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The Ethnoecology of the Malay Sacred Myth through Narratives of Kampung Tua Nongsa in Batam

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Abstract

The condition of the Malays is significantly marginalized due to the migration and the rapid industrial development in Batam, Indonesia. However, the Malay sacred myth is still sustained as a local wisdom for the Malay generations. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the ethnoecology behind the story of the sacred myth of Bumbum, Puak, and Batu Belah as a representation of environmental Malay local wisdom in Kampung Tua Nongsa, Batam. Within the conceptual framework of ethnoecology as a bridge to understanding the relationship between literature in the form of folklore and the culture of society, this qualitative research collected data through observation by being directly involved in the community and in-depth interviews with 21 informants including the key jury of the sacred places, community advice, community leaders, village officials, and the younger generation of Malay people in Kampung Tua Nongsa. Data analysis was carried out by comparing, reconfirming, classifying, and interpreting the data with an ethnoecology approach. The results showed that there were three important ethnoecological representations: (1) the ecological ties between forests and humans in the

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sacred Bumbum, (2) the reflection of the wise king in the sacred of Puak, and (3) the sea as the central life of nature in the sacred of Batu Belah. Sacred site prohibitions reveal deep connections between human behavior and nature, emphasizing ethical considerations; these stories highlight cultural values, insights for heritage preservation, and solutions for environmental challenges within an ethnoecological framework, stressing the importance of ethics in human-nature interactions.

Keywords: Ethnoecology, Kampong Tua Nongsa Batam, Malay, myths, sacred.

1. INTRODUCTION

Batam is well-known as an industrial city. Since 1970, through the Presidential Decree of Republic Indonesia No. 74/1971, Batam has been designated as a bonded industrial area (Pernando, 2018). As an industrial city, Batam has emerged as a magnet, drawing individuals from other cities in search of fortune and opportunities to enhance economic well-being. The implementation of the 2009 Free Trade Zone (FTZ) has notably intensified this attraction, enticing investors to establish large-scale industries within Batam City. This influx of investment not only contributes to the city's economic growth but also plays a pivotal role in improving people's welfare (Aritenang, 2017). Behind the splendor of industrial city developments, Batam has significant impacts on nature and the environment. The primary contributors to extensive environmental degradation in Batam stem from industrial and residential logging activities, reclamation, and the detrimental effects of industrial waste and air pollution. Widespread deforestation driven by the demand for land has disrupted ecosystems, causing biodiversity loss and soil erosion.

The data from the Agency for the Assessment and Application of Technology Indonesia added that the pollution of water quality due to industrial waste in 1992-2000 ranged from 34.70mg/l to 268.4mg/l in the reservoir area adjacent to the Batamindo Duriangkan industry (Hariyadi, 2006). The rapid economic growth also creates gaps, especially for communities around industries that feel the impact of environmental damage (hinterland). This impact was also caused by the loss of awareness of upholding the principles of Malay culture as the first inhabitants of Batam since the early 231 AD regarding protecting nature and the environment. In the *Gurindam* (a type of irregular verse form of traditional Malay poetry), it clearly states that: *Bila habis latar sang hutan berdiri alam lestari tinggal idaman yang lari* 'When the forest is cut down, the sustainability of nature remains only as a dream that has eluded us'.

Among the rapid development of industrialization in Batam, there were a few Malay people who still hold on to customs and traditions from generation to generation, especially those related to preserving nature. This could be seen from the existence of the Malay sacred place in Nongsa which is still maintained and held firmly. The preservation of this sacred place could not be separated from the belief of Malay people toward the story behind this existing mythical sacredness, including the sacred of *Bumbum*, *Puak*, and *Batu Belah*. The sacred of Bumbum is a legacy of Habib Nuh in the form of a tree that grows from coconut fibbers. This tree could not be cut

or moved because it is believed to have mystical in it. Then, the sacred of Puak is the tomb of Nong Isa King's descendant, who was known as honest, keeping promises, and wise. Adjacent to the sacred of Puak, there is a sacred stone which is believed to be the crossing of the dragon who wants to cross the opposite island namely the sacred of Batu Belah. This sacred existed on Putri Island, which was well known as small Nongsa Island.

The story of myth cannot be separated from studies in oral literature. According to [Sarkki et al. \(2018\)](#), myth serves as the expressive embodiment and attribution of identity to particular values, a symbolic representation of deeply held and steadfast beliefs. These narratives contribute to the construction of meaning within societies, acting as powerful conduits that shape cultural understanding. Myths, often passed down through generations, not only convey stories but also encapsulate the core values and ideals deemed significant by a community. Meanwhile, oral literature is an oral testimony in the form of messages or, stories from generation to generation ([Taum, 2011](#)).

Moving from the various phenomena of the problems above, especially the myth behind the three sacred stories is important to be studied more deeply, particularly by using an ethnoecological approach. In line with this, ethnoecology is the study of the indigenous perspectives on the connections between humans and their natural surroundings that encompasses various ecological elements such as soil, climate, ecological communities, and other environmental factors, extending beyond the focus solely on the species involved ([Hunn, 2007](#); [Nazarea, 1999](#)). The influence of Malay culture and belief in the ancestors makes a strong relationship between the community and the surrounding ecology so that it inspires every behavior of the Malay community in Batam.

