

Transforming Traditions: Exploring the Adaptation of Nganteuran Tradition during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This study examines the changes in the Nganteuran tradition during the COVID-19 pandemic in Cianjur Regency. Using a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with purposively selected participants. The findings reveal a decline in community participation in the tradition due to physical limitations and concerns about virus transmission. Instead of physical visits, individuals opted for exchanging greetings through text messages or phone calls. Adjustments were made in the execution of the tradition, including reducing the number of visited houses, prioritizing visits to immediate family members, or organizing virtual Nganteuran events via video conferencing platforms. The pandemic also influenced the perception and attitudes of the community, with emerging concerns and caution in participating. However, despite the challenges, the Nganteuran tradition persisted with adaptations made by the community. This research provides insights into how local traditions adapt to unforeseen changes, emphasizing the importance of reconfiguring social relationships in the context of a pandemic.

Keywords: Nganteuran Tradition; COVID-19 Pandemic; Change; Adaptation.

Introduction

Traditions and culture play a crucial role in preserving the identity and togetherness of a community (Cahya & Purnama, 2022). One distinctive tradition in Cianjur Regency, Indonesia, is Nganteuran. Nganteuran is a social practice carried out before the celebration of Eid al-Fitr, where neighbors visit each other to exchange greetings and strengthen social bonds. However, in recent years, this tradition has undergone significant changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected the world.

Since the emergence of the pandemic, health guidelines and social restrictions have changed the way we live and interact (Akerlof, 1997; Baker, Martí, Braunstein, Whitehead, & Yukich, 2020; Kotus, Rzeszewski, & Olejniczak, 2022). Cultural traditions like Nganteuran have not escaped the impact of these changes. Cianjur Regency, which possesses unique cultural richness (Stuono & Meitasari, 2021), has also undergone adaptations to ensure safety and cleanliness in the implementation of the Nganteuran tradition.

One tradition that is familiar to Sundanese people, especially in the Cianjur region, is the Nganteuran tradition, which is commonly practiced before the celebrations of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. The Nganteuran tradition is generally understood as the custom of exchanging or giving food, such as traditional dishes and Eid-specific cakes, to relatives, neighbors, and those in need in the surrounding area during the night before the festive day. The word “Nganteuran” itself is derived from the Sundanese language, meaning “to deliver”. The activities in the Nganteuran tradition fall into the category of sharing, as people give to others with the aim of complementing one another’s joy during the festive season. Moreover, the implementation of this tradition is also expected to

strengthen the bonds of kinship and social ties within the community. The Nganteuran tradition has created many positive impacts, making it a key factor in the harmony of Sundanese society, particularly in Cianjur Regency.

Previous studies have examined the impact of changing traditions and cultures during difficult crises or social transformations (Misra & Stokols, 2012; Scholte et al., 2020). However, research specifically exploring the changes in the Nganteuran tradition before Eid al-Fitr in Cianjur Regency during the pandemic is still limited. In this context, this study aims to fill the knowledge gap and contribute to understanding the changes in this tradition during the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Several studies have shown that local traditions and cultures can undergo transformation and adaptation in response to social changes or crisis situations (Dosmaroha, Widiyari, & Pahlawan, 2020; Wardhana & Farokhah, 2021; Wibisono, Truna, & Rahman, 2021). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, local traditions like Nganteuran have undergone adjustments to comply with social restrictions and minimize the risk of virus transmission. Although there have been studies observing the adaptation of traditions and cultures in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no specific research that addresses the changes that have occurred in the Nganteuran tradition before Eid al-Fitr in Cianjur Regency. Therefore, this study aims to fill this knowledge gap by focusing on the changes in the implementation of the Nganteuran tradition during the COVID-19 pandemic in Cianjur Regency.

By analyzing the adaptation of the Cianjur community to the pandemic in the context of the Nganteuran tradition, this research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dynamics in Cianjur Regency during the pandemic period. The results of this study will contribute to the field of cultural studies and provide insights for policies and strategies in preserving and promoting the sustainability of local traditions in the future.

