

Circumcision Custom as the Cultural Symbol of the Dompu People, West Nusa Tenggara

Reni Anggriani^{1,*} Hadjar pamadi²

¹Graduate Program, Yogyakarta State University

²Faculty of Languages and Arts, Yogyakarta State University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

* Corresponding author. E-mail : renianggriani.darwis@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The cultural resource of the people of a region can be seen from their customs and traditions. As a tradition, the circumcision custom is as result of the cultural diversity of this nation. Circumcision is one of the traditions of Dompu people which has been passed across generations and continuously developed and preserved by the people of Dompu. Circumcision is customary for the Muslim communities as it aims to clean or purify the children's bodies. In addition to being a compulsory custom in Islam, circumcision also signifies the transition from the child age to adulthood. This means that the child should be ready to be *mualaf* who bears responsibilities and duties as a teenager. The method used in this study is the qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. The qualitative method aims to understand how certain phenomena occur and is based on data in words, documents, or videos obtained from the research site, which is processed into the research results. These data were collected through interviews with the community elders and figures at the research site, observations by attending a circumcision ceremony, and documentations (taking pictures, videos, or recording the circumcision ceremony using mobile and electronic devices). On the other hand, ethnography is an approach that examines the culture of a community. As the circumcision custom is a part of the traditions of the Dompu people, it certainly contains cultural elements related to the life of the local community.

Keywords: *circumcision, tradition, culture, Dompu*

1. INTRODUCTION

Dompu is one of the regencies in the island of Sumbawa, West Nusa Tenggara. It is located between the regions of Bima and Sumbawa, with most of its residents working as farmers, and the majority of the population are Muslims. In terms of language, the Dompu people speak Mbojo or *nggahi mbojo* which has no consonant ending. In their daily life, the community is bound by tradition and customs which apply to the community. One of these traditions is the circumcision custom.

Circumcision is a long-existing custom that develops in the life of the Dompu community as it is one of traditions that are passed across generations from the ancestors. As a tradition, the circumcision custom is done over and over by the community in the same manner to this day.

In traditions, every community has a distinctive characteristics and attributes. This is because tradition is the pattern or behaviors which directs the life of a certain community in various daily activities. Naturally, traditions are incredibly diverse and unique

between different communities, especially those that remain thriving and preserved today. For example, the circumcision custom in Dompu, West Nusa Tenggara must have different processions with that in the Sleman region in Java.

In Sleman, circumcision is done modestly. Boys are taken to the local health center or hospital to be circumcised. Afterwards, a small gathering attended by neighbors or relatives may be held (interview with Tiwi Purbandari in Desember 2019). This is in contrast with the circumcision celebration in Dompu, West Nusa Tenggara, where there is a whole ritual consisting of various stages of preparation, from the village deliberation (*mbolo weki*), making the cookies (*pangaha soji*), a ritual involving powdered *inai* leaves (*peta kapanca*) for girls and a traditional blade or *keris* (*compo*) for boys, prayers (*ngaji jama*), *roko oi* at night, followed by the circumcision process and the *syukuran* gathering during noon or afternoon in the next day.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, the authors did not only use field research, but also used several journals as reference materials that had relevance to this research. The reference materials used are as follows.

According to Fitra (2019), in her undergraduate thesis entitled *Circumcision Ceremony in Kandai Dua, Woja District, Dompu Regency (A Philosophical Perspective)* at State Islamic University of Alauddin Makassar, circumcision is one of the means to reduce AIDS disease which has increased each year [1]. The writer also discusses the meanings contained in the ceremony such as slipping the traditional blade (*keris*) in the side of the hip, making offerings of yellow rice and traditional cookies, and the combination of the drum and flute music which can cause trance. The myth among the Kandai Dua people is that the stages of the circumcision custom must be followed, otherwise the children will be affected.

Irfan Rifaid writes his undergraduate thesis entitled *Jiki Kapanca Song in the Mada Rawi Procession in the Circumcision Ceremony among the Bima People in Taloko Village* Makassar State University. The *Jiki Kapanca* song is one of the performance arts of the Taloko village community for the circumcision event [6]. The main instrument was *arubana* or *rebana* (a type of tambourine), which is one of the favorite Islamic instruments of the Bima people in general. The objective of the song in the circumcision process is to express gratitude toward God Almighty and Prophet for the gift of children and blessings. Therefore, the song is compulsory for the people of Desa Taloko.

3. METHOD

This research is a qualitative descriptive study. Qualitative research refers to a data collection method that aims to understand a particular phenomenon and generate data in the form of words, documents or videos from or on the research location. The collected data are then processed and analyzed into the research findings. As stated above, this study aims to provide more details on the circumcision custom as the cultural symbol of the Dompu people in West Nusa Tenggara. Ethnographic approach is used in the study. Ethnography is an approach which studies the culture of a community. Circumcision is the tradition of the Dompu people which contains cultural elements related to the life of the local community such as the way they live and their social activities.

