

Behind the *Ulap Doyo* of East Borneo: Indigenous Women and the Importance of Media Coverage

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the interconnection between indigenous people, gender, and the media through the case of indigenous women in East Borneo, Indonesia. This descriptive study addresses two main questions: first, “What challenges do the indigenous women of Dayak Benuaq face in the context of making *ulap doyo*?” Second, “What role does the media play in this issue?” The *ulap doyo*, an authentic woven fabric from East Borneo, has been created by the women of the community for centuries and has become part of the cultural identity of the indigenous people of Dayak Benuaq. This article uses a case study-based, qualitative approach associated with documentary research. The findings indicate that the indigenous women of Dayak Benuaq in East Borneo have been struggling for recognition as key players in sustaining the cultural heritage of *ulap doyo* as well as in building gender equality in the community. We argue that the media, in various forms, can play a significant role in strengthening the *ulap doyo* tradition, empowering the indigenous women of Dayak Benuaq, providing them space to participate in the social and political aspects of their communities, and challenging various stereotypes associated with the indigenous people of Borneo.

Keywords: Dayak Benuaq, East Borneo, indigenous women, Indonesia, media, *ulap doyo*

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INTRODUCTION

Issues related to indigenous peoples have become a global concern since the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) by the General Assembly in 2007. The UN defines indigenous peoples as the “inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment, they have retained social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live” (United Nations 2019). About 500 million indigenous peoples are spread around the world in more than ninety countries. They live in almost all geographic regions and represent 5,000 different cultures (UNDP 2019). They also represent about 5% of the world’s population and, interestingly, the vast majority (about 70%) live in Asia (Amnesty International 2019).

Moreover, the authenticity and uniqueness of the indigenous people’s way of living and their cultures have been recognized by global activists as they have enabled lands, forests, and ecologies to flourish. The principle of “living in harmony with the surroundings” becomes the key for the communities to thrive. However, it is also known that indigenous people, particularly women, are more likely to suffer inequalities, discrimination, and even violence in various aspects—physical, social, economic, and political (United Nations 2019). They also work primarily in traditional occupations and subsistence economies in the informal sectors (United Nations 2020).

As a response to these conditions, as well as the lack of information and stories about indigenous people around the world, the United Nations has highlighted the vital role of the media in empowering the world’s indigenous people. This was also highlighted by senior official Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in 2012 when the UN marked the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples. He stressed that both traditional and new media are essential components in helping the indigenous peoples preserve their culture, especially on the contours of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) where their voices must be heard (United Nations 2012).

Moving from the global to the national context, Indonesia has between 50 to 70 million people who belong to indigenous groups throughout the nation. According to the Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN) or the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of Nusantara, the members of its organization consist of approximately 2,359 indigenous communities throughout Indonesia with around 17 million individual members. It is their mission to create a just and prosperous life for all indigenous peoples in Indonesia (AMAN 2018).

In the local context, there is Dayak Benuaq, the indigenous people from East Borneo (Kalimantan). They originated in the West Kutai regency. Just like other indigenous communities in the world, Dayak Benuaq people have always bonded and engaged with nature through culture, traditions, and clothes.

The Dayak Benuaq people have their own cultural identity in a form of woven fabric called *ulap doyo*. It is an authentic woven fabric made from Doyo leaves and is predominantly made by the indigenous women of Dayak Benuaq for centuries. However, in the past decades, the production of *ulap doyo* has been decreasing due to private companies intruding into areas of East Borneo. The demand for land availability in the area has affected the production of Doyo leaves as the land clearing techniques include burning Doyo plants, which is a fundamental material to produce the fiber clothes of *ulap doyo* (Japan Environmental Council 2003). Indirectly, these conditions have

affected the indigenous women of Dayak Benuaq because weaving has become their daily profession where they earn their own income and become empowered.

Based on the explanations above, this paper explores the interconnection between indigenous people, gender, and the media through the case of indigenous women in East Borneo, Indonesia. The issue is significant for at least two reasons. *First*, the United Nations (UN) demands countries to seriously consider the vital role of indigenous people, particularly in terms of achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) 2030 (United Nations 2012). *Second*, President Jokowi has confirmed moving the capital city of Indonesia to East Borneo where indigenous peoples live (The Jakarta Post 2019). The lack of study of media and indigenous peoples in Indonesia, especially in English literature, is another reason why this paper is written.

This descriptive study aims to answer two questions: First, “What challenges do the indigenous women of Dayak Benuaq face in the context of making the *ulap doyo*?” Second, “Why should the media play a role in this issue?”.

