

Traditions of Welcoming Birth in the Ende Community, East Nusa Tenggara: The Dialectics of Islam and Local Culture

Hairul Hidayah¹, Ilman Paris²

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram; hairulhidayah@uinmataram.ac.id

²STIT Darussalimin NW Praya; ilmandefaris@gmail.com

Abstract: The tradition of welcoming a baby has an important role in the Ende people of East Nusa Tenggara. This tradition reflects a blend of Islamic teachings and rich local culture. However, social and religious changes have affected the way this tradition is carried out. This study aims to understand how religious and traditional aspects are dialectic in welcoming the birth of a baby. This research method uses an ethnographic approach, involving participatory observation, in-depth interviews with traditional and religious leaders, as well as literature studies to gain a comprehensive understanding of the traditional practices and Islamic values involved. The results of the study show that the tradition of welcoming babies in the Ende people is a blend of Islamic teachings and local cultural values. Religious aspects such as special prayers are integrated with local practices. This research highlights the importance of tolerance and cultural adaptation in maintaining the identity of the Ende people. The dialectic between Islam and local culture reflects a unique harmony in welcoming new life. Despite social and religious changes, this tradition continues to function as a social glue and cultural identity for the Ende people. The conclusion is that the dialectic between Islam and local culture is a key factor in maintaining this tradition in facing the dynamics of the times.

Keywords: Dialectic, Islam, local culture, Tradition, Welcoming a baby

1. Introduction

East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) is a province in Indonesia known for its rich cultural diversity and traditions. Tradition holds significant importance for NTT residents, serving as a primary source of the value system that must be preserved and upheld as a testament to the ancestral struggles in ancient times. Tradition or customs, in the simplest sense, refer to practices that have been carried out over an extended period and have become integral to the life of a community within a particular society, culture, religion, era, and country. Presently, local traditions persist among communities,

particularly in rural areas throughout the country, reflecting a commitment to their preservation and continued observance. (Widyaningrum, 2017).

In alternative terms, culture is considered a continuous human product that is consistently preserved and passed down through generations (Sirajun Nasihin, 2018). This concept extends to cultural aspects, including traditions related to welcoming the birth of a baby. In East Nusa Tenggara, the birth of a child is regarded as a divine blessing bestowed upon a family, prompting many to celebrate with traditional ceremonies as a form of gratitude for the bestowed blessings.

One of the ethnic groups residing in this region is the Ende tribe. The Ende community possesses unique and diverse traditions in welcoming the birth of a baby, incorporating elements from both Islam and their local culture. The birth of a child holds significant importance in the life of the Ende community. The process of welcoming a newborn in East Nusa Tenggara, especially in the Ende regency, is characterized by strong traditional and spiritual values, evident in various rituals and customs practiced by the local community. Several birth-related traditions persist to this day, such as "tane funi," "rio keso ine," "se'i," "ka ngguia," "nggezu ngara," and "akikah."

The Ende people believe that these traditions must be upheld to ensure the safety and unhindered growth of the newborn. Failure to adhere to these traditions, they believe, may result in the child facing illnesses or challenges as they grow older. To comprehend the traditions of welcoming a newborn in Ende, relevant theories such as cultural anthropology can be applied. According to this theory, culture comprises a system of values, norms, beliefs, and practices held and maintained by a social group, regulating behavior and influencing perspectives and social relationships.

Moreover, sociology provides insights into studying the traditions of welcoming a newborn in East Nusa Tenggara, considering society as a system composed of

interconnected social structures, norms, and institutions. In this context, welcoming a newborn can be understood as a form of social institution within the community. The roles and functions of family, relatives, and the community are crucial in this tradition, as they collaborate to prepare and execute cultural activities.

Despite some research on culture and traditions in East Nusa Tenggara, studies specifically focusing on the tradition of welcoming newborns in this region remain limited. This research is essential in revealing the dialectics between Islam and local culture in this tradition, demonstrating the tolerance between Islamic teachings and the cultural practices of the Ende tribe. Therefore, this article aims to provide a deeper understanding of the process of welcoming newborns in East Nusa Tenggara through an ethnographic approach.

Ethnography, involving direct observation and researcher participation in the community's life, is expected to offer a comprehensive overview of various aspects of the newborn-welcoming process, including preparations, rituals, community roles, and associated cultural meanings. This research is anticipated to contribute significantly to our understanding of local culture and enrich our knowledge of community practices in East Nusa Tenggara.

