

Ritual and Resistance: A Critical Analysis of GMIT Women's Spirituality through the Practice of Naketi, Nazar, and Fasting

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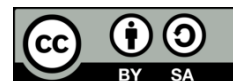
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ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop the concept of ritual resilience theory to address the gap in understanding how local Christian rituals function as a mechanism for shaping the spiritual resilience of GMIT women in East Amanuban Classis, who face social issues such as premarital pregnancy, domestic violence, verbal abuse, and patriarchal cultural pressures that trigger trauma, identity crises, and spiritual vulnerability. The research used a qualitative, phenomenological approach, integrated with anthropological theology, sociology, and psychology. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving ten informants (GMIT women, pastors, and community leaders). The findings indicate that the rituals of naketi, vow (nazar), and fasting play a significant role in shaping women's spiritual resilience. Naketi provides space for reflection and emotional reconciliation; vows strengthen commitment and hope in life; and fasting cultivates self-control and mental endurance. These three rituals also enhance social solidarity, foster community acceptance, and build transcendent relationships with God through forgiveness, repentance, and surrender. However, the rituals exhibit ambivalence: within a patriarchal context, they can become an additional burden for women while simultaneously serving as a space for spiritual agency that enables them to rise from suffering. The study's main contribution is the development of ritual resilience theory as a synthesis of local culture, Christian spirituality, and resilience theory, which can serve as a foundation for contextual theology, pastoral care, and women's empowerment strategies in addressing social injustice.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence against women in Indonesia is closely linked to patriarchal social structures, economic inequality and the lack of effective legal protection. In many

contexts, victims' recovery is not only psychological and social, but also deeply spiritual and cultural. Domestic violence continues despite the existence of the Domestic Violence Act; barriers to reporting and seeking help stem from social structures, education, economic disparities, and a patriarchal culture that reinforces gender inequality [1]. In rural Java, women live in a state of "gender-based subordination" within marriage; traditional norms and the acceptance of wife-beating are linked to an increased risk of physical and sexual violence [2]. Patriarchy also normalises symbolic violence, such as the stigma and demeaning jokes directed at widows and divorcees, which are perpetuated by political figures and the media, further marginalising women who fall outside the norms of traditional marriage [3]. In East Sumba, women's vulnerability to violence is linked to water insecurity, legally sanctioned patriarchy and the caste system; women in households facing water insecurity are twice as likely to experience gender-based violence [4].

Gender-based violence has a severe impact on mental health: chronic stress, emotional numbness, memory impairment, and an urgent need for trauma-informed mental health services [5]. Ethical and integrity dynamics can create conflicts of duty and moral consequences, reflecting rural community vulnerabilities, inequalities in academic power relations, and the diversity of existing ethical frameworks [6]. Healing is a non-linear process that involves processing trauma, managing negative emotions, rebuilding one's sense of self, connecting with others, and restoring hope and strength. True healing is more than alleviating symptoms; it is a process of restoring relationships and achieving holistic growth, grounded in safety, justice, courage, and love, to bring about well-being and transformation. Furthermore, the proposed public health approach emphasises that individual and collective healing are closely interdependent with structural change as the cornerstone for building an inclusive and sustainable culture of peace amid various crises [7].

Recovery is heavily influenced by culture; the shared goal is to 'reconnect' with oneself, others and the world, yet this is interpreted differently depending on the social context and the role of motherhood. Four key enabling factors are social connections, self-care, self-understanding and spiritual connections; recovery is understood as a process that is simultaneously social, cultural, psychological and spiritual. As they go through recovery, survivors rely on supportive factors, including social interaction, self-care, self-reflection, and spiritual connection [8]. Policy analysis in Indonesia highlights that patriarchal culture and the legacy of feudalism hinder the effectiveness of the law on sexual violence; implementation continues to be hampered by law enforcement officials' perspectives, which are not yet victim-centred, and by the weakness of recovery services.

Other studies emphasise that violence against women and children in Indonesia is fuelled by a patriarchal culture, economic factors and weak law enforcement, thus requiring comprehensive efforts: law enforcement, raising public awareness, and empowering victims. This is in line with the gap highlighted by the author: structural, psychological and legal studies have not yet sufficiently integrated local rituals and contextual spirituality as mechanisms of resilience for women who are victims of violence. Research confirms that patriarchy, unequal gender norms and structural weaknesses make violence against women a systemic phenomenon, rather than an isolated incident. This

violence damages women's mental, social and spiritual health, whilst the healing process has been shown to be heavily dependent on spiritual connections, rituals, social relationships and the reconstruction of the meaning of life. However, empirical studies that explicitly link local rituals such as naketi, nazar and fasting with the spiritual resilience of victims—particularly in the context of NTT and the GMIT—remain very limited, meaning that there is still ample scope for both conceptual and practical research in this area.