The paper is divided into five parts. The first part consists of the introduction, which explains the background, problem identification, aims of the study, and research questions. The second part explains the framework used as a guide to understanding the problems and cases in the study. The third part explains the method of this research. The fourth part discusses the case and findings, and the final part is the conclusion.

FRAMEWORK

The framework used to explain the issue in this study consists of the indigenous people’s conception, gender perspective, and the media, culture, and society approach.

Indigenous People

According to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the official definition of ‘indigenous’ has not yet been adopted by any UN body. However, modern concepts and terminologies reflect several considerations, such as self-identification; historical continuity with pre-colonial and pre-settler societies; strong linkages to the territories and surrounding natural resources; distinct social, economic, or political systems; distinct languages, cultures, and beliefs; form non-dominant groups of society; and resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities (United Nations 2010).

Moreover, the term ‘indigenous’ has prevailed as a generic term in the past decade. In some countries, there may be preferences to use other terms, such as tribes, first peoples/nations, aboriginals, ethnic groups, etc (ibid, 2010). In Indonesia, the term ‘*masyarakat adat*’ or ‘*masyarakat hukum adat*’ is used to identify indigenous people. This term also means ‘geographically isolated customary communities’ or ‘customary law societies’. The term is used in Act No. 27/2007 on Management of Coastal and Small Islands, also Act No. 32/2010 on Environment, which also recognizes indigenous people’s rights. Nevertheless, for all practical purposes, all terms can be used interchangeably with “indigenous peoples” (AMAN 2018).

It is known that the indigenous peoples hold unique languages, knowledge systems, beliefs, and most importantly, they possess invaluable knowledge of practices, such as the sustainable management of natural resources. They believe in special relations between themselves and their god in the form of natural gifts as the key principles to have a balance of life. They believe that their ancestral land has laid an essential foundation for their collective physical and cultural survival. This has affected their conceptions of development which is based on their traditional values, visions, needs, and priorities (United Nations 2010).

However, as also stated by the UNPFII, the notion of “indigenous” has ‘negative connotations and some people may choose not to reveal or define their origin’. This is the reason why, at the same time, people have to work against the discrimination of indigenous peoples.

Moreover, indigenous peoples often face discrimination as they are considered as the neglected segments of society. Some of the social-political problems within the indigenous communities consist of the lack of political representation and participation, economic marginalization and poverty, and lack of access to social services. In Indonesia, indigenous peoples are increasingly experiencing criminalization and violence often related to economic investments in indigenous territories (IWGIA 2020).

Gender Perspective

The gender perspective is an important framework to understand the issue. According to the United Nations (2010), the “(a)pplication of a gender perspective requires consideration of the impact of gender on people’s opportunities, social roles, and interactions. In most indigenous societies, women and men have a distinct ritual, social, and economic responsibilities” (14). In different societies and cultures, different values and norms are attached to men and women and this has affected them in having different statuses. Moreover, in indigenous communities, men and women have different gender roles and responsibilities. This has led to different needs, desires, and interests between men and women. Traditionally, indigenous women were generally respected by indigenous men and had equal access to and control over collective land and natural resources. However, with the gradual loss of the land as natural resources by dominant outsiders of institutions and private property, indigenous women have progressively lost their traditional rights to land and natural resources (United Nations 2010).

The application of a gender perspective can improve the distressing situation of indigenous women caused by multiple oppressions – as indigenous people, as women, and as members of the poorer classes of society. It is known that indigenous men and women have a very low participation in decision-making bodies, politics, and employment but indigenous women are also deprived of educational opportunities. The experiences and challenges that indigenous women face worldwide are often similar in terms of poverty, human rights violations, lack of access to education, health care, and socio-economic development. Their position in the community is even harder considering that they bear the prime responsibility to ensure that the culture and traditions of their peoples are passed onto future generations (Roy 2004).

Mainstreaming the gender perspective in development initiatives can make a real difference. For instance, the situation of both indigenous men and women can be better understood through the analysis of gender-disaggregated data. When indigenous women manage institutions, resources, and development initiatives, they enhance and improve their social and economic situation. With no gender-approaches to development, it would fail to address the issues and problems of indigenous women (United Nations 2010):

Globalization and economic liberalization have often destroyed indigenous subsistence economies and displaced indigenous peoples from their land. Indigenous women have lost their livelihoods due to the impact of globalization on natural resources and as their products have been replaced by manufactured goods. Poverty has contributed to the displacement of these indigenous communities. Indigenous men move from their communities in search of work, in some cases leaving women and children behind. Indigenous peoples are also displaced from their lands due to the construction of highways, dams, mines, and the establishment of national parks (3–4).