The application of ethnoecology in literature is a development of the mimetic approach (the mirror of social phenomena) by applying interdisciplinary scientific disciplines. Therefore, concern with the significance of theoretical and practical the relevance of this approach could refer to cross-scientific applications. [Gurung and Koirala \(2020\)](#) explore the practices and perspectives of Nepali women in ecological conservation against environmental, socio-cultural, and religious degradation. Stand with the "act locally, think globally" slogan to save nature, various ethnic behaviors played a role in the realm of ethnoecology in this study. The studies related to environmental sustainability with an ecocritical approach in literature have been carried out in many countries ([Arianto et al., 2021](#); [Bracke, 2018](#); [Curry 2014](#); [Goldwyn, 2016](#)). However, none of these studies applied an ethnoecological approach to oral literature, especially in the form of myths even folktales.

This study bridged the relationship between literature in the form of folklore and the culture of society which were embraced and believed as ethnic customs with an ethnoecological approach. This research focused on revealing the ethnoecological reality behind the story of the sacred myth of Bumbum, Puak, and Batu Belah of Malay people in Kampong Tua Nongsa Batam. This study is significant considering the condition of the Malay community as an indigenous tribe in Batam which was increasingly marginalized geographically, culturally, and historically by the rapid flow of industrialization and migration in this city. This study is among the efforts that tried to contribute to reinvigorating the remaining values of local wisdom.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Myth as Part of Oral Literature

Oral literature constitutes a rich tapestry of literary expressions seamlessly transmitted from one generation to the next through spoken word. Oral literature stands as a testament to the enduring power of spoken language in preserving the collective wisdom and cultural identity of societies across generations (Zaimar, 2008). Taum (2011) elaborates on the significance of aesthetics as a primary component of oral literature. Additionally, he emphasizes that oral literature serves as a means of expressing the collective consciousness (mentifact) of local communities concerning life, customs, and beliefs. This perspective underscores the intrinsic connection between the aesthetic qualities of oral narratives and the cultural awareness embedded in them, portraying oral literature as a dynamic and culturally rich medium for conveying and preserving the collective knowledge and values of a community.

According to Sarkki et al. (2018), myths serve as expressions and identifiers of specific values, symbolizing deeply held meanings. The mythic narratives are transmitted orally from one generation to another, solidifying their existence. This process results in a manifestation of obedience and submission to the conveyed values, highlighting the enduring nature of these cultural expressions. In essence, myths play a crucial role in shaping and preserving identity by encapsulating and passing down meaningful beliefs from one generation to the next.

Furthermore, myths often serve as repositories of historical knowledge and communal wisdom. Through the oral tradition, these narratives become part of a community's identity, providing a sense of continuity with the past. Sarkki et al. (2018) suggest that myths not only express identity but also act as a means of imparting deep meanings. The stories told by ancestors from one generation to the next not only preserve cultural values but also contribute to the transmission of collective experiences. In this way, the study of oral literature, with a specific focus on myths, becomes a rich exploration of how societies conceptualize and communicate their shared history, values, and understanding of the world.

2.2 Narrative Structure of Myth Stories

The theory of narrative structure was first introduced by Greimas (1983). According to Ratna (2011), the analysis of narrative structure involves examining the sequence of actions that exert a direct influence on the storyline. Taum (2011) added that the object of Greimas' (1983) research was not limited to fairy tales but also myths, legends, and folklore. In the storytelling stage, the identification of sequences or sequences of text units is carried out. A sequence is a group of consecutive events that can become one story unit that comes together (Poyatos, 1988).

Greimas (1983) proposes that a narrative semiotic approach challenges the notion that the surface structure of a story is arbitrary. Instead, it suggests that each narrative follows an actantial model, implying that the elements and characters within a story play specific roles in a structured and meaningful way. This perspective underscores the idea that underlying semiotic structures contribute to shaping the surface features of a narrative, emphasizing a deeper, inherent order and significance to the elements presented in a story. Greimas (1983) posits that at the heart of the

meaning in any meaningful discourse, there exists a common human scenario. Within this scenario, actants—entities playing specific roles in a narrative—operate as Subject and Object, Sender and Receiver, and occasionally as Helper and Opponent (Pikkarainen, 2015). These actants become roles in their fictional acts if they have a social or cultural quality. Greimas' (1983) next stage is functional schema analysis, which is divided into three: (1) the initial situation, (2) the transformation stage (the skill test stage, the main stage, and the glorious stage), and (3) the final situation (Al Anshory et al., 2023). The final stage in Greimas (1983) narrative structure concept is isotopy. Isotopy tries to reveal the meaning behind the narrative story by considering the act and function of the story. From this isotopy, linguists and literary researchers go on to use ethnological theory to see the relationship behind the story with human behavior.

2.3 Ethnoecology in Myths

Literature and people's behavior could be bridged by using a literary anthropological approach. Ratna (2013) explains that society is part of literature, as the background, as well as the recipient of the creation itself. In the case of community, it will also talk about the culture formed by the community in it. Endraswara (2018) provides several effects that bring together anthropological and literary studies, it is (1) anthropology and literature pay attention to the human aspect as the perpetrator, (2) humans are cultured social creatures, and (3) there are many oral discourses and oral literature that link anthropological and literary studies. One of the anthropological studies that can trace the relationship between humans and the environment is by using an ethnoecological approach (Kottak, 1999).