The birth of a child is not just an individual event but a crucial moment in strengthening social and cultural relationships among community members. Therefore, this tradition is celebrated with enthusiasm and camaraderie. This study focuses on the dialectics or integration between Islamic elements and local culture in the tradition of welcoming newborns among the Ende tribe. This integration reflects a harmonious blend of Islam, the majority religion in the region, with the beliefs and cultural values of the local community.

The amalgamation of Islam and local culture in the tradition of welcoming

newborns among the Ende tribe is intriguing because it showcases the adaptation and continuity of culture over centuries. Despite the changes brought about by Islam in various aspects of their lives, including their traditions, the local culture of the Ende tribe has maintained its distinct characteristics. This study delves deeper into how Islamic values align with local Ende traditions in welcoming newborns, analyzing how social and spiritual aspects influence how the Ende community celebrates the birth of a child.

The research aims to provide a profound understanding of cultural diversity in Indonesia and preserve local wisdom in the face of ongoing globalization.

2. Research Findings

In this province renowned for its customs and culture, research findings indicate that in East Nusa Tenggara, specifically in the Ende regency, there are several traditional rituals or customs commonly practiced by the community when welcoming the birth of a baby. Regarding the sequence or stages of traditional ceremonies or customs in welcoming the birth of a baby in the Ende regency, East Nusa Tenggara, some of these include:

2.1 Ritual of *Tane Funi* (Burying the Infant's Placenta)

In the community of Nusa Tenggara Timur, the placenta, or "ari-ari," is not merely understood as an organ expelled simultaneously with a newborn's arrival. Rather, the Ende people attribute profound significance to the presence of the placenta, believing in its close connection with the newborn, extending into the child's growth into adulthood. Consequently, the Ende community accords special treatment to the placenta of a recently born infant through the ceremonial act of burying it.

Termed "tane funi" by the Ende people, where "tane" refers to burial and "funi" signifies placenta, this ritual holds deep philosophical meanings. According to

interviews with local participants, one of the primary objectives of this tradition is to safeguard the newborn from supernatural entities and to invoke good fortune and positive prospects for the infant's future development.

From a medical standpoint, the placenta, also known as "ari-ari," is acknowledged as an organ that undergoes development in a woman's uterus during pregnancy. According to Mayo Clinic, the placenta functions to eliminate metabolic waste products not needed by the fetus while serving as the supplier of oxygen and nutrients for the baby during gestation. In alignment with this understanding, the Ende community believes that the placenta plays a significant role in a baby's survival within the womb. Consequently, upon the baby's birth, the placenta, expelled simultaneously with the infant, must be carefully buried to prevent it from being consumed by animals or decomposing in waste areas.

The burial process of the placenta cannot be arbitrary; rather, it follows specific customs and traditions established by ancestors. The central element in the "tane funi" ritual involves preparing tools and materials such as young coconuts, cotton, bamboo, books, pencils, and stones. Each tool and material holds its own functional and philosophical significance. For instance, the Ende people believe that young coconuts provide comfort and protection from supernatural disturbances for the infant. Cotton and bamboo, as explained by Ibu Jainab, a traditional elder, are utilized as illuminating tools for the buried placenta.

Moreover, books and pencils are integral elements in the "tane funi" ritual for the Ende community. They attribute meaning to these objects as influential tools shaping the intellectual development of both male and female infants, fostering literacy and intelligence. Finally, stones are employed to cover the buried placenta, placed on the ground after the burial process.

The execution of the "tane funi" tradition begins shortly after the birth of the baby. The paternal family prepares and organizes the necessary tools and the burial

site for the infant's placenta. Before burial, the placenta undergoes thorough cleansing, wrapped in white cloth, and placed inside a split young coconut. Following this, the next step involves burying the placenta into the ground, a task assigned to the baby's father, who recites a thankful prayer as an expression of gratitude to the creator. The prayer commonly recited is "ngai sia, rende ki mbara, umu ki zewa, funi nakina tane mae reu, tane harus wee sao, supaya ana nitu jimu iwa ka ganggo funi nake kai." These prayers are recited by the father and are followed by the recitation of Surah Al-Fatihah.

Once buried, the placenta is secured with bamboo fencing, and a stone is placed on top to prevent its disturbance by wild animals. This practice also serves to illuminate the buried placenta by affixing cotton to the bamboo, acting as a lamp to safeguard the infant from supernatural disturbances.