However, it is worth knowing that the challenges, barriers, and statuses of indigenous women differ from one community to another and from one region to another. Yet, their concerns, particularly in South Asia and Southeast Asia, often coincide in terms of the imbalanced structure of gender equality. “What unites indigenous women is their common struggle for greater recognition of their rights as indigenous people” (Roy 2004, 4).

Therefore, it is essential to apply a gender perspective to the issues of indigenous people. The role of indigenous women as custodians of culture, language, and beliefs should be strengthened and their status should be respected by society. With this, they are able to strengthen their roles in the protection of the environment and biodiversity. The economic, political, cultural, educational, and health status of indigenous women should be improved. It is believed that the elevated status of indigenous women will also contribute to improvements in the living conditions of indigenous peoples.

Media, Culture, and Society

Media and communication are the center of our everyday lives. Forms of media can be found and used anywhere, whether as radio, television, newspaper, magazines, mobile phones, games, music players, internet, and social media. The media has influenced us so much as it entertains us, enables connections with friends and communities, provides interpretations of the world around us, and offers resources for the forging of identities and imaginations. Somehow the media has become ultimately important for human lives and must have the most significant implications for the nature and character of the broader culture and society that surround us (Hodkinson 2011).

Essentially, the media refers to how content is communicated between an origin and a destination. The use of artificial forms of media could enhance our communicative capacity beyond the capabilities of our bodies. In this 21st century, it is known that the media is at least divided into two forms: old (traditional) media and new (digital) media. Although such a distinction is also

problematic because several media technologies are now considered to be ‘old’, such as film, radio, and television, which were once considered new (Gitelman and Pingree 2003; Marvin 1988, in Flew and Smith 2011). Meanwhile, the new media is an outcome of the digitalization of content, which has enabled ‘convergence’. This refers to the process by which media technologies, industries, and services are merging, through changes in computing, communication networks, and content ... It is known that the characteristics of the new media are interactive with it enabling two-way communication, making it the most effective platform in the 21st century. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are not merely online social platforms, but have become hubs for political organizing and commercial promotions as well. For these reasons, social media platforms are considered powerful tools in this era (Flew and Smith 2011).

Moreover, the word ‘culture’ refers to the whole way of life of a society or group, including its values, meanings, identities, traditions, norms of behavior, and ways of understanding the world. Meanwhile ‘society’ refers to social relations, which includes the detail of everyday interactions and the operations of broader social groupings and categories of social differentiation, such as those based on class, ethnicity, and gender. Indeed, patterns of wealth, power, and inequality are also a further core element of societies. This includes social institutions, such as the apparatus of government and law; education systems, religious organizations, commercial enterprises, communities such as indigenous peoples; and smaller-scale organizational units which are family (Hodkinson 2011).

It was previously stated that it is necessary to understand the role of the media concerning the various features of the broader social and cultural environment and context. Hodkinson argues that there are three roles of media: 1) as shapers, which argues that the content they distribute has the power to influence people and affect the future of society; 2) as a mirror, which means that the role of media is to reflect to the society different events, behaviors, identities, social relations, or values that already are important. Media are deemed more significant for the way they follow rather than the way they lead.; and 3) as representations, which means that the content the media portrays does not reflect the social events, trends, and cultural values in a perfect and neutral way. Instead, they are very selective as to what they include and how they present the elements in particular ways. This conception has strengthened Stuart Hall’s perspective (1982:64) which explains that “representation is a very different notion from reflection. It implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping”).

METHOD

This research is conducted through a qualitative case-study approach to explain the phenomenon in a specific context. As Stake (in Shank 2006) states, “case study is the study of the peculiarity and complexity of a single case, ... to understand its activity within important circumstances” (126–127). Therefore, the discussion in this research does not intend to give a generalization about the phenomena of indigenous people. Moreover, as Merriam (in Shank 2006) states, “the case study can be characterized as being descriptive which means that the product of a case study is a rich and thick description of the phenomenon under study” (126–127). The data is collected through textual studies of books, journals, reports, websites, and news. The study limits the collected data to documentation published between 2016 to 2019.