2. METHOD

This study adopts a phenomenological qualitative approach. The phenomenological qualitative method is a flexible theoretical framework in educational research for describing and understanding the complexity of human social experience [9]. It explores in depth the essence of GMIT women's lived experiences in the East Amanuban Classis as they undergo the Naketi, Nazar, and Fasting rites, which play a central role in developing spiritual resilience. Phenomenological research has two primary focuses. The first focus emphasizes describing real-world phenomena based on participants' narratives, whereas the second focuses more on interpreting the meaning of experiences to explain how that process influences individual choices [10]. Researchers do not merely act as neutral observers, but also as agents of socio-ecclesiastical transformation who seek to understand these three rituals. These three elements are not merely religious procedures, but authentic expressions of women's resistance and inner strength as they seek meaning and hope amidst gender injustice legitimised by customary law and certain theological interpretations. These cross-cultural patterns provide a basis for drawing conclusions about the biogenetic origins of religion, while also interpreting religious practices, organisations, and beliefs of the past [11].

The field research, which took place over one semester—specifically from July to December of the 2025/2026 academic year—focused on four GMIT churches: Nazareth Oekam, Betania Haunomaten, Betel Maunsenu, and Pniel Oetua. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, comprising two community leaders with a comprehensive understanding of the naketi ritual, four pastors who support the congregation through their struggles, and four GMIT women from each church who have directly experienced complex issues such as pregnancy outside marriage, verbal and physical abuse, and social marginalisation. This ensured the data collected was truly representative of the heterogeneity of spiritual experiences the study sought to explore. To gather rich, holistic data, this study employed three data collection techniques simultaneously: participatory observation, which enabled the researcher to immerse themselves directly in the dynamics of the rituals at the research site while recording non-verbal expressions and the social atmosphere. Observation records people's actual behaviour in the real world, focusing more on what they do than on what they say [12].

In-depth interviews using semi-structured guidelines specifically designed to explore the implementation, interpretation and impact of rituals on the spiritual, social, moral and mental health potential of the informants, as well as a documentary study comprising field notes, church archives, meeting minutes and the researcher's reflective journal to reinforce the historical and social context of the phenomenon under study. This

method involves a flexible dialogue between the researcher and the participant, supplemented by follow-up questions to gather open-ended data, while exploring in depth the participant's thoughts, feelings, and sensitive personal issues related to a particular topic [13]. Subsequently, all the raw data collected was analysed using phenomenological procedures. The researcher consciously set aside all theological prejudices, personal assumptions and prior knowledge regarding the effectiveness of rituals so that the resulting interpretations would stem purely from the participants' perspectives; this was followed by a process of 'horizontalisation', which treated each respondent's statement as equal and meaningful, before finally undergoing reduction and elimination to identify statements relevant to the core of spiritual experience and resilience, so that the units of meaning that pass selection are then grouped into major themes through a clustering process that illustrates collective patterns such as rituals as spaces of spiritual refuge, the ambiguity of ritual effectiveness, and the tension between faith and social reality, before the researcher finally compiles a textual description that captures in detail what the women experienced [14].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Sentence Patterns

This study reveals that the Naketi, Nazar and fasting rituals practised by GMIT women in the East Amanuban Classis are not monolithic religious practices, but rather complex phenomena that serve a dual function: on the one hand, as powerful spiritual coping mechanisms to build resilience amidst suffering; on the other hand, as instruments that ambivalently both reproduce and resist patriarchal structures. GMIT women face the multidimensional suffering of pregnancy outside marriage, domestic violence, social stigma, poverty and gender discrimination, which create a crisis of identity and meaning in life. In such circumstances, these three rituals become fundamental means of survival.

Drawing on Kenneth Pargament's theory of religious coping, Naketi functions as a form of religious reappraisal and meaning-making. Through the lens of coping theory, religion is viewed as a process of seeking meaning that offers specific methods to help individuals cope with crises and preserve what is most valuable in their lives [14]. Women reinterpret suffering not merely as a punishment, but as an opportunity for reflection and reconciliation with God, their families and themselves. Religious coping is an individual's effort to make sense of and overcome life's various pressures through an approach grounded in spiritual values or holiness [15]. A vow serves as a form of collaborative religious coping grounded in hope, making God a partner in resolving life's problems so women do not feel alone in facing pressure.

