The Popolo Tradition within the Wabula Community

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ABSTRACT

Popolo is the tradition of wedding gifts of the Wabula community in Southeast Sulawesi Province. From 12 to 45 five *boka* (old form of money) is given to be distributed to (a) the family of the husband, (b) the family of the wife, (c) religious leaders and traditional community leaders, and (d) the wife. The distribution is a symbol of gratitude by the newly married couple for raising and protecting them. Betel leaf (*roono gili*) which symbolizes the bride, cigarette stick (*tabako*) which symbolizes the bridegroom, betel nut (*wuano pangana*) which symbolizes the strength of the relationship between husband and wife, *sirih* lime (*hapuno gili*) which symbolizes semen, and *gambir* (*tagambiri*) which symbolizes the blood of creation and the process of human propagation, have important roles within the wedding ceremony. The study is a qualitative case study and aims to analyze the processes within the tradition of Popolo and to see (i) to what extent they are consistent in practice across the Wabula Community; and (ii) to what extent they have been accommodated into Islam. Data was collected through document analysis, observations and interviews. The findings show that the practice of Popolo is consistent in practice among Popolo community and there are no aspects of practice which are contradictory to Islamic teachings.

Keywords: Islam, Popolo, Wabula community

INTRODUCTION

Wabula is located in the eastern waters of Buton Island, which is one of the Buton regencies in Southeast Sulawesi Province. The Wabula community consists of immigrant and indigenous tribes. The beliefs and culture of immigrant tribes and indigenous people in Wabula were...
different. However, differences in beliefs and culture in the Wabula community at that time did not lead to conflict, but instead enriched the cultural treasures of the local community. Such multiple influences of belief and culture do not result in the loss of the original elements of community culture. The infusion of Popolo was no exception. It existed without any major threat, and while there seemed to be elements of un-Islamic elements within it in the past, the immigrants and indigenous people gradually cleansed it of the undesirable elements and maintained it as part of their culture. It has now been embraced by the community as culture and has become tradition for generations.

Initially the people of Buton did not accept Islam as a whole (Yunus, 1995). Things changed when Syeh Abdul Wahid ibn Muhammad al-idrus ibn Umar Mudhar ibn Ma’ruf al-Qurkhi from Pasai arrived at Kadie Burangasi- Tanjung Pamalipada in the eastern part of Buton Island in 1506 AD (Zuhdi, 2010). Syeh Abdul Wahid met Kumaha, directly conveying the teachings of Islam. Kumaha as King Wabula II was the first student and also the first person to accept Islam on the island of Buton. Then, Syeh Abdul Wahid taught Islam to the people of Wabula who accepted Islam as their new religion. Soon the teachings of Islam were accepted by all the people of Burangasi and Lapandewa (Manguin, 2001).

The presence of Islam, and the conversion of people into it resulted in changes. In the initial period, beliefs contrary to Islamic belief remained. People were aware of it. Soon there were questions raised as to what in their culture was acceptable or unacceptable in Islam. People however believed that ancestral beliefs before Islam did not have to be eliminated as a whole, except those that were contrary to Islamic teachings. For pre-Islamic ancestral beliefs that did not conflict with Islamic teachings, it was concluded that they supplemented and enriched Islamic values (Nurcholish, 1992).

Wabula society includes “religious beings” (Nurcholish, 2000), as well as “cultural creatures” (Notowigdagno, 2000). Wabula society has the ability to compile values in life which are diverse and universal. The Wabula community considers marriage ceremonies including that which has the Popolo ceremony (held simultaneously with the wedding ceremony) to be Islamic.

The Popolo tradition is a statement of the initiation of love between man and woman in marriage, and feelings of gratitude to both parents and their families. The ceremony includes the gift of money, a maximum of up to 45 boka, as confirmed by La Botu Mossy (Personal Communication, April 1, 2017), and which is based on a two-party agreement involving both the families of the bride and groom. There is a ritual which comes with the boka and this will have symbolic associations with marriage and offspring. Popolo includes this and the main items in the ceremony include betel leaves, betel nuts, betel lime, and gambir which have been neatly wrapped in a tangaba.

After the marriage contract, the betel leaf, betel nut, betel lime and gambir are
given to the wife to be eaten; the cigarette is
given to the husband to inhale several times,
who then passes it to the wife to inhale
several times before she returns it to her
husband (this symbolizes sex). The money
is distributed after the marriage contract
into four parts, namely for the parents of the
men (husband) and family, for the parents of
the women (wife) and family, for religious
leaders and traditional leaders (who attend
and witness the marriage contract called
sara), and then to the bride as well.

This paper discusses the meaning
of symbols in the Popolo tradition, its
consistency in practice and how it is related
to the values within Islam. More specifically,
it aims to investigate (i) to what extent
the symbols in the Popolo tradition are
consistent in practice across the Wabula
Community; and (ii) to what extent they
have been accommodated into Islam.