DISCUSSION

The Creation of *Ulap Doyo*: Symbolism and the Role of Dayak Benuaq Women

In the traditional sense, the 'Ulap' is locally translated as 'cloth', and 'Doyo' refers to the kind of leaves they used to produce the cloth. To understand the egregious process of production and the importance of Dayak Benuaq indigenous women, it is necessary to first look at its historical origin. This dates back to the 17th century when the Kingdom of Kutai reigned in the region (Zaini et.al 2019) and to the 1940s. around the time where Japan occupied Hindia (Indonesia). The *ulap doyo* became the substitution of cloth due to the scarcity of cloth material in that era (Maryanto 2012).

The woven cloth, *ulap doyo*, is a natural thread made from the delicate fiber of Doyo leaves or *Curculigo latifolia* (Maryanto 2012, 41).¹ Traditionally, there is a division of tasks between men and women in the process of making *ulap doyo*. The men are tasked to find and pluck the wild leaves in the forest. Meanwhile, the women are tasked with the rest of the process, from cleaning the leaves, extracting them, and finally to weaving it into fabrics or clothes. The Dayak women would then immediately wash the leaves in the river as soon as the men plucked the leaves due to the oxidation process of Doyo leaves that would affect the quality of the thread. While washing the leaves, the Dayak women would also perform the extraction process using a knife-shaped bamboo, scraping slowly on the surface of the leaves until the color turns darker and gradually removes itself from the fiber. Then, the fiber is stored between woods that are pierced into the river and it is scraped again to get better quality as well as a clearer color. Soon after, the *ulap doyo* fiber is dried under the sun. The sorting process is still required to remove the brown colored fiber as it will affect the coloring process (Maryanto2012, 43-49) (See Figure 1).



Figure 1. Doyo leaves and fiber²

The coloring of these clothes is based on the availability of the natural materials from their surroundings, such as from Lado stones, Gelinggam fruit seed, burned Damar, or Bekakar wood. These respective colors are weaved by the Dayak indigenous women into nineteen different motifs and types (Maryanto 2012, 60-62) (See Figure 2). Moreover, the motifs and types of *ulap doyo* represent different meanings for the indigenous community of Dayak Benuaq. For instance, the motif of Timang represents a 'tiger' which means 'courage', or Pupu that represents a 'butterfly' which means 'hope'. Interestingly, it is Dayak Benuaq women who give meanings to the woven fabrics they produced (See Figure 3).



Figure 2. The production of *ulap doyo*³

Making an original *ulap doyo* takes time, sometimes up to months. The process comprises twenty stages that need to be handled carefully from one stage to another. The Dayak Benuaq women have mastered the process of weaving since they were teens, sometimes even from their childhood. They have learned how to weave from the older women (beritagar.id, 2017). Given this unique transfer of skills, it is almost certainly difficult to find anyone who has mastered the weaving technique of *ulap doyo* outside the Dayak Benuaq tribe (*Kaltim Post* 2016).



Figure 3. Motifs of *ulap doyo*⁴

In 2013, the *ulap doyo* woven cloth was designated as a National Cultural Heritage by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. As a product of the creative industry, it is even redesignated not only as a local notable product to represent East Borneo, but also as an intangible national cultural heritage for the second time in 2017 together with 32 other traditional fabrics from Indonesia. The fabric has become increasingly known worldwide and has been used for both national and international fashion events. It is also widely favored by the international community (beritagar.id 2017). The fabrics entered the market through the intermediary who acts as a reseller of the products. The price of the *ulap doyo* is considered high. A piece of *ulap doyo* cloth measuring 40 x 100 centimeters is sold ranging from 400.000 to 500.000 rupiah. In 2018, the demand for *ulap doyo* also came from international markets such as China and Europe (*Koran Kaltim* 2018), making the woven fabric even famous internationally.

Challenges and Problems

Apart from the strong potential of the *ulap doyo* as a product of Indonesia's creative industry, it should also be noted that there is a cultural shift that has created challenges and problems faced by the indigenous people of Dayak Benuaq.

In the early 1990s, because of modernization, the forest area in West Kutai began to erode due to the construction of commercial land in East Borneo, which is also home to the Dayak Benuaq tribe. Furthermore, the issue of commercial land has developed into the land conflict between the government, private companies, and the indigenous people of Dayak Benuaq. Land issues have taken place in almost all parts in Borneo (Kalimantan) since 1971. Several private companies entered the village of Dayak Benuaq to control the forests and the lands for economic purposes, particularly for palm oil plantations or for mining businesses. These companies include PT. Sawit Sumbermas Sarana (palm oil company), PT. London Sumatera (palm oil company), PT. Gunung Bayan Pratama Coal (coal mining company), PT. Munte Waniq Jaya Perkasa (palm oil company), PT. Borneo Surya Mining Jaya, PT. Gemuruh Karsa, and PT. Aneka Rekasa Internasional (See Table 1).