Research Methodology

This research focuses on the changes in the Nganteuran tradition before Eid al-Fitr in Cianjur Regency during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Nganteuran tradition is a social practice that involves neighbors visiting each other to exchange greetings before the Eid celebration. This study will analyze how this tradition has changed in terms of implementation, community participation, and public perception during the pandemic situation.

This research adopts a qualitative approach with data collection methods including in-depth interviews and direct observations. Respondents for the interviews are purposively selected, considering diversity in age, gender, social background, and experience in the Nganteuran tradition. The interviews are conducted using a pre-designed interview guide. Additionally, direct observations are carried out to observe the implementation of the Nganteuran tradition while adhering to health protocols. The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify the main themes and sub-themes that emerge from the interviews and observations. The validity of the research will be ensured through data triangulation, and the research report will adhere to ethical research principles.

Results and Discussion

1. Nganteuran Tradition in Cianjur Regency

Indonesia is a country rich in cultural diversity, including different traditions and customs in each region. One well-known tradition is the Javanese tradition, particularly in West Java (Indrawardana, 2013). The Sundanese community, known for their strong tradition of maintaining social ties and creating harmony, highly values the cultural and religious values passed down from their ancestors (Miharja, 2015). In Cianjur Regency, West Java, there are many local cultural practices that serve as the identity and pride of the local community, such as the Nganteuran tradition, Ngarak Posong, Rengkong art, Kuda Kosong art, Cianjuran songs, and maenpo or martial arts (Cimande, Cikalong, and Syabandar styles) (Risman, Wibhawa, & Fedryansyah, 2016). Although recognized as local wisdom and cultural pillars, there are still local communities that are not fully familiar with and appreciative of these cultural practices (Ningsih & Erdlanda, 2019). The cultural diversity in Indonesia is attractive to tourists, allowing them to explore differences and similarities with other cultures (Risman et al., 2016).

The Nganteuran tradition is a long-standing tradition practiced by the Sundanese community in Cianjur Regency before the celebrations of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. In this tradition, people deliver traditional Eid foods from door to door as a way of sharing happiness. The food includes various types of cakes, white rice, ketupat (rice cake), opor (coconut milk-based dish), rendang (spicy meat dish), and others. This tradition holds deep meaning in strengthening kinship ties, complementing each other, sharing blessings, and promoting brotherhood. However, this tradition has declined in some areas of Cianjur, especially in urban areas, due to factors such as new arrivals, changing times, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that has limited Eid celebrations.

The Nganteuran tradition has become an important part of celebrating victories and is deeply ingrained in the Islamic community in Cianjur. To preserve the authenticity of this tradition, preservation efforts are needed, especially during the pandemic, to ensure that the tradition is not lost. Preserving and developing traditions in a region is crucial because traditions are an integral part of community life. Humans play a significant role in developing culture and traditions. Their influence brings changes to culture and traditions (Widyanti, 2015). It is important to avoid the extinction of traditions and culture. Preserving cultural heritage requires awareness and commitment from various parties. Essentially, in the development of traditions, human encouragement towards culture is essential, with an active attitude and creativity. Local traditions and wisdom in a culture are not variables that can stand alone. Preserving and securing their future is influenced by various interconnected factors such as geography, politics, economy, history, behaviors, and government policies that significantly impact culture (Utina, 2012). The Nganteuran tradition is one of the local wisdoms that deserve to be preserved. This tradition has the potential to develop as a meaningful cultural heritage. Despite the spread of globalization, it is important to preserve local culture as the identity of the region itself. Local culture should not be uprooted from the cultural heritage passed down from our ancestors in the face of homogenization tendencies resulting from globalization (Brata Ida Bagus, 2016). Understanding the meaning behind the cultural traditions of a region is expected to foster love, pride, and a sense of belonging among the community towards their local wisdom (Ningsih & Erdlanda, 2019).