Meanwhile, fasting functions as a form of religious self-regulation that helps to control destructive emotions, curb anger, and build spiritual discipline that stabilises their psychological well-being. To complement this analysis, Viktor Frankl's theory of logotherapy asserts that people can persevere if they find meaning in their suffering. People can endure suffering when they can locate meaning in it, and that life retains meaning even under misery or unavoidable pain [16]. Through Naketi, suffering is reinterpreted as a path to repentance and the maturing of faith; through vows, women gain

a sense of direction for the future that prevents existential despair; and through fasting, they achieve self-transcendence by shifting their focus from personal pain to God and their families. Thus, these rituals transform suffering from a source of destruction into a source of meaning, hope, and inner resilience, although the findings suggest that their effectiveness is more pronounced in the individual's psychological and spiritual dimensions than in social structural transformation.

However, this study critically reveals the fundamental ambivalence of such ritual practices. On the one hand, rituals serve as a space for healing; on the other, they have the potential to become a tool for the reproduction of patriarchy, burdening women with a double moral burden (double burden spirituality). Social constructs have shaped women as guardians of family morality, especially through marriage, motherhood, media, and language [17]. Feminist analysis, particularly that of Simone de Beauvoir, shows that social constructs have shaped women into the guardians of family morality; consequently, when domestic conflicts arise, it is they who are pressured to perform Naketi, Nazar and Puasa in order to restore the relationship, whilst men who commit acts of violence or adultery often escape equivalent moral demands. Without denying the existence and significance of facts, Butler argues that facts are shaped within diverse historical frameworks, in line with her critique of individualistic freedom in favour of collective freedom bound by historical context [18]. Butler emphasises that women's bodies become an arena of patriarchal control; when women do not give birth to sons, they are regarded as the cause of the crisis. The Naketi ritual serves as a mechanism that directs women to correct themselves, rather than challenging the structures of injustice.

Naketi empowers women to speak out about the violence they have experienced, a political act that reclaims their personal narratives from patriarchal silence. Nazar serves as a declaration of free will to shape their own futures, forging a new identity as subjects rather than objects. Fasting, often practised collectively, fosters solidarity and support networks amongst women, becoming a form of collective resistance. Thus, ritual exists in a zone of ambiguity: it can be an instrument of oppression when it merely demands that women endure injustice, but it can become a praxis of liberation when used to give voice to experiences, build solidarity, and affirm dignity as equal images of God.

The process of transformation from external ritual to internal resilience unfolds gradually and profoundly. Viewed through the framework of a woman's rite of passage, it begins with the stage of separation, wherein life crises—such as domestic violence or social rejection—sever the connection to a secure, former identity [19]. Next, they enter a phase of liminality—or an 'in-between' space—through Naketi, where they engage in self-reflection, acknowledge their wounds, and reveal truths long hidden, making this space a place of identity transformation from victim to a more self-aware individual. The reaggregation stage takes place through Nazar, where women construct new identities as responsible mothers, servants of God, or individuals full of hope, and gradually return to social life with a renewed status. Fasting serves as a stage of internalisation, where transformation is no longer merely external and symbolic, but permeates their thoughts, emotions and character, fostering self-control and spiritual maturity.

The women of GMIT demonstrate physical, intellectual, and moral courage as they remain steadfast in their faith, fulfil demanding vows, and fast as an act of devotion to God, while managing their feelings of fear and guilt. Rituals performed with a conscious faith foster true courage, whereas rituals without reflection merely serve as an escape. Faith in God is the primary source of courage, and community and cultural support further underpin this process, making resilience a communal rather than merely an individual trait. Spiritual and religious beliefs have the potential to be a vital resource in a person's ability to recover from adversity [20]. Through ritual, women open themselves (the 'porous self') to the presence of God, which transcends logic (the 'mysterium tremendum'), particularly in extreme situations such as illness or family conflict. This experience transforms suffering into meaning and provides the strength to persevere, whereby resilience is not merely the result of human effort, but a gift received through one's relationship with God and the community.