No.	Company Name	Starting Year of Operation	Location	Business Field
1	PT. Sawit Sumbermas Sarana	1971	Kampung Muara Tae, West Kutai, East Borneo	Wood
2	PT. London Sumatera (Lonsum)	1995	Kampung Muara Tae, West Kutai, East Borneo	Wood, palm oil plantations, coffee, pepper, tea
3	PT. Gunung Bayan Prima Coal	1996	Kampung Muara Tae, West Kutai, East Borneo	Coal mining
4	PT. Munte Waniq Jaya Perkasa	2011	Kampung Muara Tae, West Kutai, East Borneo	Palm oil plantations
5	PT. Borneo Surya Mining Jaya	2010	Kampung Muara Tae, West Kutai, East Borneo	Coal mining
6	PT. Gemuruh Karsa	2012	Kampung Muara Tae, West Kutai, East Borneo	Coal mining
7	PT. Aneka Rekasa Internasional	2016	Kampung Dingin, West Kutai, East Borneo	Palm oil plantations

Table 1. List of Companies Operating in Customary Territory of Dayak Benuaq⁵

In the general culture of the Dayak indigenous people, the Dayak Benuaq people have been dependent on the preservation of the forest as it provides the basic needs of the people. The forest has become a crucial part of their lives and belongs to them socially, culturally, and economically. The deep contact between the Dayak people and the forest has, in turn, formed their knowledge system called 'cultivation system'. The system has become their main characteristic as well as the local wisdom of the Dayak Benuaq indigenous people (FWI 2016).

The *ulap doyo* tradition plays a big role in the livelihood of indigenous women of Dayak Benuaq. Traditionally, the Dayak Benuaq tribes have combined the patrilineal and matrilineal cultures which have provided them a flourishing environment for the women of Dayak Benuaq to express themselves in their community. The people of Dayak Benuaq do not separate rights and responsibilities, rather they emphasize the division of tasks between men and women. Fortunately, this culture has created an enabling environment for women to grow and to play their role in the community. Moreover, the norms in the Dayak Benuaq community have subsequently assisted the women in expressing their knowledge and observation towards their surrounding nature. In the making process of *ulap doyo*, the indigenous women of Dayak Benuaq have not only mastered their precision in the extraction process of fiber but also their artistry and knowledge through weaving. They are expressing their concerns and feelings through patterns, such as plants and animals in their surroundings, so that the final products have created the cultural symbolism with the respective meanings of each motif. Furthermore, the *ulap doyo* tradition has become one of the main sources of income for the women of Dayak Benuaq, making them economically independent, although the husbands are still considered heads of the household.

The private companies operating in the West Kutai area have exploited the natural resources without paying attention to the welfare of the community of Dayak Benuaq. Before these companies existed, it was easy for the people to find resources of livelihoods, such as water, rattan, wood, fish, honey, plants to use as ingredients for medicine, as well as Doyo leaves as their cultural tradition and identity. Besides having an impact on natural resources, the existence of these companies has also affected the creation of horizontal conflicts between communities in the villages, making the social-political structure even worse. As a result, the Doyo plants, as well as its natural dyes, have become harder to find. Alternatively, the natural dyes have been replaced with chemical color and the Doyo weaving process has been replaced by sewing thread. Since then, there have been many printed fabrics with motifs similar to the original *ulap doyo*, making the culture of Doyo weaving lack the appreciation it deserves.

Luckily, modernization has posed a positive impact on the tourism activities in Indonesia, including in Kalimantan (Borneo). The increasing number of foreign tourists who travel to Borneo, as well as the existence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are concerned about the sustainability of the environment of the area, has encouraged the Dayak Benuaq indigenous people (both men and women) to continue to preserve the environmental-friendly *ulap doyo* tradition.

Why Media Coverage is Important

The role of the media is fundamental in supporting indigenous people, particularly towards the developmental model that follows their own priorities, culture, and knowledge system, which has been known as 'cultivation system'. It is well known that the media has the power in representing

society. Media, both old and new, are the key to raising public awareness, sharing knowledge, and supporting broader debates and discourses in society especially regarding indigenous knowledge, cultures, and values (UNESCO 2012). It is also known that the media can be used to share stories about culture, language, perspectives, opinions, etc.