The inseparable connection between humans and their natural environment highlights the intrinsic relationship shaping individuals within their context. This untouched, natural environment influences culture, as humans interpret and reflect it. Ethnoecology delves into the exploration of values and meanings embedded in human behavior, particularly actions reflecting environmental conservation. Aligned with Malinowski's theory of narrative structure, as cited in Baiduri (2020), this approach aims to grasp the native perspective, understand their life relationship, and acknowledge their worldview. Emphasizing the significance of capturing nuanced cultural insights within specific sociocultural contexts, ethnoecology highlights the interconnectedness of human behavior, culture, and the untouched natural environment.

Throughout history and in contemporary times, every culture has dealt with the question of how individuals relate to the natural environment. Just as social interactions are guided by a set of rules within each culture, the connection between individuals and nature is also defined by cultural frameworks (Schultz, 2002). The phenomenon of human culture can be examined by relating it to the natural environment in which humans and cultures live. The approach in ethnoecology, which is also known as geographical determinism or ethnographical environmentalism, has the view that the conditions of an environment have a very big role in shaping the culture of an ethnic group.

Stewart and Strathern (2003) assert that the environment and culture are intricately interconnected, challenging the notion that they are distinct entities. This viewpoint implies that environmental and cultural considerations should be

approached as interdependent factors influencing each other. According to [Steward \(2005\)](#), the environment and culture are indivisible entities engaged in a reciprocal relationship. He emphasizes that these elements form a cohesive blend, each influencing and shaping the other. His theory suggests that the dynamic interaction between environment and culture is essential for understanding how societies adapt and evolve within their ecological contexts.

3. METHODS

This study employs qualitative research methods where the data gathered empirical facts relevant to research problems, comprising words and sentences provided by informants, necessitates an in-depth understanding ([Faruk, 2012](#)). The research was conducted in Kampong Tua, Nongsa Batam sub-district, Riau Islands, with 21 informants purposefully selected. Informants include caretakers, key figures overseeing sacred sites, and members of the Malay community such as traditional leaders, community leaders, village officials, and the younger generation, collectively forming a diverse representation of Kampong Tua village in Nongsa.

3.1 Data Collection

Data collection techniques in this research include primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through field observations and in-depth interviews ([Boyce & Neale, 2006](#)). Structured questions were prepared for in-depth interviews to ensure focused and comprehensive responses, with the selected informants considered knowledgeable about the research object. Recording tools, including platforms like WhatsApp, video cameras, and recorders were employed to document the primary data collected during the field observations and interviews. Meanwhile, secondary data derived from a literature study of writings on the object of study, that is the story of the sacred myth of Bumbum, Puak, and Batu Belah as a representation of environmental Malay local wisdom in Kampong Tua Nongsa, Batam.

3.2 Data Analysis

The processing of research data in this study involved a systematic and multifaceted approach ([Gioia, 2021](#)). The research process involved several key steps which involved defining clear objectives, scrutinizing data sources for relevance, transcribing interviews, and translating literature. Findings from observations and interviews were summarized, followed by a thorough review for accuracy. The ecological determination phase integrated narrative structure, and the final step interpreted data within ethnoecological approaches, offering a comprehensive understanding of cultural and ecological significance.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Humans and nature form an integral and interconnected unity. Frequently, as time progresses, this interconnectedness is overlooked and prioritizing human

convenience (Arianto & Suryani, 2020a). The challenges posed by urbanization and rapid industrialization in Batam City are directly confronted and addressed by the ongoing processes of modernization. Several forms of environmental pollution, the degradation of nature, deforestation, harm to marine life, destruction of hillsides, and soil excavation mark the initiation of ecological harm caused by attitudes that prioritize materialistic gains without consideration for the environment (Hariyadi, 2006). The issue has escalated into a serious problem affecting nearly all sectors across Batam.

The extensive human migration exacerbates the distortion of indigenous cultures, where the prevailing harmonious relationship between humans and nature is under threat (Arianto & Suryani, 2020a). Regrettably, the endeavor to construct settlements and expand land for industrial, tourism, and entertainment purposes has marginalized the crucial priority of preserving the natural environment. Concurrently, the formidable influence wielded by global elites holds the potential to alter cultural values for personal material gain, posing a significant threat to the very existence of social culture. Humans have overwhelmed the natural environment, threatening their own existence (UNESCO, 2021).

Ethnoecological studies play a crucial role in deconstructing cultural values within societies. The overarching goal is to foster a balanced and harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Through this approach, ethnoecology aims to promote a profound understanding of the interconnectedness between cultural beliefs, practices, and the natural world (Arianto & Suryani, 2020a). Despite facing challenges and potential elimination, communities preserving their traditions and adhering to social-moral laws that uphold a balance with nature exhibit remarkable resilience, showcasing the ability to navigate cultural shifts while maintaining a harmonious relationship with the environment. One of them is found in the community of the Malay village of Nongsa, Batam, Riau Islands.

