed by a specific conclusion in the data presentation stage to a more specific conclusion in the real conclusion drawing stage. This series of process process indicated that qualitative data analysis in the research combined data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing stages repetitively and, in a cycle, [11]; [12]. Data validity was also conducted in four ways, namely: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability [13].

## 3 Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Ethnic Wisdom to Anticipate the Pandemic

Mysterious area. The people live in a group at Tana Towa Village, Bulukumba Regency, and identify themselves as indigenous people. As an indigenous people, Kajang people live based on ancient wisdom called pasang ri Kajang, which is a system of ideas and life guides that is taught and practiced from generations for the people to live life. The people are led by an Ammatoa who is assigned special tasks to manage the community [14]. Kajang consists of two customary areas, namely ilalang embaya and ipantarang embaya. The terms ilalang and ipantarang refer to outside and inside areas, respectively. Whereas, emba means a territory. In the context of territory, ilalang embaya can be understood as Ammatoa's territories. Whereas,

ipantarang embaya means areas outside the Ammatoa's leadership [15].

Ammatoa's duties during its leadership include becoming the human representative to represent the presence of Tu ria ara'na on earth. The duty is related to a pasang stating "lagai lino lollong bonena, kammayatempa langika, rupa tau siagang boronga", which means maintaining the world and everything in it that includes the sky, humans, and forests. Further, Ammatoa also becomes a living representation of pasang ri Kajang. Ammatoa is the valve that solves differences in the indigenous people [16].

Kajang becomes a unique area since it ethnically is a community that still holds ancient wisdom known as tallasa kamase-masea. The wisdom is a teaching emphasizing simplicity with an orientation of simple life, mutual sharing, getting along, and not bringing each other down. Compared to modern society's lifestyle, the Kajang indigenous people are an antithesis of an excessive behavior pattern. Simplicity, in this case, has its meaning for the Kajang people; therefore, their life is far from a glamorous lifestyle (Interview, March 14, 2022)

From the moral perspective, tallasa kamase-masea affects the Kajang people's way of life that supports a lack of desire to achieve unwanted or beyond-the-limit things, including appearances. Kajang people only know two main colors, black and white. Black is represented in clothes, sarong, and head coverings. White is found when they use pants. Based on its philosophy, black indicates depth and modesty from the origin of life (darkness). Therefore, flashy colors are deemed to be representing luxury and vanity (Interview, March 15, 2022).

During the pandemic for the last two years, according to the *Bulukumba Tanggap Covid-19* per November 3, 2021, victims died from the virus in Bulukumba was 70 people out of 1960 people positive for Covid-19. None of the victims were from the Kajang indigenous people. This was confirmed by Faizal Pasmal, the Surveillance team from the Covid-19 Task Force of Bulukumba, stating that in Tana Towa, especially in Kajang indigenous people, no Covid-19 suspects were found during the pandemic. This was due to the role of the local wisdom of the indigenous people. Kajang is the cause why no Covid-19 victims are found in the area.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that Kajang indigenous people could continue their life normally despite the threat of Covid-19 outside their community. This is due to Kajang indigenous people who hold their ethnic wisdom from the past. The obedience to kamase-masea life has made the community able to anticipate Covid-19; thus, minimum victims. Looking at the future, the Kajang people concern more with unpretentious, simple, and abstemious life so they have less worry even though communities in their surroundings are faced with Covid-19.

Local wisdom of the Kajang people in the perspective of sociology has been, at present, the best solution so that people could avoid modernity forecast explained by two figures, namely Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck. Giddens [17] opines that modernity as

currently achieved by current modern civilization is a condition of a society that moves fast without its reflection ability. Through “Juggernaut” supposition, modern society is an entity that is moving without control and no direction; hence, it sometimes provides enjoyment explosions of innovation and yet, at the same time, could not provide certainty and a sense of security.

Beck [18] in an analysis state that the characteristic of modernization pace will plunge society into completely uncurable risks. Technological achievements, globalization, and industrial societies, according to Beck will engender social, economic, and health risks due to the threats from modernity. To Beck, the threat currently tends to be massive and global targeting all life orders on earth (humans, animals, and plants).

Based on both figures’ opinions, the forecasts might have occurred that the current modern era has given birth to various human threats and one of them is Covid-19. The virus was an animal virus that, due to the change in ecosystems as a consequence of modernization (natural extraction) through industrialization that changes the natural captive life network of the forest, triggered the migration of diseases from animals to humans.

### 3.2 Kamase-Masea Life Principles that Shape the Behavior and Interaction Systems Indirectly Create Herd Immunity

#### a. Forest and Ecology of *Kajang* Indigenous People

The *Kajang* indigenous people consider the forest as a sacred entity that is different from other areas. Forest is believed as the link between two life orders, namely present life and the hereafter [19]. The sacred belief in the forest is related to the concept of tau manurung, which is the first man to ever comes down to earth and experience ascendance or go back up to the sky. It is in the forest the first-time earth is presented as the arena of human life. In daily life, the sacred belief in the forest shapes the attitudes and patterns of ecological behaviors to maintain the environment in which they live [14].

A forest area of 331,17 hectares that surrounds the indigenous people has two functions, namely ritual function and ecological function. The ritual function is related to the function of the forest as a place to perform customary rituals, such as the selection of traditional leaders, addingingi, or akalomba. Whereas, the ecological function refers to the four streams (6 Uli river, Sangkal river, Limba river, and Doro River) that become the hydrological support for all ecosystems in it. Moreover, the forest’s ecological function is also related directly to the daily life of the indigenous people, which is as a water source [19].