Specifically for indigenous people, the media allows the society, in general, to learn from their experiences, to stand together as a community of this world. The media, particularly the indigenous media, could help Dayak Benuaq people to even deal with local, national, and international trauma. It can also bring opportunities for indigenous women. They can stay informed about the threats or challenges they face and potentially face (Intercontinental Cry 2016).

The lack of indigenous people's representation in the media is a classic problem, not only in Indonesia but also worldwide. However, the existence of the media is the key to a growing and a healthy community. The media also can educate and serve as a channel of information for both the indigenous people and general society. It could also be the channel for raising voices of indigenous people of Dayak Benuaq. In this regard, even UNESCO underlines the importance of utilizing indigenous knowledge, as well as local wisdom, and ensuring continuity with broadcast production, especially in terms of their skills. This also includes the importance of respecting their traditional practices in public services, such as education and health. The media can be a tool to create a platform for the indigenous people's voices to be heard nationally and globally, particularly about the role of their culture and identity towards sustainable development goals (SDGs) which is targeted in 2030.

As a result of indigenous people's strong engagement in the process towards the 2030 agenda, the final resolution "Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (A/RES/70/1) refers to indigenous people 6 times, three times in the political declaration; two in the targets under Goal 2 on Zero Hunger (target 2.3) and Goal 4 on education (target 4.5) – and one in the section on follow up and review that calls for indigenous people's participation. (UNFPII 2015)

However, there are obstacles and challenges in this regard. First, indigenous peoples have limited access to information, both in terms of receiving information and also in providing information to outside communities. The lack of education faced by indigenous people, along with the general society lacking in respect and appreciation of indigenous peoples become a fundamental problem in this issue. This means there is limited space to voice their original and local knowledge. This becomes an issue because the original knowledge mentioned plays a part in the answers to various challenges, one of which is the environment.

Second, there is a lack of coverage by Indonesian journalists on the culture and role of indigenous peoples. This is mostly due to the lack of compensation for journalists who work on projects related to indigenous peoples, because it would then be difficult to sponsor and raise funds to highlight news of indigenous peoples. In other words, they feel that filming themes of indigenous peoples is not considered attractive by the audience. This has its complexity to it, as the audience has already been comforted by modern culture in film, so the demand of the audience in Indonesia does not align with journalist idealism. Although there are journalists who cover the theme of indigenous peoples, the absence of personal narratives when doing coverage becomes a scourge of its own. So

far, personal narrative in the form of storytelling or film documentary is a powerful tool in removing the biases in the media against indigenous peoples. Story-telling and personal narratives can increase positive stereotypes of people of different cultures, because so far, the general society or the people who do not have enough interaction with people of different cultures, have consumed a lot of information then considered as facts that may not be accurate (Asmi 2017).

Third, news related to the Doyo plants focus more about the fabric made by the community. It often highlights merely the manufacturing process and its price, where the goal of this communication is for promotion. While plenty of more important issues, like the issue of inequality of indigenous peoples and the actual problems faced by the Dayak Benuaq indigenous people, especially related to development aggression, pressures by companies, discrimination, and the destruction of the identity of the Dayak Benuaq, were never conveyed to the community.

Regardless of how the media carries out their role and function in reporting about indigenous peoples – specifically in the context of *ulap doyo* and the Dayak community – the basic problem lies in the interpretation of indigenous peoples by the government and the Parliament as legislators. Based on a study conducted by the Indonesian Parliamentary Center (IPC), the perspective of the Indonesian government and the Parliament in interpreting indigenous peoples is still considered wrong. Indigenous peoples are considered as backward, not having scientific studies, and driven by certain parties. Simply put, indigenous people are considered to believe the myths that are contrary to the values of Western-style modernity, which was considered to interfere with the development process. This fundamental problem is raised by the fact that the aspirations of indigenous peoples have not been accommodated. This is due to various reasons, for example, indigenous peoples do not have representation in parliament. Even though a proportional electoral system has been implemented in Indonesia, the requirement to build indigenous-based political parties is difficult. In this case, there needs to be a political party which is concerned with the issue of indigenous peoples. However, this choice is also constrained by issues, such as the difficulty of competing in the election (since the electoral district divides the unity of indigenous territories), the lack of coordination between representatives and their constituents, and the absence of an Indigenous Peoples Law governing their political matters (*Media Indonesia* 2017).