The cultural foundation of the community is shaped by ethnoecological contemplation, emanating from the continuous protection of three sacred sites in Batam, coupled with the cultural practices that accompany them (Arianto & Suryani, 2020a). The researchers found that three tomb locations still exist in the Malay of Kampong Tua Nongsa, namely the sacred Bumbum, Puak, and Batu Belah. This research tries to uncover the ethnological representations of the three historical places with the societal behaviors that are formed. In essence, all of these community behaviors are inseparable from the bonds that maintain harmony between humans and nature.

4.1 The Ecological Ties Between Forests and Humans in the Sacred Bumbum

The sacred of Bumbum is a legacy of Habib Nuh in the form of a tree that grows from coconut fibers. This tree should not be cut or moved because it is believed to be mystical. Habib Nuh was a smart and devout person who could act as an intermediary between humans and God to treat various diseases and avoid calamities. For people to maintain nature, he left a sacred place by planting trees that grew from coconut fibers. This tree has aged hundreds of years but no one can even move or cut the tree.

The ethnoecological element that was reflected in the existence of the tree was represented by the existence of an oral tradition in the form of prohibitions regarding the existence of the tree. The researchers explained these prohibitions in the following descriptions and analysis.

4.1.1 Prohibition against cutting down the sacred tree

The act of cutting down trees has a close correlation with ecological criticism. Heise (2011), through ecological criticism, highlighted the impact of deforestation on ecosystems and biodiversity, reflecting concerns about environmental degradation. The anthropocentric legal attitude that emphasized all life was human-centered made many people feel innocent, including cutting down trees and deforestation (Mantiri & Handayani, 2020). Ethnoecology is a bridge that makes people aware of the culture related to ethics towards nature and the environment. The existence of the sacred Bumbang forms an interrelated interaction between humans and nature. Bumbang as a representation of nature implies an existence that is not only silent but still alive and in harmony with one another. This is described by Informant 1.

- (1) *Bumbang asalnye dari serabot kelape yang sengaja di tanam oleh Habeb Nuh orang yang pandai lagi taat. Banyak masyarakat yang hendak berziarah untuk mendapatkan berkat Sang Kuase melalui perantare Sang Habeb. Pokok keramat ini tak boleh di tebang, sebab ini sebagai umpama bentuk perantare manusi alam dan jugak Tuhan.* [Bumbang has its origin from coconut fibers that were deliberately planted by Habib Nuh, a devout shaman. Many people want to go on a pilgrimage to seek the blessing of the Almighty through the medium of the Habib. This sacred tree cannot be cut down because it serves as an intermediary for humans, nature, and God.] (Informant 1)

The excerpt in (1) by Informant 1 gave an overview of the sacred origins of Bumbang. It gives an understanding that Bumbang represents the existence of Habib Nuh, who was believed to be alive and kind by the community. This tree has lived for hundreds of years. No one could cut or remove this tree. This was further clarified by the following excerpt from the interview with Informant 1 that the public believes that the Habib Nuh form was still inscribed in a Bumbang. Longing for obedience and honesty makes people inseparable from his figure. Therefore, the growth of the Bumbang tree cannot be separated from the existence of his figure. Nobody knows where Habib Nuh was buried, some believe he was buried in the sacred Bumbang. Others believe that he had moved and was buried in the shrine of Bumbang on Malaysian soil.

4.1.2 Prohibition against picking leaves and tree trunks

The social phenomenon refers to the dynamics of human social interactions, holding particular significance in the examination of ethnoecology. This importance arises from the central focus of ethnoecological studies on the interactions between humans and the natural environment (Arianto & Suryani, 2020b). Socio-anthropological knowledge of human relations, grounded in the maintenance of a harmonious natural balance, elucidates the interconnectedness of two interrelated relationships. Through this dynamic interaction, prohibitions arise as mechanisms to constrain human actions and prevent the disruption of the harmonious coexistence between nature and humans, emphasizing the imperative of utilizing nature without causing its destruction (Mei, 2023).

This prohibition was further understood by some people as a myth whose truth could just happen by chance. However, in ethnoecological studies, the most important thing is not whether it's accidental or not, but how myths shape people's behavior, especially about the mutual interaction between humans and nature. Rodrigues et al.

(2022) state that ethnoecological science explores the interactions between a community and the living and non-living elements of the environment within which they socially exist and reproduce. The term combines “ethno” referring to nation or people, and “ecology”, denoting the science that examines the connections between living organisms and their surroundings. This supports the statement that the relation of the prohibition against picking leaves or even cutting down trees with the occurrence of the disease has a functional relationship that cannot be explained logically. However, the human ability not to destroy nature is a reflection of the existence of this myth.

The fact that many prohibitions existed behind the existence of the sacred Bumbang did not stop the greed of humans with the power to repeatedly shift this sacred existence. One of them is Citratubindo Batam Company. The company wanted to restore the area because the location was very strategic to be developed. This is discussed with the sacred jury (Informant 3) of the Bumbang.