METHOD
The methodology used in this research is
descriptive qualitative (Moleong, 2000)
which is intended to describe the research
by collecting information about the status of
an existing phenomenon, namely the state of
affairs according to what it was at the time
the research was conducted (Suharsimi,
2005). Qualitative research is rooted in an
interpretive paradigm (Suyanto & Sutinah,
2007). The reason the writer uses qualitative
methods in this study is because:

a. The problem studied is not clear,
holistic and complex, dynamic and
meaningful so that it is impossible for the
data in the social situation to be captured
with quantitative research methods using
instruments such as tests, questionnaires,
and interview guidelines.

b. Researchers intend to understand
social situations in depth, find patterns,
hypotheses and theories (Sugiyono, 2010).
The intention of the writer is to get a clearer
understanding of Islam within the Popolo
tradition according to the customs of the
Buton Wabula community.

In this study the author uses a historical
approach, as well as three approaches
included in the interpretative paradigm,
namely the phenomenological approach,
symbolic interaction, and ethnomethodology
(Suyanto & Sutinah 2007; Taylor & Bogdan,
1984). The data used in this study are
primary data, observations, and secondary
data as follows:

1. Primary data, consisting of key
informants as resource persons, namely
customary chiefs and Wabula priests,
traditional leaders and religious leaders, as
well as Wabula community leaders. Data
was obtained directly by the researcher when
conducting research through observation
and interviews, as well as documentation
with regards Popolo traditions in the Wabula
community. In the selection of informants
in this study purposive sampling technique
was used. Four religious leaders and four
experts on Popolo tradition (Kepala Adat,
or community leaders) were interviewed.

Data collection techniques are
observation, in-depth interviews and free
interviews, and documentation. Data
processing and analysis techniques, mainly
the identification process, are carried out in
several processes, namely the categorization process, priority process, and the process of determining completeness. This was done over three months. Next the following steps were taken;

a. Data reduction where the writer chose, and then sorted the words and sentences delivered by the respondents when interviews were conducted to be adjusted to standard Indonesian language which was then translated into the English language by experts.

b. Data display where the writer elicited the data at the research location based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation presented. Concrete evidence in accordance with the rules of scientific writing had to be accounted for.

c. The conclusion was drawn that was the core of the discussion in this article based on the statements of experts, both from primary data and secondary data, namely outlining the subject matter into more detailed elements and sharpening broad statements so that they can be conceptually understood. The steps taken in testing the validity of the research data include triangulation. Triangulation is a data validity checking technique that utilizes something other than data for checking purposes or as a comparison of data (Moleong, 2000). There are two aspects to triangulation of data in this study, namely triangulation with data or sources and triangulation with methods (Moleong, 2000).

2. Observations were carried out 8 times over three different regions of Wabula and notes were taken to be analyzed based on consistencies in practices and identification of aspects of the tradition and their compatibility to Islam.

3. Secondary data, namely data obtained from literature in the form of books, research results, data retrieved from related institutions was also used. The main resources in document analysis apart from the Holy Quran, included *Terjemahan Singkat Ibnu Katsir* (Bahreisy & Bahreisy, 1986a, 1986b), *Al-Qur’an dan Terjemahannya* (Departmen Agama R.I., 2002). The documents which provided literature on Popolo included *Sejarah, budaya dan Peradaban Masyarakat Wabula* (Manguin, 2001).

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The first objective of the study was to determine the processes within Popolo and determine if there was consistency in practice across the Wabula Community. Observations were made and interviews carried out in eight locations where the marriages and Popolo ceremony were held. The following illustrates the consistency of proceedings within the Popolo ceremony in all eight locations across three regions:

In all three regions which involved eight marriages and Popolo ceremonies, it was found that the Popolo ceremony was carried out together with the wedding ceremony (*akad nikah* which consistently showed the ceremony followed standard Islamic marriage practices). The Popolo tradition however came with ancient culture and was unique to the Wabula community. In the Popolo ceremony, there was money
(boka) exchanged. The value of money was given based on strata agreed upon by adat, which was a minimum of 12 boka, and a maximum of 45 boka; as well as other gifts which included 3 packs of cigarettes, betel leaves (ro'ono gili), betel nuts (wuano pangana), whiting (hapuno gili), and gambir (tagambiri), stored in tangaba made of brass and neatly wrapped in a white square cloth (pato kampanga) (La Botu Mossy, Personal Communication, May 12, 2017). Some Wabula communities determine the amount of Popolo to be as little as 12 boka (La Yubi, Personal Communication, July 22, 2017). There are also those who prescribe 30 boka (La Gapu, Personal Communication, January 16, 2017) and there are also those who determine that it should be 45 boka (La Botu Mossy, Personal Communication, June 11, 2017). The monetary value of each boka is dependent on a mutual agreement between the men and women of families of the bride and groom (Amanto Parabela Wabula, Personal Communication, July 11, 2017). Determination of the amount of boka that has been combined with the value of the money does not mean that there is intention of the bride’s parents to sell their daughter. The more prosperous the bridegroom and the more educated and wealthy the bride, the higher the value of boka. The interviews confirm that the belief among people is that prospective husbands must understand the sacrifice of both parents from the process of the womb to birth and in becoming adults. Boka and the value of it should not take precedence. The interviews confirmed that people generally believed that assets are least important, because they can be obtained at any time – the value of the bride is in her upbringing. The girl has to be educated and raised with love and affection, and to have been nurtured to show responsibility. Prospective husbands must do the same to their future wives when they officially become husband and wife. Interviews also confirmed that parents of the prospective bride needed more than just money, namely love and affection and mutual understanding. They also wanted the potential bridegroom to be sincere in accepting their girl as she was (Amanto Imamu Wabula, Personal Communication, June 22, 2017).