The data collection in this study was done by interviews (with Makarau Ibrahim and St. Aisyah as the elders who understand the circumcision ritual), observation, and documentation (taking pictures, videos, or recording the procession using mobile devices or other electronic devices).

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Circumcision Tradition

The word circumcision (*khitanan* in Indonesian, or also known as *sunat*) is familiar to the Indonesian people. For Indonesians, the circumcision tradition is a special coming-of-age ritual which signifies the induction to Islam. Some Muslim communities celebrate this event by combining the Islamic ritual with the local tradition.

Circumcision is obligatory for all Muslims and marks the children's transition to growing up. In a family, children starting the age of 2 years must be circumcised (for girls, it is known as *saraso*). Certainly, all the procedures contain specific meaning. Circumcision is done in the hope that the child will be ready to be a *mualaf* (a newly recruited Muslim) and bear the responsibilities and duties as a human being.

In general, the process of circumcision is usually carried out by traditional leaders or elders in the area or village. For girls, the *saraso* is done by traditional female leaders, and for boys, the process of circumcision is also carried out by male traditional leaders.

Based on the interview with Mr. Makarau Ibrahim as an elder as well as a resident in Maulana Hamlet, Sorisakolo Village, NTB in December 2019, over time, however, some people prefer the services of medical personnel such as village ministers and village midwives, because it is considered to be more practical, and due to the belief that the medical personnel have knowledge and experience in their field. However, this only applies to boys. For girls, *saraso* remains conducted by female elders.

In terms of the healing process, there are advantages and disadvantages for both the medical and traditional methods. In the medical procedure, the circumcision process tends to be faster, but the healing time is longer, taking up to weeks.

On the contrary, when the circumcision is done in the traditional (manual) way, it requires shorter healing time. It only takes one or two days for children to wear pants again and play as usual.

4.2 Preparation for the Circumcision Custom

The following are a series of preparation for the circumcision process.

4.2.1. Forming the deliberation committee (mbolo weki)

A committee is formed to decide the day for the circumcision event.

4.2.2. Building the stage

The stage is used for the *kanpanca* (applying the *inai* leaf powder).

4.2.3. Pangaha soji (cookies)

Cookies made from flour with interesting and unique shapes are made for the event.

4.2.4. Genda (drum) and Solu (flute)

These instruments are used as the music accompaniment when the circumcision process takes place.

4.2.5 Bongi monca (yellow rice)

Turmeric-dyed rice is thrown during the *kanpanca* process and during the circumcision process.

4.3 The Circumcision Custom

As a part of culture, circumcision consists of a series of stages with important meaning for the life of the community. The stages of the circumcision process are described below.

4.3.1. Mbolo Weki (Sokongan)

Mbolo weki (sokongan) is the deliberation done by the local community to discuss the details and organize the circumcision process. This gathering aim to determine the day and month to hold the event to avoid clash with other events. *Mbolo weki (sokongan)* is usually held at night and attended by the older male members of the family (the fathers).

4.3.2. Making Pangaha Soji (Cookies)

Pangaha soji (cookies) is one of the requirements of the circumcision custom. The cookies are typically made a day after the *mbolo weki (sokongan)*. There must be seven varieties of the cookies presented for the circumcision custom. The following are the varieties of cookies that can be made.

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| a. rice | b. sangkaru |
| c. ro,o saha | d. ro,o saha |
| e. aruna | f. wunta garoso |
| g. kadada | h. glasses |
| i. riva | j. janga ncuni |
| k. sala | l. pahi |
| m. mangge lenggo | n. kariko |
| o. karoto sahe | p. tobe lampu |
| q. taja manangi | r. karencu |
| s. kahuntu | t. arunggina |
| u. kadodo | v. waji |
| w. kalempe | x. jenmawar |
| y. banana | z. roa bou |

(Based on interview with Siti Aisyah, a resident of Maulana sub-village, Sorisakolo, Dompu, West Nusa Tenggara in December 2019).

4.3.3. Peta Kapanca (applying the inai leaf powder)

Kapanca is the name of one of the leaves (*pancar* or *inai*) that is used by the people of Dompu as a dye material for traditional events such as circumcision and wedding. As a dye, it can be used for hair and nails. *Pancar* leaves can also be used as a medicine. Many people plant the *kanpanca* tree in their front yard.