Fulata Moyo's theology of the body deepens our understanding that ritual is a therapeutic bodily narrative [21]. Women's economic, social and gender-based vulnerability is not a weakness, but rather the theological foundation upon which solidarity and new strength emerge. The female body becomes the locus of theology; fasting, for example, is a tangible bodily experience (hunger, weakness) that is transformed into embodied spirituality. Rituals give women a space to share their suffering, and this shared acknowledgement of vulnerability fosters communal solidarity that strengthens resilience. A key point Fulata raises is that women's narratives should not be viewed merely as those of victims, but as those of active agents capable of making decisions of faith, constructing meaning, and becoming agents of transformation. Jione Havea adds that resilience is multidimensional and contextual, shaped through individuals' interactions with their social, cultural and spiritual environments. The meaning derived from rituals—that suffering is part of the journey of faith has a greater impact on resilience than mere biological factors. The resilience of GMIT women is a spiritual resilience born of dependence on God and the strength found in weakness; it rejects the individualistic concept of 'rising through one's own strength' and emphasises strength in relationships.

Martyn Percy highlights religious resilience as a synthesis of resistance and accommodation [22]. Naketi is a form of cultural accommodation that allows the Gospel to 'take root' in Timor, while simultaneously resisting despair. Vows and fasting are practical embodiments of spirituality in everyday life, through which women exercise spiritual agency via their bodies and their pledges when institutions fail to provide solutions. Percy uses the metaphor of 'the salt of the earth' to describe the women of the GMIT as life-giving agents in a barren culture, sacrificing themselves and immersing themselves in the community's suffering to bring reconciliation and resilience to the next generation [23].

Ultimately, religion is a system of symbols that creates lasting motivation and purpose. Rituals bridge the ethos (the reality of everyday life) and the worldview (the cosmic order), thereby making suffering bearable and meaningful. When women perform Naketi or make a vow, there is a fusion between the real world, full of difficulties, and the spiritual world of the imagination, full of hope, transforming their understanding of

reality—from victims to spiritual subjects connected to divine power, which is the starting point of resilience [24].

Overall, this study concludes that the journey from ritual to resilience is a complex, gradual theological process: Naketi opens space for reflection and acknowledgement, Nazar builds hope and a new identity, and Puasa internalises spiritual values as inner strength. Rituals that were initially external are transformed into an internal capacity comprising psychological resilience, spiritual maturity and the courage to carry on with life [25]. However, this transformation remains caught in an ambivalent tension. Rituals succeed in building robust personal and spiritual resilience, but this is not yet sufficient to transform the patriarchal social structures that lie at the root of suffering. Consequently, the resilience that emerges is primarily individual and communal-spiritual, rather than structural. To achieve complete liberation, ritual practice must be complemented by critical pastoral care, the economic and social empowerment of women, and efforts at theological and cultural transformation that challenge gender injustice, so that the church and society produce not only women who are resilient in the face of suffering, but also women who are capable of transforming the very system that gives rise to that suffering.

4. CONCLUSION

The significance and contribution of these three rituals to the development of spiritual resilience amidst complex realities of suffering such as domestic violence, verbal abuse, gender discrimination, poverty and patriarchal pressures in East Amanuban. The findings indicate that these three rituals are not merely religious obligations or church traditions, but rather religious coping mechanisms that enable women to express their inner wounds, reflect on traumatic experiences, seek God's help, and rebuild broken relationships. Naketi serves as a means of reconciliation and confession of sins that restores socio-spiritual balance; vows sustain hope and provide a future orientation amid uncertainty; and fasting serves as a spiritual discipline that strengthens self-control, perseverance, and inner resilience. Through these ritualistic processes, suffering, originally understood as punishment or social stigma, is reinterpreted as a space for the growth of faith and personal maturation, thereby fostering resilience that transforms from external practices into robust and sustainable inner strength. However, the research also reveals the ambivalent nature of these ritual practices.

On the one hand, all three serve as significant sources of psychological recovery and spiritual strength; on the other hand, they have the potential to reinforce the double burden on women, as they are more frequently expected to take responsibility for restoring family harmony within an unequal patriarchal structure, whilst perpetrators of violence often escape equivalent moral accountability. Nevertheless, women continue to demonstrate agency by turning rituals into spaces for expression, solidarity, and the negotiation of identity, so rituals are not merely tools of oppression but also spaces of partial liberation. This research makes a significant contribution to the fields of anthropological theology, critical feminism and resilience studies by developing a conceptual model of spiritual transformation that unfolds through the stages of suffering, ritual, meaning-making, self-transformation and resilience, thereby enriching our

understanding that women's spirituality is a vital resource in confronting socio-cultural and religious challenges.

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