In the Islamic perspective, detailed regulations or obligations regarding the burial of an infant's placenta are not explicitly outlined. Consequently, there is generally no specific Islamic prayer associated with this process. However, the Ende community commonly invokes blessings and expressions of gratitude to Allah SWT. While there are no explicit Islamic recommendations regarding the burial of the placenta, the community aligns with Islamic principles by reciting shalawat and prayers of gratitude. This viewpoint is supported by the Nihayatul Muhtaj (Syihabuddin, 2019) which emphasizes the absence of specific Islamic directives related to this ceremonial process:

"It is recommended to bury detached body parts from a living person who is not imminently dying or from someone whose death is still uncertain, such as the hand of a thief, nails, hair, 'alaqah (clot of blood), and blood from a scratch, out of respect for the individual.

In light of the aforementioned viewpoint, it can be discerned that, fundamentally, the directive to bury the placenta of an infant in Islam is not explicitly detailed. However,

Islam does not prohibit the practice of this ritual. As elucidated in the book *Nihayatul Muhtaj*, it is permissible and recommended as long as it does not violate Islamic law. Religion, as a system within culture, cannot be separated from societal life. Therefore, Islam is not merely a symbol of knowledge containing rules and regulations. Beyond that, Islam also functions as a value system that imparts meaning to the culture existing in society, thereby interconnecting and contributing to the coloring of the prevailing culture in the community (Jannah, 2022).

2.2 Ritual of *Rio Keso Ine* (Postpartum Massage)

The Ende community believes that pregnancy induces fundamental changes in a woman's physical state, including alterations in the reproductive organ system. Consequently, after a woman completes the childbirth process, physical and organ-related issues persist. Therefore, a woman who has just given birth requires care for her body to strengthen and restore weakened muscles, facilitate the flow of breast milk, and, undoubtedly, to serve as a form of relaxation for the mother post-delivery (Anam, 2010).

The Ende ethnic community engages in the care of newly delivered mothers based on ancestral heritage, adapting these practices to conform to longstanding customs and traditions. The care provided encompasses maintenance of personal hygiene and bodily health for the mother. The residents of Ende refer to this ritual as "rio keso ine," interpreted as a massage therapy specifically designed for the mother.

To carry out this tradition, the Ende community relies on the expertise of a baby healer, known as a "*dukun bayi*," who is trusted as a professional adept in providing postpartum care or massages to women after childbirth. The Indonesian Ministry of Health (Departemen Kesehatan RI, 2008) asserts that a *dukun bayi* is considered

skilled and reliable, possessing the ability to assist in childbirth and provide care for both the mother and child in accordance with the community's needs. Consequently, this ritual is exclusively entrusted to healthcare professionals.

The procedural steps of the traditional ritual known as "rio keso ine" commence with the first stage, wherein the healer prepares a traditional herbal concoction derived from plants and foliage in the vicinity. The Ende community utilizes two types of leaves referred to in the Ende language as "daun Pombo" and "daun eku nde'u." Subsequently, these herbal leaves are boiled in water until reaching a boiling point. After boiling, the herbal infusion is allowed to cool for several minutes until it reaches a cold temperature.

Following the cooling of the herbal infusion, the next step involves the healer, responsible for the mother, bathing her with the traditional herbal water while simultaneously massaging and applying pressure to various parts of the postpartum mother's body. The entire body undergoes massage, excluding the abdominal region. The massage is conducted with the aim of restoring the mother's strength and facilitating a return to her regular activities. Additionally, in the rio keso ine ritual, the healer also prepares an herbal concoction derived from boiling turmeric and betel leaves, which is then administered to the mother for consumption. Based on interviews with the baby healer, it is noted that this herbal concoction is intended to aid in the recovery and cleansing of the reproductive organs, promote the smooth flow of breast milk, and maintain overall health and vitality.

2.3 Ritual of *Ka Nggua*

This ritual takes place on the third day following the birth of the baby. The Ende community refers to this ritual as "ka nggu," which translates to a communal meal. Before the implementation of ka nggu, postpartum mothers are prohibited from

consuming certain foods such as rice, bananas, sweet potatoes, and others. Regarding this practice, Intan Nugraehi, in her journal, explains that the dietary restrictions for postpartum mothers involve avoiding specific types of food. According to prevalent myths, the community believes that the consumption of forbidden foods by postpartum mothers may pose risks to both the mother and the baby (Intan Nugraehi et al., 2014). The prohibited foods include those with a strong odor, such as fish, eggs, and crab. Additionally, postpartum mothers are also advised against consuming certain vegetables, such as cucumbers, raw vegetables, bean sprouts, and beans. This belief is rooted in the community's understanding that these foods can hinder the rapid healing of stitches in postpartum mothers and may lead to breast milk having an unpleasant odor. Therefore, during this ritual, the family prepares foods like free-range chicken, corn bose, and uta boda (white pumpkin) for the postpartum mother to aid in her recovery and restore her strength.