In *peta kapanca*, finely ground powder of *inai* leaves is applied on the palms of the girl who will undergo *saraso* (circumcision for girls) by women (usually the mothers). There are some preparations for this stage, namely:

- The girls must put on make-up.
- The girls must wear a traditional attire. In Dompu West Nusa Tenggara, the traditional outfit usually has a lot of bright colors, such as yellow, green, blue, white, and red.
- Ground *kanpanca (inai)* leaf powder is placed in a small bowl.
- A small pillow is prepared as a support for the hand that will receive the powder application. The pillow is covered with banana leaf to prevent the powder from touching the pillow.
- Bongi monca* (yellow rice) is also provided. The yellow comes from turmeric. The rice will be thrown by the women during the *peta kapanca*.
- Clean water is also prepared in a small bowl for washing the hands of the women who will apply the *inai* leaf powder.
- The women who attend *peta kapanca* will be invited to apply the *inai* leaf powder to the hands of the girls, accompanied by singing praises for the Prophet Muhammad SAW by the Asrafal Anam group.

4.3.4. Compo Sampari (Slipping the Blade)

This refers to the process of slipping the traditional blade or *keris* in the left hip of the boy. Before that, however, the blade must circle the boy 7 times while singing praises for the Prophet Muhammad SAW and dzikir by reciting the following “*Infiru iffafan wasoabiru waba amfusiku fisabilillahi*”. In Islam, this is in reference to the Hajj ritual of going around the Ka’bah 7 times (interview with Makarau Ibrahim in Desember 2019).

4.3.5. Ngaji Jama (reciting the Qur’an)

Ngaji jama is the recitation of Qur’an that is done after *peta kapanca* and *compo sampari*. It is believed that during *ngaji jama*, all past ancestors and predecessors will attend the event to pray for the children who will undergo the circumcision or *saraso* process.

4.3.6. Roko Oi

This marks that the next day, the circumcision process will be done. Usually, when *roko oi* is held, members or the family or relatives are possessed when the music is played. *Roko oi* is only accompanied by *solu* (flute) and *genda* (drum) saja. *Roko oi* is done after *peta kapanca* and *ngaji jama*.

4.3.7. The circumcision or saraso process

The circumcision or *saraso* process is done in the morning. Children will be bathed first using sacred water that has been blessed with the hope that they will be able to stand the pain during the circumcision or *saraso* process. Bathing the children is also intended to clean the children. After all, the goal of circumcision is to purify the children.

The circumcision process begins with girls and followed by boys. Six layers of sarong (*jare* cloth) are placed to sit for the girls, while the boys only use one layer of sarong. The whole process is accompanied by praises for Prophet Muhammad SAW, as well as music instruments such as *genda* (drum) and *solu* (flute). After the process is done, children will be carried up high as a sign that the circumcision process has finished. This only applies to boys.



Figure 1. The circumcision process



Figure 2. A boy is carried after the circumcision process.

4.3.8. Possession (maka)

In the process of circumcision, the family members who hold the ceremony may be possessed by the spirits of their ancestors or commonly known as "Bolo". The local people said that the trance happened because of the influence of the *genda* (drums) and *solu* (flute) being played as part of the celebration. By playing the music using these

instruments, the family indirectly invites the ancestors to watch the circumcision process.

4.3.9. Syukuran (Slametan)

Syukuran is a communal prayer led by one of the community members, followed by a celebration of having a meal together. According to Geertz (1989), *syukuran (slametan)* is a social activity in the form of a ceremony conducted in accordance with the tradition. This event is considered important to ensure safety, peace, and balance ^[1].

5. CONCLUSION

With the rich cultural resources of the local community, it is expected that the people must maintain and preserve the traditions passed down from the ancestors, including the circumcision tradition. The tradition is still practiced today, especially by the people of Dompu as it contains important values. For example, it brings forth the religious morality in the life of the community. Therefore, it is important that traditions be respected and uphold for the values they contain.

REFERENCES

- [1] Fitra, Fitra. *Upacara Khitanan pada Masyarakat Kandai Dua Kec. Woja Kab. Dompu (Tinjauan filosofi)* [Circumcision Ceremony at Kandai Dua Community, Woja District, Dompu Regency (Philosophy Review)]. Diss. Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, 2019.
- [2] Geertz, Clifford, Dorodjatun Kuntjoro-Jakti, and S. Supomo. *Penjaja dan Raja: Perubahan sosial dan modernisasi ekonomi di dua kota Indonesia*. [Traders and Kings: Social change and economic modernization in two Indonesian cities] Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 1989.
- [3] Rifaid Irfan. *Nyanyian Jiki Kapanca Dalam Prosesi Mada Rawi Pada Upacara Khitanan Masyarakat Bima Desa Taloko* [Jiki Kapanca's Song in Mada Rawi Procession at the Circumcision Ceremony of the Bima Community in Taloko Village]. 2013. Universitas Negeri Makassar.
- [4] Spradley, James P., and David W. McCurdy. *Anthropology, the cultural perspective*. New York; Toronto: Wiley, 1980.