- (2) *Sudah banyak orang yang hendak memusnahkan keberadaan keramat Bumbang, namun selalu gagal. Kalau tak silaf, anak dari perusahaan Citratubindo Batam yang hendak melakukan perluasan lahan dan pemindahan keberadaan keramat Bumbang. Alhamdulillah, keramat Bumbang tetap saje wujud dan tetap teja kelestariannya dari sifat tamak manusia. [There have been many people who wanted to displace the sacred existence of Bumbang but failed. If I'm not mistaken, the subsidiary of the Citratubindo Batam Company wanted to expand the land and move the sacred Bumbang's existence. Praise to Allah, the sacred Bumbang still exists and is preserved from human greed.] (Informant 3)*

The excerpt in (2) provides an example affirming that by using human power, there is an attempt to destroy the relationship between humans and nature. It is stated that several attempts were made but failed. According to the caretaker, the failures were commonly due to the sudden breakdown of the mower or sudden unfavorable weather conditions. Whether or not the story is true, the existence of this sacred tree still stands strong to this day. Unfortunately, many other locations have been destroyed by human greed. Many hills were leveled for the sake of building settlements or resorts and entertainment venues. Many trees were cut down and replaced with ornaments that were not useful in protecting nature itself.

4.1.3 *Prohibition against defecating around the tree*

The goal of the ecological struggle for the environment is to build awareness that humans are not subjects of superiority while nature and the environment are objects of inferiority (Kober, 2013). A harmonious relationship of equality between humans and nature is achieved by maintaining environmental ethics, including not polluting the environment. The prohibition of defecating around the tree is another aspect of these environmental ethics. This is reflected in the following conversation excerpt with Informant 4.

- (3) *Usah sesekali buang ae kecil ataupun buang ae besa di sekeliling keramat Bumbang, sebab itu tempat suci yang tak boleh di kotori. Padahnya nanti boleh kualat jike mengotori tempat tersebut. [Don't try to urinate or defecate around the sacred Bumbang. It's a holy place that shouldn't be contaminated. People could later face problems if the place is polluted.] (Informant 4)*

The relationship between humans and ethical morality toward nature is also an inseparable part of ethnoecological studies. Ethnoecology explores the intricate relationship between humans and nature, emphasizing the ethical dimensions of this interaction. Human ethical morality towards nature within ecocriticism involves examining how individuals and societies perceive, value, and treat the environment. Buell (2009) calls for a shift from anthropocentrism to ethnocentrism where ethical considerations in ethnocentrism thus contribute to fostering sustainable and respectful attitudes towards the environment. Likewise, the attitude of respecting the holy places was not only a part of myth but also of the existence of nature, religion, and social ethics in society.

4.2 The Reflection of the Wise King in the Sacred of *Puak*

The second sacred story was found in the sacred existence of *Puak Nongsa*. This time the researchers interviewed Informant 2, the caretaker of the *Puak* shrine who lives right at the gate of the sacred entrance. This sacred place was more isolated than the tomb of other Malay kings. Not every person could visit this place. When the researchers conducted the interview, Informant 2 initially objected to providing information because she had to ask permission ‘inwardly’ first.

The King of *Puang* was well-known within the Malay community as a simple, honest, and wise king. He did not like to be exalted or to exalt others. The king, who was the descendant of the Bugis kings, was buried in this location, and the tomb was taken care of by a key jury. It was not easy to be a caretaker of this sacred place. There were special requirements that should be fulfilled by a caretaker, including many separate rules, such as being obedient to worship, doing good deeds, not being prejudiced, and so on. During the interview, Informant 2 gave a glimpse of the origins of the sacred tribe.

- (4) *Keramat Puak berasal dari nama Raja Puang keturunan Bugis. Raja ini konon terkenal dengan kearifan, jujur dan bijaksana. Ia kemudian dimakamkan di Nongsa yang terpeleset menyebutkan Puang menjadi Puak.* [The sacredness of *Puak* comes from the name of the Bugis King, *Puang*. This king is said to be famous for his wisdom and honesty. He was then buried in *Nongsa*, which led to the mention of *Puang* as *Puak*.] (Informant 2)

Regarding the ethnoecological study behind the existence of the *Puak* tomb, the researchers also discovered that several prohibitions must be complied with during a pilgrimage to the tomb. These prohibitions were also closely related to tracing human behavior interacting with nature. They are explained in the next sub-sections.

4.2.1 Prohibition of bad intentions during pilgrimage

When undertaking pilgrimages to the site, visitors must first purify their intentions. This tomb is not open to the public. All individuals intending to visit this sacred place must seek permission in advance from Informant 2, the caretaker. This is emphasized in the interview excerpt as follows.

- (5) *Prasasti menyebutkan bahwa Pusare Raje Puak adalah keturunan dari sang Maha Raje Nong Isa, tapi dengan perlakuan yang berbeda. Pusare Puak lebih condong untuk kalangan pribadi bukan untuk orang ramai.* [The inscription stated that *Pusare Raje Puak* is the descendant of the great

Raje Nong Isa, but with different treatment. *Pusare Puak* is more suitable for private groups, not for the general public.] (Informant 2)

In the interview, Informant 2 shared many stories about several people visiting the grave without asking permission first. The visitor could be threatened with danger, such as getting lost or encountering wild animals. All the visitor's behaviors will have an impact on the key jury; the key jury could experience pain and even a fever. [Suryana and Angga \(2022\)](#) mention this correlation as a relationship between humans from the perspective of travel mysticism. This concept emphasizes that when humans have merged themselves with a certain object when another object is hurt, they will also feel hurt, even if they feel it spiritually. In this context, the key jury has become one with the sacred; the pain she felt represented the sacred as a part of nature that teaches inner unity between each other.