In Indonesia, indigenous women are very rarely mentioned in the news. And within these rare occurrences, indigenous women are displayed in the media as an object of negative connotation. Indigenous peoples are even often a subject of mockery. There was once a case where a television program named itself Primitive Runaway and got sued by the Press Council. It then finally changed its title to Ethnic Runaway instead. There is still very minimal coverage in the Indonesian mass media, and even within these rare reports of indigenous peoples, it does not follow their aspirations. There is even a tendency for the media to represent indigenous peoples as a community that is still underdeveloped. Media workers are considered weak in their perspective and knowledge of the existence of indigenous peoples (AMAN 2013).

The Interconnected Issues Behind *ulap doyo*

Supporting what has been stated by Hall (1982) and Hodgkinson (2011), the various features of the broader social and cultural environment and context are essential to understand the role of media representation concerning indigenous peoples, particularly the people of Dayak Benuaq. From the

case of the *ulap doyo*, it can be identified that there are three issues behind the *ulap doyo* which are interconnected with one another. Those issues are the indigenous people of Dayak Benuaq, gender issues, and the media (see Figure 4).

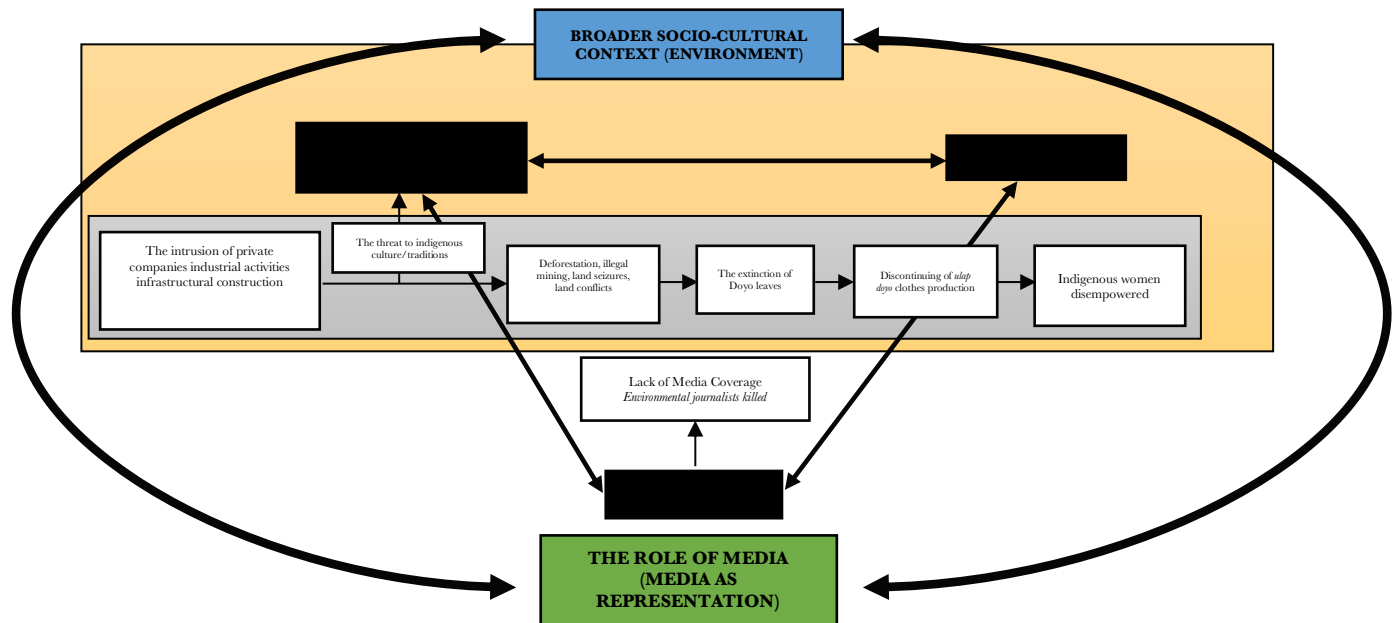


Figure 4. The interconnected issues behind the *ulap doyo*
(Case: Indigenous women in East Borneo)

Issues arise after private companies intruded upon the West Kutai area in East Borneo resulting in the loss of Doyo leaves that have become a vital material in making the *ulap doyo* clothes. The natural surroundings have been damaged, including deforestation caused by the operations of these private companies (e.g., mining industries, palm oil plantations, etc.) in the area of West Kutai regency, where the indigenous people of Dayak Benuaq live. This condition is a threat to the Dayak Benuaq culture and traditions. When the indigenous people of Dayak Benuaq can no longer find the materials, the production will decrease. This means that the Dayak Benuaq women will no longer be able to get additional income for the households, and instead will become dependent on their husbands. This could lead to the challenges for their right to self-determination, resulting in the disempowerment of indigenous women.