The selection of the aforementioned foods takes into consideration the condition of the postpartum mother. Nutritional intake from the consumed foods is crucial, especially considering that postpartum mothers are vulnerable to postpartum anemia. Anemia can affect the health of both the mother and the baby (Siti Nur Aini & Juli Selvi Yanti, 2021)

In this ritual, the entire family gathers to share a meal at the baby's home. According to interviews with the traditional custodian, the significance of this tradition lies in the family's ability to come together to visit the baby and foster camaraderie with relatives and the community. Relatives and neighbors present at the gathering offer congratulations and prayers for the baby's future well-being. This ritual is considered a form of religious education that the baby receives (Azizah, 2019).

2.4 Ritual of *Nggezu Ngara*

The nggezu ngara ritual is a tradition of naming a baby when the infant reaches 40 days old. This tradition is specifically referred to as nggezu ngara, where "nggezu" means to give and "ngara" means a name. This ritual is carried out concurrently with the performance of aqiqah. According to Islamic law, aqiqah involves the sacrifice of a specific animal for the benefit of the child, as well as the cutting of the baby's hair and the bestowing of a name (Yasmine, 2022). The legal basis for aqiqah is derived from the saying of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which translates as:

"Every child born is pledged for its Aqiqah, which is sacrificed on the seventh day, and on that day, the child is given a name and its hair is shaved." (Hadith reported by Ahmad, Abu Daud, An-Nasa'i, Tirmidzi, Nasa'i, Ibn Majah, Baihaqi, and Hakim)

In the context of the aqiqah ceremony, scholars in the Shafi'i school of thought concur that there is a consensus among them that the practice of aqiqah is deemed as a Sunnah (commendable tradition). Additionally, they prioritize certain days for the execution of the aqiqah, with the preferred day being the seventh day after the child's birth. If this is not feasible, it is permissible to conduct the aqiqah on subsequent days, in increments of seven, or even beyond, as long as it occurs before the child reaches the age of maturity. This perspective is grounded in the methodology of Imam Shafi'i, wherein the extraction of legal rulings places a paramount emphasis on the Quran as its primary source (Harahap, 2019).

The Ende community tends to adhere to the perspective of Imam Shafi'i, who holds the view that performing the aqiqah is permissible beyond the stipulated time, provided that the child has not yet reached the age of maturity (*baligh*) (Anang Dony Irawan, 2021). The ritual is typically conducted when the infant is 40 days old, and the family prepares a specified number of animals according to Islamic guidelines: two goats for a male child and one goat for a female child.

During the execution of this ceremony, the Ende community engages in a gathering or religious chanting known locally as "deba." Deba refers to a series of religious gatherings or chants usually held in the evening after the Isha prayer. The ritual commences with a series of chants (shalawatan) and proceeds with the partial cutting of the baby's hair. The person entrusted with cutting the baby's hair is typically a member of the maternal family or one of the siblings of the mother.

After the family completes the hair-cutting, the ritual continues with the Imam, who leads the aqiqah ceremony, performing the hair-cutting as well. Once the hair-cutting is complete, the cut hair is immersed in water. The Ende community believes that by immersing the hair in water, it will promote the lush growth of the child's hair and contribute to clear thinking. Following the hair-cutting ritual, the next step involves partaking in the meat from the sacrificed animals together with those present at the event, including family members, community members, and religious scholars.

Furthermore, the meat from the aqiqah ceremony is distributed to neighboring households and orphanages. This gesture aims to allow others to share in the joy and happiness of the occasion.

3. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the aforementioned research, it can be concluded that in East Nusa Tenggara, specifically in the Ende regency, several traditions welcoming the birth of a baby persist and are still practiced by the Ende community to this day. Some of these traditions include tane funi, rio keso ineki, ka nggu, and nggezu ngara. The traditions surrounding the birth of a baby in the Ende ethnic group are a fusion of Islamic teachings and local cultural values. Religious aspects such as specific prayers are integrated with local practices. In practice, there exists tolerance and cultural

adaptation to maintain the identity of the Ende ethnic group. The dialectic relationship between Islam and local culture reflects a unique harmony in welcoming new life. Despite social and religious changes, these traditions continue to serve as social bonds and cultural identifiers for the Ende community. In essence, the traditions observed in welcoming newborns in the Ende community demonstrate a unique blend of Islamic and local cultural values. This amalgamation not only showcases the cultural adaptability of the community but also serves as a testament to the enduring role of these traditions in preserving social cohesion and cultural identity among the Ende people.

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