4.2.2 *Prohibition against arrogance*

The ethics of protecting the environment are not only in physical form but also in terms of moral ethics, as [Wang's \(2009\)](#) postmodern ecological perspective describes the ideology of Tiongkok society in terms of the moral balance between humans and nature. This reflection was also implied in the myth of the prohibition of being arrogant when visiting the sacred of Puak. An arrogant attitude will prevent visitors from being able to reach the tomb. Various obstacles will be experienced if this attitude is carried out. This is also confirmed in the following excerpt.

- (6) *Jangan pernah berlaku angkoh bile nak bekunjong ke tanah pusare, kite manusi cume sekedar hambe, yang paling berkuase cukup milik kuase, jadi rendahkela hati sucikelah niat.* [Don't ever act arrogantly if you want to visit the sacred (Puak). We are only human beings and just servants; the one with the most power belongs to God. So, be humble with a pure heart and have pure intentions.] (Informant 2)

Ethical behavior was also a part of the relationship to maintain harmony between nature and humans. The moral ethic of not being arrogant, as mentioned in the excerpt above, was also, according to researchers, a part of not making someone superior to others. The ecological concept states that environmental damage begins because of an imbalanced relationship between humans and nature ([Arianto & Simanjuntak, 2020](#)). Human superiority will make people behave at will, including in their treatment of nature ([Harun et al., 2023](#)).

4.2.3 *Prohibition against damaging the natural environment*

In ethnoecological studies, the interaction between humans and nature is carefully examined. This representation of behavior is also reflected in the prohibition of damaging the natural environment, which includes changing positions and modifying graves at will. This was highlighted in an excerpt from the interview with the brother of Informant 2, as follows.

- (7) *Jage kate dan sikap bile menginjak tanah pusare, besikaplah yang ramah dan santon, utamakan meminta ijin pade penjage pusare bukan sekendaknye. Termasuk memperbaiki pusare, niat dah baik iringi juge dengan sikap nan elok.* [Watch your words and attitude if you intend to visit sacred land. Be friendly and polite, prioritizing asking permission from the sacred guardian, not

acting on mere whims. This includes repairing the sacred land with good intentions accompanied by a beautiful attitude.] (Informant 2)

Hilmanto (2010) highlights the inseparable connection between human culture and the environment, stressing the need for a balanced approach in preserving nature and respecting both. The sacred tomb Puak, located near Resort PT Tirta Riani Indah, requires permission from the key jury for any beautification or modification to ensure the preservation of its sacred elements. This aligns with ethical considerations within the caretaker tradition. Fremaux (2019), an ecomodernist, emphasizes the importance of an ethical path in all forms of modernization for environmental sustainability. Emphasizing an ethical imperative, she advocates addressing ecological issues, ensuring social justice, and promoting responsible environmental behavior amid the challenges of modernization.

4.2.4 Prohibition against stealing and wrongdoings

Garrard (2004) states that in ecocriticism, respecting nature involves recognizing the inherent value of the environment beyond human utility. Another prohibition discovered through the interview with the key jury was the forbiddance of taking anything from the grave, especially with certain bad intentions. This was explained by the caretaker in the following excerpt.

- (8) *Pernah ade sang pungenjong (peziarah) yang datang ke makam untok mengambil sebungkah tanah kemudian buat ritual tertentu. Saye bisa merasekan kegelisahan yang penat oleh tingkah orang tu baik dalam mimpi atau dalam sendiri. Tolong dijage niat jika hendak bekunjong kesane.* [There were once pilgrims who came to the grave to take a piece of earth and then perform a certain ritual. I can feel the anxiety that is caused by the behavior of well-intentioned people in dreams or within myself. Please be mindful of your intentions if you want to visit there.] (Informant 6)

Informant 6 also mentioned that the soil from the tomb could be used by someone to harm others. This was typically done by business owners who did not appreciate other people's businesses. Such actions would also destroy the sacredness of the tomb and cause anxiety for the caretaker. The caretaker is unable to filter visitors who have bad intentions, and it will affect them. Informant 6 mentioned that he would experience pain and wake up at night due to certain disturbances.

4.3 The Sea as the Central Life of Nature in the Sacred of Batu Belah

In Kampong Tua Nongsa, another ethnoecological representation is seen in the sacred Batu Belah on Putri Island. According to the myth, a dragon launched from Nongsa Island to the sea, creating Putri Island. The sacred significance of Nongsa Island, its beach, and Putri Island is upheld by various prohibitions, indicating profound and sacred values linked to Batu Belah and these locations among the Malay community.

