

## 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

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### 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 (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:

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## 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*).

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