2. The Impact of the Pandemic on the Nganteuran Tradition

The emergence of the coronavirus pandemic in 2019, originating from China, quickly spread throughout the world, including Indonesia. The pandemic, which has been ongoing for several years, has not only affected public health but also various aspects of life. The pandemic has caused many changes in social, cultural, economic, and educational aspects in various countries. Among the many negative impacts caused by the pandemic, the most palpable one is the social changes in communities, which affect people's behavior, attitudes, and mindset towards social values (Muara, Prasetyo, & Rahmat, 2021). Governments have implemented various measures to break the chain of pandemic transmission, including policies that enforce social restrictions in communities. These policies have inevitably led to a decrease in interactions and connectivity within communities, resulting in the fading of culture and traditions (Nasution, Erlina, & Muda, 2020). Particularly for Muslims during Eid celebrations amidst the pandemic, the experience has been significantly different from previous years as many cultural and traditional aspects of the festivities have been limited according to government guidelines, prioritizing safety and health. One of the traditions affected by the pandemic is the Nganteuran tradition, which is a long-standing tradition in Cianjur Regency. The tradition of visiting and sharing traditional Eid foods with the community has now diminished. Furthermore, the pandemic has also impacted the local economy, resulting in negative effects on the financial situation of the community.

In 2020, the number of impoverished families in Cianjur Regency reached 200 thousand households, primarily due to the pandemic. This is particularly significant as Cianjur is one of the districts in West Java Province known for its tourism potential in its rural areas. According to data from the local tourism office, there are nine villages in Cianjur Regency that offer alternative tourism experiences, showcasing their respective local cultural heritage (Risman et al., 2016). In addition to farming, a significant portion of the community in Cianjur is engaged in trading and works in various tourist destinations. The pandemic has led to a decrease in visitor numbers to the tourism sites in Cianjur, which has an adverse impact on the local economy. Many accommodations and hotels have reduced their staff due to the lack of visitors. The economic downturn in Cianjur has made it challenging for the community to develop and sustain their culture and traditions. As a result, many people have reduced the implementation of traditions, including in the celebration of special occasions like Eid, with the Nganteuran tradition being one of those affected. The economic factor has led to a less elaborate menu being served during the Nganteuran tradition. With the COVID-19 pandemic, people face difficulties in economic factors, and they also feel anxious about performing such traditions, resulting in a decline in the Nganteuran tradition in several regions. However, in some areas, such as Kampung Awilarangan, Benjot Village, Cugenang District, Cianjur Regency, the local community continues to strive to maintain the existence of this Eid tradition by replacing traditional Eid foods with packaged meals such as staple food packages, syrup cookies, and more. This is done with the hope that this meaningful tradition, passed down through generations, will continue to live on and be preserved so that its philosophical essence and positive impacts can be experienced by future generations. With such conditions, people's daily activities are disrupted, especially with the fading of many traditions. Many people have shifted their culture virtually, using digital platforms (Nasution et al., 2020).

The diverse traditions and local wisdom in Indonesia represent the culture and traditions of the various islands in the archipelago, playing a significant role in the

development of national culture in Indonesia. In the era of technological advancements and the pandemic, efforts should be made to preserve and develop traditions and culture. With easy access to various media, Indonesian culture can be effectively showcased to a wider audience. However, it seems that many individuals in Indonesian society lack confidence in their own culture during this era of globalization and the pandemic. They tend to imitate foreign lifestyles and sometimes take more pride in foreign cultures rather than their own. Consequently, even in culinary aspects, Indonesian society tends to prefer foreign cuisine over traditional Indonesian dishes made with local spices (Rahmawaty & Maharani, 2013). This affects the existence of authentic Indonesian products, making them less popular in Indonesia. This significantly impacts the existence of local cultural heritage and can lead to a decline in the local economy, especially during the pandemic, and a lack of a sense of ownership towards our current local wisdom. To avoid this, a change in mindset is needed from each individual to better preserve and maintain the culture of our nation (Risman et al., 2016). During the pandemic, the meaning embedded within the Nganteuran tradition should be applied in daily life and serve as an example of community living, especially during this challenging time. It emphasizes the values of mutual assistance, complementing each other's shortcomings, and working together to experience happiness collectively. Local wisdom can sustain itself in a region, usually being passed down through generations.