4.3.1 Prohibition against committing adultery

The sacred *Batu Belah* was found on Putri Island, across from the Malay of Kampong Tua of Nongsa, featuring an exotic tourist attraction that captivates the interest of visitors. A picturesque sea spans the distance between Nongsa and Putri

Island, enhancing the scenic beauty of the surrounding landscape. From the beach, a prominent elongated island is believed by the Malay people to be the former path of a dragon. Visitors are advised to adhere to specific restrictions to ensure a respectful and harmonious visit to the site. This information was obtained by researchers through interviews with several other informants, including community advice consisting of traditional leaders (Informant 8), village officials (Informants 9 and 10), the younger generation (Informants 11, 12, 13, and 14), and community leaders (Informant 15). Among them is the following excerpt.

- (9) *Diingatkan sangat untok anak-anak mude yang menyebrang ke Pulau Puteri, jage sikap kalian jangan buat yang tak senonoh. Alam tu tak diam, die memperhatikan ape yang kalian lakukan.* [Please remind young people crossing over to Puteri Island to be careful not to act indecently. Nature is not silent; it watches what you do.] (Informant 8)

The prohibition in (9) reflects the concept of cultural awareness regarding the interconnectedness between humans and the environment. This perspective emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature. Such awareness motivates individuals to encourage ecological ethics, promote sustainable relationships and steering clear of narrow anthropocentric views (Hilmanto, 2010).

4.3.2 *Prohibition against using obscene language*

Many traditional societies view nature as sacred and imbued with spiritual significance, leading to certain behaviors and language being deemed appropriate or taboo in natural settings. This reverence often extends to the language used, where taboo language or obscene words could be seen as a form of pollution or disrespect not just socially, but also spiritually, potentially disrupting the natural order or offending nature. The prohibition on saying dirty words when crossing the sea to the sacred of Batu Belah, and the avoidance of profane language in this context, reflect a deeper cultural and spiritual connection with nature, illustrating how language and environmental ethics are intertwined in the collective consciousness. This is reflected in excerpt (10).

- (10) *Laut merupakan bagian dari keindahan, jangan kotori keindahan tersebut dengan ucapan-ucapan yang tak pantas. Bersikaplah sewajarnya dan cintai lingkungan alam.* [The sea is a part of beauty; don't ruin it with inappropriate words. Be good and love the natural environment.] (Informant 11)

The sea is celebrated as a manifestation of natural beauty, embodying the sublime and interconnectedness of ecosystems. Garrard (2004) demonstrated that the perspective to value the sea is not merely as a resource but as a symbol of ecological harmony. The ecocriticism approach recognizes the aesthetic significance of the sea, appreciating its role in shaping narratives that foster environmental consciousness and an appreciation for the intrinsic beauty of the natural world. It is akin to appreciating the true beauty of nature not with insults but with praise.

4.3.3 *Prohibition against littering*

Another prohibition emphasized by the society in Kampong Tua of Malay when people want to visit the Sacred of Batu Belah is that they are prohibited from polluting

the environment. This prohibition, accompanied by myths, is also a reflection of Malay identity closely tied to the environment. They believe that nature would be angered if it were hurt or polluted, so people always emphasize concern for environmental cleanliness, especially on the coast. This is illustrated in the following excerpt.

- (11) *Masyarakat melayu yang tinggal dipesisir pantai sangat peduli dengan lingkungannya. Karena tahu kerusakan lingkungan disebabkan oleh perbuatan manusia itu sendiri. Upaya yang dilakukan warga sekitar diantaranya gotong royong membersihkan pantai dari berbagai sampah dan kotoran. Jadi, masyarakatpun turut mengimbau pade pengunjung untuk menjaga kebersihan lingkungan.* [Malay people who live on the coast truly care about their environment because they understand that environmental damage is caused by human actions. Efforts carried out by local residents include working together to clean the beach from various rubbish and dirt. Therefore, the community also urges visitors to maintain environmental cleanliness.] (Informants 9 and 10 [village officials])

Excerpt (11) reflects the emphasis on maintaining cleanliness as a form of a broader commitment to environmental stewardship. Heise (2011) highlights the interconnectedness between ecological well-being and human actions, where protecting nature is seen as essential for sustaining biodiversity and mitigating climate change. Safeguarding nature is crucial for averting disasters that impact human well-being. Anderson and Renaud (2021) emphasize that preserving ecosystems acts as a natural buffer, mitigating the impact of disasters. Conserving nature is an integral strategy for securing human communities against environmental threats (Arianto et al., 2021). This is also what the Malay community continues to encourage, striving to keep the environment clean from the threat of natural disasters.

4.3.4 Prohibition against damaging the marine environment

The emphasis on caring for the environment was also expressed by the Malay community leader, accompanied by the prohibition of damaging the marine environment. He mentioned that there had been a disaster because nature was angry, so they held a prayer together as a form of regret for destroying nature. The relationship between nature and society, particularly in the context of myths that prohibit damaging nature, reflected deep-rooted cultural and spiritual beliefs about the interconnectedness of humans and the natural world. This was described in the following conversation excerpt.

