



# Neocolonialism and Local Values: How Indigenous Peoples Preserve Their Cultural Identities in a Global Age

\*Musdalifah Syafitri

Faculty Of Science And Culture, Hasanuddin University

\*Correspondence author: [Musdalifahsyafitri249@gmail.com](mailto:Musdalifahsyafitri249@gmail.com); Tel.: +6287678545653

## Abstract

This study aims to explore the impact of neocolonialism on indigenous peoples in Indonesia and the strategies they use to maintain their cultural identity. A qualitative research method with a case study approach was used in this study. Three indigenous communities were selected as sub-cases: Baduy indigenous people in Banten Province, Dayak indigenous people in East Kalimantan, and Toraja indigenous people in South Sulawesi. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with indigenous leaders, activists, academics, and practitioners working in the fields of indigenous peoples' rights, environment, and neocolonialism. In addition, participatory observations were conducted to understand local values, cultural practices and social dynamics of indigenous communities. Document analysis was also conducted to support the primary data obtained. The results show that indigenous peoples are faced with various forms of neocolonialism that threaten their cultural identity. However, indigenous peoples are not passive in the face of neocolonialism. They use local values such as solidarity, cooperation, harmony and sustainability as a source of strength and wisdom to maintain their cultural identity. The recommendations include the protection and development of local values, recognition and protection of indigenous peoples' rights, and accountability and transparency in implementing activities involving indigenous peoples. In conclusion, this study highlights how neocolonialism affects the cultural identity of indigenous peoples in Indonesia and shows that indigenous peoples are active in maintaining their cultural identity through local values that are a source of strength and wisdom for them.

**Keywords:** Neocolonialism, Local value, Conventional.

## 1. Introduction

Neocolonialism is a term used to describe a form of economic, political and cultural domination of developing countries over developing countries without direct colonization. Neocolonialism can take the form of military intervention, economic aid, foreign debt, free trade, foreign investment, mass media and popular culture. Neocolonialism aims to control the target countries' natural resources, markets, labour and ideology. Neocolonialism also affects the cultural identity of the communities within its sphere of influence. One of the communities experiencing

the effects of neo-colonialism is indigenous communities. Indigenous peoples are social groups with historical ties to specific territories and local values that differ from global values. Indigenous peoples have collective rights to land, natural resources, culture and way of life. Indigenous communities also play an essential role in maintaining biodiversity and environmental sustainability.

However, indigenous peoples often face challenges and pressures from neo-colonialism, such as exclusion, discrimination, exploitation and assimilation. Indigenous peoples also often do not receive recognition and protection from the countries in which they live. Therefore, this research aims to discover how indigenous peoples maintain their cultural identity amidst the phenomenon of neo-colonialism. This research also seeks to know how indigenous peoples use their local values as a source of strength and wisdom in the face of neo-colonialism. This study uses a qualitative approach to the case study method. In this study, Indonesia was chosen as a research location because Indonesia is a country with a large number of indigenous peoples and has also experienced various forms of neo-colonialism.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The data used in this study comes from three primary sources: in-depth interviews with key informants consisting of indigenous leaders, activists, academics and practitioners working on indigenous rights, the environment and neo-colonialism. Interviews are conducted face-to-face or online using a semi-structured interview guide. The purpose of the interview is to obtain information about indigenous peoples' opinions, experiences and strategies to preserve their cultural identity amid neo-colonialism. Participatory observation in several places where indigenous communities live. Observations were made by observing the daily activities of the indigenous communities, such as rituals, meetings, farming, etc. The observations aim to gain insight into the local values, cultural practices and social dynamics of indigenous communities. Document analysis in the form of reports, articles, books, newspapers, social media and other sources related to the research topic.