3. Adaptation of the Nganteuran Tradition Amidst the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the community in Cianjur Regency to make new adjustments in the implementation of the Nganteuran tradition. Social restrictions and health protocols implemented by the government have affected the way this tradition is carried out. One noticeable change is the decrease in physical visits to neighbors' houses during Eid celebrations. As a precautionary measure, the people of Cianjur now prefer to send Eid dishes through courier services or deliveries. An interview with one of the participants involved in the Nganteuran tradition, Mr. SJ, revealed, "Since this pandemic, we have to be cautious and mindful of our health. We no longer make physical visits to our neighbors' homes. We prefer to send Eid dishes through courier services or deliveries."

Furthermore, in previous research conducted by Ningsih and Cysbya Erdlanda (Ningsih & Erdlanda, 2019), it was found that many people in Cianjur still have not fully understood and appreciated local wisdom and traditions such as Nganteuran. However, with the pandemic, adjustments in the implementation of this tradition have become important in ensuring the safety and health of the community. Although the tradition is no longer carried out directly, efforts to continue the tradition through safe food delivery can strengthen the values of brotherhood and complementing each other's happiness within the community.

In addition to changes in food sharing, social interactions have also undergone significant shifts. In the Nganteuran tradition before the pandemic, the people of Cianjur would gather at their neighbors' homes, engage in conversations, and celebrate Eid together. However, with social restrictions in place, face-to-face gatherings are no longer possible. As an alternative, the community has embraced the use of technology and virtual communication to stay connected and share Eid moments.

To maintain social relationships and celebrate the Nganteuran tradition amidst the pandemic, the people of Cianjur have utilized technology and virtual communication. Another participant in this research, Mrs. RT, stated, "We use messaging apps and video

calls to stay connected with family and neighbors during Eid. We exchange greetings and stories through messaging services and even hold Nganteuran events online through video calls.”

Through messaging apps, video calls, and social media, the people of Cianjur can continue to communicate with family, neighbors, and loved ones. They can exchange Eid greetings, share stories, and even engage in collective prayers virtually. The utilization of technology allows the community to still experience togetherness and maintain social connections, even without meeting in person.

Additionally, the use of technology and virtual communication enables the people of Cianjur to hold Nganteuran events online. They can share experiences, stories, and exchange traditional Eid dishes through video calls or social media. Although not the same as physical traditions, these efforts allow the community to still feel the warmth of social relationships and togetherness in celebrating Eid.

This aligns with previous research conducted by Muzakki (2020), which shows that the pandemic has affected the moments and warmth of celebrating sacred days such as Eid. However, with the utilization of technology and virtual communication, people can still experience togetherness in the Nganteuran tradition. This technology provides a new alternative for communication, sharing experiences, and exchanging traditional Eid dishes through video conferencing platforms or social media.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the community in Cianjur Regency to make adaptations in the Nganteuran tradition. Social restrictions and health protocols have influenced the way this tradition is carried out, but the community has found solutions by sending Eid dishes through courier services and utilizing virtual communication technology to maintain social connections. Despite undergoing changes, the Nganteuran tradition continues to uphold the values of brotherhood and togetherness in celebrating Eid amidst unusual circumstances. In a broader context, this research provides insights into the adaptation of local culture in facing global crises and emphasizes the importance of support and active participation in preserving and developing these traditions for the future.

This research has some limitations to consider, including the limited focus on Cianjur Regency and a small number of participants in the qualitative approach. Additionally, the research was conducted during a specific period of the pandemic, so changes in the Nganteuran tradition may continue to evolve over time. Nevertheless, this research provides valuable initial understanding of the adaptation of the Nganteuran tradition amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and can serve as a basis for further research and the development of more effective strategies in preserving and reviving local traditions in unusual situations.

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