- (12) *Suatu ketike pernah ade ae laot yang melunjuk kedarat, semua karene perbuatan manusie yang tak peduli lagi dengan alam. Dengan itulah, kami masyarakat kampung mengadekan doa tujuh hari berturut, sebagai bentuk kepasrahan pade yang kuase dan permohonan maaf atas kesilafan yang tak mempedulikan alam.* [Once there was a lake that surged to the ground, all because of the actions of humans who no longer cared about nature. With that, we, the village community, offered prayers for seven days in a row, as a form of submission to the ruler and an apology for our mistakes of not caring about nature.] (Informant 15)

Excerpt (12) reflects the relationship between nature and society, particularly emphasizing the connection between spiritual beliefs and nature. Taylor (2010) terms this phenomenon the 'Dark Green Religion'. He investigates the spiritual dimensions of nature appreciation, illustrating how individuals and groups, often outside traditional religious structures, develop profound connections with the environment. This addresses the intersection of spirituality, nature, and environmental values in the

context of today's global ecological challenges. In the context of myth, this is not only a form of ritual but also a spiritual dimension of a movement to appreciate the existence of nature.

4.3.5 Prohibition against berating

Another attitude that needs attention when heading to the split rock is not to curse. This abuse has the potential to go beyond the spiritual. The negative energy that comes out could disrupt the harmony and balance of nature, disturb spirits or Gods, and cause undesirable consequences. This emphasis was expressed in the following excerpt.

- (13) *Ketika berada dilaut tak perlu mencaci maki. Selain menjaga lingkungan secara fisik juga penting untuk menjaga perkataan. Perbanyak pujian terhadap ciptaan bukan sebaliknya sikap mencaci dan merendahkan manusia lain dengan ucapan.* [When you are at the sea, there's no need to berate. Apart from protecting the physical environment, it is also important to protect our speech. Increasing praise for creation is not the opposite of scolding and degrading other humans with words.] (Informant 12)

The ethnoecological approach involves exploring values and meanings in human behavior reflecting the preservation of the natural environment. The excerpts presented in this study depict ecological representations of the sacred myth of Batu Belah, emphasizing the sea as the center of natural life. Various prohibitions closely tied to environmental sustainability, such as adultery, using harsh words, littering, damaging the marine environment, and weighing others down, are separately addressed. In ethnoecological studies, the symbiotic relationship is explained: humans depend on nature for survival, and preserving nature is crucial for ensuring its continuous ability to provide essential benefits. In ethnoecological concepts, the intricate relationship between nature and humans is expanded (Hunn, 2007; Nazarea, 1999). This encompassing perspective recognizes nature beyond living organisms, encompassing islands, oceans, and trees as integral components contributing to the interconnected relationship. The inseparable correlation between the beauty derived from interconnected natural elements and prohibitions against negative behaviors emphasizes the importance of upholding actions, attitudes, and ethics as integral moral values, reflecting a reciprocal appreciation within the framework similar to ethnoecological principles.

The Nongsa people exhibit a regular commitment to sea protection, using large nets to remove flooded dirt and rubbish from the beach; additionally, during sea waves' rise to residential areas, the key jury advises residents to hold a *kenduri* (feast) and prayer ceremony to seek protection from human errors, recognizing the connection between environmental damage and human actions. While ecocriticism in literature has explored oral literature, the implementation of ethnoecology in literary criticism remains unexplored. This research uncovers ecological phenomena in Malay ethnic habits reflected in sacred myths like Bumbum, Puak, and Batu Belah, emphasizing the intricate relationships between humans and nature, where the attitude of respecting sacred sites represents not just a myth but an essential aspect of nature, religion, and social ethics in society.

5. CONCLUSION

Ethnoecology is concerned with the exploration of the values and meanings contained in human behavior and ethnicity, especially behavior that reflects the conservation of the natural environment. This study found that there are three important ethnoecological representations of ecology conservation in the framework of ethnoecology behind the story of the sacred myth of Bumbum, Puak, and Batu Belah toward Malay people in Batam, they are (1) the ecological ties between forests and humans in the sacred Bumbum, (2) the reflection of the wise king in the sacred of Puak, and (3) the sea as the central life of nature in the sacred of Batu Belah. The ethnoecological elements found in the sacred sites reveal thoughtful connections between human behaviors and the natural world. Prohibitions against cutting down sacred trees, picking leaves, defecating around the tree, and other restrictions are not merely myths but reflect an intricate relationship that emphasizes ethical considerations and environmental custodianship. The stories behind these sacred myths underscore the deep-rooted cultural, spiritual, and ethical values that guide human interactions with nature. In essence, the Malay community's ethnoecological practices provide insights into preserving cultural heritage, maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature, and confronting contemporary environmental challenges. The interconnectedness between cultural beliefs, practices, and the natural world highlights the reciprocal appreciation within an ethnoecological framework, emphasizing the need for ethical values as integral moral principles in human-nature interactions.

While this study provides valuable insights into the ethnoecology of Malay sacred myths in Kampong Tua Nongsa, Batam, it has certain limitations. Firstly, the research relies on qualitative methods, such as direct community involvement and in-depth interviews with a limited sample size of 21 informants. This raises concerns about the generalizability of the findings to the broader Malay population in Indonesia. While the study explores the cultural significance of the sacred myths, it does not explicitly address the socio-economic factors or contemporary challenges faced by the Malay community regarding the industrial development in Batam, which could offer a more comprehensive understanding of their current situation.

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