The contents of Popolo are stored neatly in a tangaba, held by children both of whose parents are still alive. Popolo is brought to the bride’s house by the bridegroom’s entourage. The head of the group is dressed in traditional Wabula community traditional attire, carrying a spear (Surampa), along with the prospective husband, to the venue of the wedding ceremony venue (La Maidu, Personal Communication, June 23, 2017). When the groom arrives at the place of the wedding ceremony, the head of the group says his greetings. The proceedings of the Popolo tradition in the wedding ceremony at all three locations is as follows: (1) The spear (surampa) is brought by the head of the group and is taken by someone who has been assigned to bring it to the wife’s room. (2) The head of the group together with the child carrying the tangaba containing Popolo, sits face to face with traditional leaders and religious leaders.
(3) *Tangaba* containing *Popolo* is handed over to religious figures, while the other luggage is carried by someone who has been assigned and then brought to the prospective wife who is waiting for the arrival of the prospective husband in the room. (4) The wedding ceremony or marriage contract (*ijab qabul*) is conducted. (5) The husband is escorted by someone into the room to meet the wife, and at the same time to handover the agreed dowry.

Then the husband and wife leave the room to meet the religious leaders and traditional leaders as well as the invited guests who are waiting for their presence, to take part in the next event, namely; (6) A mother who has been mutually agreed upon by both parties, teaches the bride how to eat *sirih* (betel nut leaves), and groom is taught how to smoke cigarettes, then the cigarette is given to the bride who learns how to smoke cigarettes. (7) This is followed by the readings of salvation. (8) *Tangaba* which contains *Popolo* (and the money) will be opened by religious leaders and distributed to; (a) the husband’s family; (b) the wife’s family; (c) the community leaders and religious leaders; and (d) the wife (Amanto Imamu Wasuemba, Personal Communication, July 20, 2017).

The observations and interviews of community leaders also revealed that the process of determining the *boka* in the *Popolo* tradition was lengthy. The men must bear all the needs of the groom, which range from beauty products to clothing. If the bride is still in the formal education process, the male party must support her until she accomplishes what she set out to achieve (La Yubi, Personal Communication, March 22, 2017). A husband should live with his mother-in-law, because the husband must be responsible for the health of his in-laws. The parents of the bride must also be responsible for their son-in-law’s household because they are new in facing the challenges that come with the unification of two families and the responsibilities that potentially come with the birth of children of the newlywed couple (La Maidu, Personal Communication, January 16, 2017).

The second objective of the study was to find out as to what extent *Popolo* has been accommodated into the religion of Islam which is the religion of the majority of people in the community. The following was found:

i) The documents analyzed showed that there was nothing about *Popolo* that was practiced by the Wabula Community that showed that there were questionable rituals which were against Islamic practices. The notes from documents and the actual documents themselves were checked and the analyses validated by three professors (Islamic Scholars) from universities in Indonesia.

ii) The notes from the observations and interviews, which were also validated, showed that the Wabula community guarded themselves from ritual that they considered un-Islamic. As a result, they have been, across the ages, removed. “Suspect” practices deemed to be contradictory to Islamic teachings were scrutinized by the religious heads and community leaders.
and removed. This again was validated by the three professors, all experts in Islamic Studies.

iii) While the *boka* in the *Popolo* ceremony can be a source of friction, many of the elders and the community and religious leaders that were interviewed believed that good sense prevailed during discussion because as Muslims the Wabula community also referred to the Holy *Quran*.

iv) The determination of *Popolo* between the two parties and whatever conflict that comes in-between can be resolved by understanding each other and making decisions based on Islamic solidarity as it is mentioned in *QS. Al Nisa* (2: 4). And most of those interviewed quoted this verse very often:

وَأَتَهُم مَّا تَأْتِيَهُمْ فَوَلَّوْهُمْ آمَنُوا مُّعَذَّبَةً مَّعَنَّاهُ众َ

**CONCLUSION**

This investigation has revealed that *Popolo*, a tradition handed down through the ages and which had in the past aspects which were un-Islamic, has evolved into something acceptable to the Muslims within the Wabula community. This was confirmed after the review of books and manuscripts (document analysis), observations of the actual marriage ceremony which included *Popolo*, and interviews of community and religious leaders.

An interesting finding recorded was that there was consistency in the proceedings in the eight places where the ceremonies were observed (both in the marriage ceremony and the *Popolo*).

**REFERENCES**