Ecologically, the life of the whole ecosystem that is interconnected will make the forest stay sustainable so it can be utilized by many people. Galla Malelleng, the assistant of Ammatoa in fishery, states that the forest is the world entity whose functions are not only limited to the *Kajang* indigenous people but also in a broader meaning to serve the needs of all mankind. In ecological meaning, a forest is a macro cosmos area that becomes the skin or clothes for the world; therefore, when the

clothes are damaged it will affect all life networks in it (Interview, March 12, 2022).

Galla Puto opines that the ecological awareness of the *Kajang* indigenous people on the existence of forests can be linked to the customary prohibition of excessive use of the forest. In other words, since forest is likened to the earth’s clothes; therefore, anyone who uses the forest for negative interest will be considered making a big mistake. The person is deemed stripping the holy entity, which is the sacred forest. Just like a body without clothes, the earth without forests will lose its respect and honor (Interview, March 11, 2022).

Regarding the position of indigenous people that is different from the modern society in the cultural aspect, *Kajang* people become a unique, ethnical-survival community owing to their acceptance and repudiation of things related to the outside world (Sampean, 2017). The acceptance of the outside world is stated by Ammatoa that there is no prohibition for his people to perform activities outside the custom and uses modern technology as long as they do it outside the customary areas (*ilalang embaya*). In terms of the repudiation of modernity-sound entity is indicated by the banning of someone to bring things that could threaten the existence of *Kajang* indigenous people (Interview, March 12, 2022).

The ecology-based meaning of life invokes the indigenous people to be independent without being disturbed by various influences of changes. They live autonomously in the customary areas and have been settled for years without migrating or leaving the customary area as their residence. In subsistence way, the indigenous people could gather a lot of forest benefits from collecting honey, fruits, timbers, shrimps, and fish to utilizing forest yields as a source of their main life. The autonomous life tradition and subsistence do not, in reality, make the *Kajang* indigenous people experience a significant effect as those happened in urban society, for example, layoffs, struggle in looking for food, and they could live normally without being affected by Covid-19 [20].

#### b. Resistance of Subsistence Life

The *Kajang* indigenous people are traditional communities that practice a subsistence life. As stated by [21] *Kajang* indigenous people, during the pandemic, did not experience a significant disturbance; therefore, their community is not threatened. Not only in terms of the victim, the *Kajang* indigenous people relatively survive in the dimension of food security while most outside communities suffer economic contradiction and unemployment.

The subsistence life pattern is applied by the people as a perspective that indirectly becomes an antidote to the human’s lowest desires who often fancy something lavish. *Kiwari*, when all the world economic activities are directed to accumulation of capital through the trading practice of capitalism style, the *Kajang* people perform an economic action that is motivated by the community needs. This is an economic practice that is called by Polanyi [22] a substantive economy, which is an economic activity that relies entirely on nature and each other.

Besides subsistence, the *Kajang* indigenous people are an autonomous community. They have independence in providing their main necessities. This is consistent with Boedihartono [23] that the forest resources owned by the *Kajang* indigenous people are numerous natural resources that could support their daily life. In contrast to the urban communities whose natural resources have disappeared and are being replaced by new buildings, the *Kajang* people could endure for the last two years from their ricefields, yards, or forests that become their life sources regardless of the economic crisis of the world societies due to the Covid-19.

Privatization and commercialization are modern principles that are contrary to the *tallasa kamase-masea* policy. If a modern society depends on individualization, the *Kajang* indigenous people prioritize collective togetherness through subsistence life practice. That is to say that the *Kajang* indigenous people continue to utilize natural resources of water, land, and yields taken from the forest by giving precedence to natural sustainability so it can be relished for a long time. Privatization and commercialization marked by individual ownership and market control are modern ideas that are incompatible with the ethnic wisdom paradigm of the *Kajang* indigenous people.

Up to now, the *Kajang* indigenous people by counting on their local wisdom still experience a variety of tensions of changes due to modernism ideas. This includes Covid-19 which can be a bad excess of the natural management conducted by the modern community. The people, however, stay resistant to maintaining their community group.

## 4 Conclusion

The current pandemic experienced by the global community is the side effect of modernity and globalization advancement that is predicted as the direction of progress that could lead the world to a level of advancement. Yet, in reality, natural destructions as the result of the ideology of modernism development and cross-continent human interaction that are triggered by globalization are the causes of the occurrence and rapid spread of Covid-19 in different parts of the world.

In Indonesia, the pandemic has changed many things and caused numerous victims. The virus affects many life sectors such as the economic, political, social, and cultural sectors. Economic growth is slowing down resulting in thousands of people losing their jobs. Political powers are in a legitimation crisis due to a government that is less optimal in handling the spread of Covid-19. Sociocultural life undergoes social crisis that causes community's spiritual and mental crisis. These situations are the opposite of the *Kajang* indigenous people who live far from the hustle and bustle of modernity and globalization. Both in the past and present since the two-year pandemic, the people could maintain the integrity of their community from the bad influence of Covid-19. They are, at least, able to minimize victims through the implementation of their local wisdom.

The local wisdom of the *Kajang* people is in the form of the principle of simplicity of life from the *tallasa*

*kamase-masea* and subsistence life principle. The principles become an antidote movement to prevent Covid-19 exposure on them. Expectation from this short article is to be important information on how is the best way to anticipate not only the Covid-19 threats and also various change ideas that provide no opportunities to humans to live a better and wise life.

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