The lack of media coverage towards the issues has also become an issue. In this regard, when the media fails to cover the issue of the Dayak Benuaq indigenous people and their obstacles, it becomes harder to change the situation. To create a wider social change, it needs the media to inform the society of what has been going on. This is not only to cover the positive image of its culture and tradition but also about the factors that trigger the problems and conflicts within the community.

The recognition by mass media and social media is considered powerful tools for disseminating information about the existence of the Dayak Benuaq indigenous people, especially indigenous women. Many things can be lifted from the recognition of this community, for example how culture

and identity are built in the environment of indigenous women; how are their efforts to preserve the surrounding environment, especially the nature in which they live; even how the threats to the sustainability of indigenous peoples occur, especially threats on cultural identity including the traditional *ulap doyo* cloth and the role of Dayak Benuaq indigenous women.

The role of the media in this regard is to amplify the issue behind the *ulap doyo*, to empower indigenous women of Dayak Benuaq, to give them space to participate in the social and political aspects of their communities, and to challenge the stereotypes of indigenous people itself. To support this, it is important to consider the use of new media as a channel to amplify the issue. With its characteristics, the coverage of social media is beyond what we can imagine. From many experiences, the role of the new media has affected a wider social change. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are not merely online social platforms, but have become hubs for multiple purposes. In the case of *ulap doyo* and indigenous women of Dayak Benuaq, social media could be the channel to represent Dayak Benuaq women, their stories about cultures, traditions, challenges, threats, and any issues related to that.

CONCLUSION

From the case of *ulap doyo* in East Borneo, there are three interconnected issues that can be identified: indigenous people of Dayak Benuaq, gender issues, and the media. The *ulap doyo* woven fabric has been carried out by the women in the community and has become the cultural identity of the Dayak Benuaq people in West Kutai regency. In the past decade, the challenges faced by these indigenous women have been even greater and complex due to deforestation, land conflict, and lack of natural resources caused by private companies that operate in the area. The condition has threatened the Dayak Benuaq culture and traditions, making it harder to preserve the *ulap doyo* as a cultural product. When the indigenous people of Dayak Benuaq can no longer find the material, the production of *ulap doyo* will decrease. This means the Dayak Benuaq women can no longer get additional income for the households. Therefore, they will become dependent on their husbands and will lead them to struggle even more for their recognition as the key player in sustaining the cultural heritage of *ulap doyo*, as well as in building gender equality in the community. The United Nations has targeted indigenous people as key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals 2030; however, the case in East Borneo has challenged the right to self-determination, resulting in the disempowerment of the indigenous women of Dayak Benuaq, the opposite of the UN's aspirations.

To overcome this challenge, the media has a significant role. The role of the media in this regard is to raise the issue behind the *ulap doyo*, both to Dayak Benuaq people and the general society. It is also important to consider the use of new media as a channel to amplify the issue and to push towards a wider social change. Social media platforms are proven to be powerful as they have become hubs for multiple purposes. In the case of *ulap doyo* and indigenous women of Dayak Benuaq, social media could serve as a channel to represent Dayak Benuaq women, their stories, cultures, traditions, challenges, threats, and other related issues.

NOTES

¹ There are various types of Doyo leaves, such as Doyo Temoyo, Doyo Pentih, Doyo Biang, Doyo Tulang, Doyo Lingan, and Bramang. Meanwhile, Doyo Tulang is rarely used because of the fiber structure that makes it harder to be weaved.

² Retrieved from Balitbangda Kutai Kartanegara, Tengarong, <https://balitbangda.kukarkab.go.id/2009/12/28/kajian-plasma-nutfah-tumbuhan-doyo/>.

³ Photo credit: Lestari, Sri (2015). Retrieved from BBC, Indonesia, https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/majalah/2015/12/151220_majalah_ulapdoyo, accessed 14 January 2020.

⁴ Photo credit: Ardee, Motifs of *Ulap Doyo* Indonesia Kaya, and Karya Kreatif Indonesia, Bank Indonesia (2019), retrieved from <https://www.indonesiakaya.com/jelajah-indonesia/detail/ulap-doyo-nilai-kearifan-lokal-dalam-tenun-warisan-dayak-benuaq>, and <https://www.bi.go.id>, accessed on 14th January 2020.

⁵ Compiled by the author from various sources.

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