Document analysis aims to obtain secondary information that supports and complements the primary data from interviews and observations. All data obtained were then analyzed using content analysis techniques. Content analysis is a method for identifying, classifying and interpreting the meaning of textual data. Content analysis is performed by determining the code categories corresponding to the research objectives, separating the analysis units from the textual data, coding the analysis units according to the given code categories, and presenting the analysis results as a descriptive narrative. The method used in this study is the case study method. A case study is a qualitative research method that focuses on an in-depth analysis of one or more specific cases in a real-world context. Case studies can be used to explain, explore or understand complex phenomena that are difficult to isolate from context. Case studies can also be used to test or develop new theories.

The cases selected in this study are indigenous Indonesian communities facing neo-colonialism. This study uses a multiple case study approach by choosing three indigenous communities as sub-cases: the Baduy indigenous community in Banten province, which faces neo-colonialism through foreign investment and infrastructure development in their traditional territory. The indigenous Dayak people of East Kalimantan face neo-colonialism in exploiting natural resources and oil palm plantations in their traditional territory. The Toraja indigenous people of South Sulawesi face neo-colonialism in the form of popular culture and tourism in their traditional territory. The purpose of choosing these three subcases is to show the differences and similarities of indigenous peoples in maintaining their cultural identity amid neo-colonialism. This

study also uses data triangulation techniques combining information from interviews, observations and documents.

### 3. Results

The results of this study show that the indigenous peoples of Indonesia face various forms of neocolonialism that affect their cultural identity. Neocolonialism threatens indigenous peoples' physical existence and changes their values, norms and cultural practices. Neocolonialism also creates conflicts between indigenous peoples and other parties, such as the government, companies and surrounding communities. Neocolonialism also creates internal crises in indigenous communities, such as division, loss and discontent. However, the results of this study also show that indigenous peoples are not passive in the face of neo-colonialism. Indigenous peoples' local values provide strength and wisdom to maintain their cultural identity. These local values are solidarity, cooperation, harmony

And sustainability. Indigenous peoples use these local values as a guide to implement resistance, adaptation and transformation strategies. Resistance strategies are strategies that indigenous peoples use to resist or fight neocolonialism. Examples of resistance strategies implemented by indigenous communities include:

1. The Baduy natives close their traditional area from outside influences and preserve their old traditions.



**Figure 3. 1** Baduy Tradition[9]

One community group that continues to preserve its local wisdom and local culture is the Baduy traditional community. They live in the traditional area of Lebak Regency in Banten province. They close themselves off from the effects of modernization and globalization, which can threaten their noble values and customs. They fulfil various old traditions from generation to generation, such as not using electricity, motor vehicles, electronic devices, coloured clothes, etc. They also protect nature and their environment by not destroying or exploiting natural resources. They believe they can maintain the balance between people, nature and God.

2. The Dayak natives offer armed and legal resistance to companies that confiscate their lands and natural resources.



**Figure 3. 2** Dayak Tradition[10]

In order to protect their rights to land and natural resources taken over by large corporations, the Dayak natives have implemented various forms of resistance. One is armed resistance, carried out with traditional weapons such as mandau, spears and arrows. This armed resistance aims to deport and expel workers and business leaders who enter their traditional territory without permission. In addition, Dayak natives also engage in legal resistance, namely filing lawsuits and claims against those responsible for violating their rights. This legal battle is supported by several institutions and organizations dealing with environmental issues and human rights.

3. The Toraja traditional community preserves its local cultures, such as death ceremonies, Tongkon houses and carvings.



**Figure 3. 3** Toraja Tradition[11]

One of the characteristics of the traditional community of Toraja is the richness and uniqueness of local cultures, which have been preserved until today. These cultures reflect the noble values, beliefs and identity of the Toraja people. Some famous examples of local Toraja culture include death ceremonies, Tongkonan houses and carvings. The Toraja death ceremony is a traditional ritual to honour and guide the deceased's soul to the afterlife. This ceremony usually lasts from several days to several weeks and is attended by many family members, relatives and neighbours. This ceremony also shows the social and economic status of the family performing it. A Tongkonan house is a traditional Toraja house that is stilt-shaped and has a curved roof like a boat. This house is a symbol of family, unity and Toraja culture. This house is also decorated with carvings that have a philosophical and aesthetic meaning. Toraja sculpture is a wood sculpture

characterized by geometric shapes, bright colours, animal, plant, and human motifs. This carving depicts the natural beauty, local wisdom and beliefs of the Toraja people. Adaptation strategies are the strategies of indigenous people to adapt to neocolonialism. Examples of adaptation strategies implemented by indigenous communities include:

- The Baduy indigenous community opens its traditional territory in a selective and limited way for educational, health and economic purposes.
- According to local communities and other parties, The original Dayak community uses natural resources sustainably and inclusively.
- The Toraja traditional community develops its local culture as a tourist destination and source of income. Strategies of transformation are indigenous strategies that aim to turn neocolonialism into something positive.

Examples of transformation strategies implemented by indigenous communities include:

- The Baduy indigenous community strengthens itself and its community through social and political organizations based on local values.
- Dayak indigenous people engage in advocacy and campaigns to achieve recognition and protection of indigenous rights by the state and the international community.
- The original Toraja community engages in dialogue and cooperation with other parties to promote their local values as universal values acceptable to all.

This study suggests some things that indigenous peoples and other parties can do to defeat neo-colonialism and preserve indigenous cultural identities, namely:

- Indigenous peoples must continue to preserve and develop their local values as a source of strength and wisdom to face neo-colonialism. Indigenous communities must also unite and work with other Indigenous communities to support and empower each other.
- The government should respect and protect the rights of indigenous peoples as citizens equal to other citizens. The government must also provide facilities and assistance that meet the needs and aspirations of indigenous peoples without interfering with or ignoring local values. Companies must be accountable and transparent when operating in indigenous customary areas. Businesses must also stop or reduce practices that damage or harm the environment and socio-culture of indigenous communities.
- Surrounding communities must respect and recognize the existence and role of indigenous communities as part of the nation's cultural diversity. The surrounding community must also be tolerant and harmonious in dealing with and interacting with the indigenous communities. The international community must support and help indigenous peoples in the struggle for their indigenous rights. The international community must also monitor and criticize parties that practice neo-colonialism against indigenous peoples.

#### 4. Discussion

This article is about neocolonialism and the cultural identity of the indigenous peoples of Indonesia. This study uses a multiple case study method by choosing three indigenous communities as sub-cases, namely the Baduy, Dayak and Toraja indigenous communities. This study uses data triangulation techniques, combining information from interviews, observations and documents. The results of this study show that the indigenous peoples of Indonesia face various forms of neocolonialism that affect their cultural identity. Neocolonialism threatens indigenous peoples' physical existence and changes their values, norms and cultural practices. However, indigenous peoples also have local values that provide strength and wisdom to preserve their cultural identity. Indigenous peoples use these local values as a guide to implement resistance, adaptation and transformation strategies. This study suggests several things indigenous

peoples and other parties can do to defeat neocolonialism and preserve indigenous cultural identity, namely the preservation and development of local values, respect and protection of indigenous rights, accountability and transparency in implementing activities. In ordinary fields, respecting and recognizing the existence and role of indigenous peoples and supporting and helping indigenous peoples to fight for their indigenous rights in the world.

## 5. Conclusions

This study highlights the impact of neocolonialism on the cultural identity of indigenous peoples in Indonesia, focusing on the Baduy, Dayak and Toraja communities. The results show that neocolonialism has threatened the physical existence, values, norms and cultural practices of indigenous peoples. However, indigenous communities are not passive in facing neocolonialism. They actively use local values such as solidarity, cooperation, harmony and sustainability as a source of strength and wisdom to maintain their cultural identity. Recommendations resulting from this research include the protection and development of local values, recognition and protection of indigenous peoples' rights, and accountability and transparency in implementing activities involving indigenous peoples. The practical implications of this research are the need for policies that are more inclusive and favorable to indigenous peoples, as well as the need for cooperation between the government, non-governmental organizations, and indigenous peoples in building sustainable solutions.

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