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Exploring the Intersection of Religion and Culture: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Cokaiba Tradition among the Fagogoru Community in Central Halmahera Regency

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Abstract

In sociological contexts, the interaction between culture and religious content naturally reflects the dynamic nature of social phenomena, arising from the harmonization of societal norms and religious principles. The Cokaiba tradition exemplifies this intersection, blending cultural heritage with Islamic commemoration. This study utilizes a phenomenological approach to explore the significance of the Cokaiba tradition within Halmahera society in North Maluku, aiming to elucidate broader perspectives on the interplay between culture and religion. Through qualitative research rooted in phenomenology, this study investigates the dynamics of the Cokaiba tradition within the Fagogoru Community in Central Halmahera, North Maluku. Data collection involves immersive engagement with key informants, including religious figures, community leaders, practitioners of the tradition, and local residents, through interviews, observations, and documentation. Findings reveal the emergence of Cokaiba as a fusion of cultural heritage and Islamic celebration, embodying principles of monotheism and serving as a means to propagate Islam within the region. Despite diverse interpretations, the convergence of religion and culture within Cokaiba fosters harmonious coexistence, facilitating the integration of religious values with cherished cultural practices. However, limitations include the challenge of fully capturing individual experiences and perceptions with a phenomenological approach and the potential lack of generalizability due to the study's focus on the Fagogoru Community. Future research incorporating a broader range of perspectives and cultural contexts would enhance understanding of the intricate dynamics between religion and culture manifested in traditions like Cokaiba.

Keywords: *Religious Content, Cokaiba Tradition, Phenomenological Approach, Halmahera Society, North Maluku, Cultural Heritage.*

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Introduction

In the social fabric of North Maluku society, ritual practices directed towards nature and deep-rooted traditions embody deep trust and adherence to ancestral customs. These rituals and ceremonies are considered important actions to ward off potential harm and express gratitude to the divine for the blessings bestowed upon them.¹ This is evident through the myriad of rituals and social as well as religious traditions that persist and thrive in this region, including the Toto Safar tradition, Sasi Custom Ceremony, Pattimura Torch, and notably, the Cokaiba tradition. These religious practices not only acknowledge the existence of sacred objects, beings, and formidable forces but also serve to reinforce and consolidate these convictions. The cohesive presence of a community sharing common beliefs and engaging in collective practice is paramount for the sustenance of religion, as unity serves to uphold beliefs and foster shared experiences.²

These ceremonies are conducted to honor, worship, give thanks, and seek safety from ancestors and the God, performed at specific times. The reverence and respect for ancestors stem from feelings of fear, awe, and reverence towards them. These sentiments arise because the community believes in an extraordinary force beyond human power and ability, invisible to the eye.³ Traditional ceremonies and customs serve as rituals with meaning for the participating community members. Aside from paying homage to ancestral spirits and expressing gratitude to the Almighty God, these rituals also serve as a means to preserve culture and uphold traditional values.⁴ Tradition encompasses customs, norms, rules, and assets; however, it is not static. It is an amalgamation of various human actions elevated as a cohesive whole. Humans both create and inherit traditions, affording them the flexibility to accept, reject, or modify. Thus, culture serves as a narrative of human evolution, constantly rejuvenating the existing cultural patterns.⁵

The relationships between society, culture, and tradition are deeply intertwined. Society generates traditions, and these traditions serve as reflections of societal identity. Traditions symbolize the bridge between society and its history, representing an inseparable bond.⁶ Every society maintains a connection with its past—an integral link that cannot be severed. This connection between the past and present is essential to the essence of tradition. As Shils aptly articulates, the connection between society and its past is enduring, inherent, and fundamental to the fabric of society itself. Society cannot exist without its past; it is an integral part of nature.⁷

Religion and culture are distinct entities, yet they can mutually reinforce their existence in society. The presence of religion is always needed to provide ethical direction to cultural life, enhancing the significance of cultural outcomes. Conversely, culture is essential for religion as a medium to maintain its existence. Through culture, religion can manifest itself tangibly in societal

¹ Abdullah Faishol, *Islam dan Budaya Jawa* (Surakarta: Pusat Pengembangan Bahasa IAIN Surakarta, 2018). 1-2.

² Faishol. 2.

³ Christopher R. Duncan, “Reconciliation and Revitalization: The Resurgence of Tradition in Postconflict Tobelo, North Maluku, Eastern Indonesia,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no. 4 (1 November 2009): 1077–1104, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002191180999074X>.

⁴ Lany Probojo, “Ritual Guardians Versus Civil Servants as Cultural Brokers in the New Order Era,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 38, no. 110 (1 Maret 2010): 95–107, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811003665421>.

⁵ Van Reusen, *Perkembangan Tradisi dan Kebudayaan Masyarakat* (Bandung: Tarsito, 1992). 115.

⁶ Fitriningsih Pratiwi Mahmud dan Ahmad Rifani Talaohu, “Cultural Identity of North Maluku in Folk Pop: When Traditional Meets the Future,” *Anaphora: Journal of Language, Literary, and Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2 (31 Desember 2023): 191–203, <https://doi.org/10.30996/anaphora.v6i2.9760>.

⁷ Shils dan Piotr Sztompka, *Sosiologi Perubahan Sosial* (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2018). 65.

life. Religion, without incorporating culture, would only develop as a personal belief system. With culture, religion as a collective entity finds its place.⁸

In the discourse of religion and culture, some perceive religion as something separate from culture, while others continually construct patterns of dialectic and acculturation between the two.⁹ In the context of Indonesian society, the presence of Islam as a religion doesn't marginalize culture; religion and culture coexist harmoniously.¹⁰ Islam consistently responds positively to local culture, remaining open to embrace local customs or traditions that are not in conflict with Islamic values and teachings. The cohesive relationship between religion and culture becomes a uniqueness and allure, enriching the tapestry of societal life.

The Celebration of the Prophet's Birthday (Maulid Nabi) has become a religious tradition among Muslims across various parts of the world, taking on diverse forms and motivations, as seen in history above, including its development in Indonesia. Motivations range from seeking popularity, charity (social worship), reciting praises, and invigorating the weakened spirit of Muslim communities (proselytizing), to offering homage to ancestral or revered spirits. The observance of the Prophet's Birthday varies in style, with differences evident between different regions. Over time, these variations have developed according to the situations, conditions, and cultures of Muslim communities in their respective areas. Just as in other parts of the Islamic world, the celebration of the Prophet's Birthday takes on various forms in Indonesia, reflecting local traditions.¹¹

For instance, the Sekaten festival is celebrated by the royal courts of Yogyakarta, Surakarta, and Cirebon. The development and variations in these celebrations are seen through the efforts of organizing committees to enhance the events, such as through social service initiatives, art festivals, seminars (academic discussions), and more. The celebrations are widespread, taking place in villages, mosques/prayer halls, offices, schools, universities, and even at the National Palace, attended by the President, high-ranking officials, diplomatic corps, scholars, political and religious leaders, Islamic figures, and Muslims at large.¹²

The Cokaiba tradition is one of the cultural treasures of the Fogogoru community in Central Halmahera Regency. This tradition, blending religion and culture, is enacted to enliven the Prophet's Birthday celebration and holds its own uniqueness, as the term 'Cokaiba' translates to 'devil's mask'. This tradition embodies the expression of joy from the entire universe at the birth of the Prophet, believed to be a bearer of blessings. This sentiment extends even to the demonic entities who, in the Cokaiba tradition, are depicted as wandering, scolding, and striking individuals who are not appreciative of the Prophet's Day.¹³ The Cokaiba tradition, performed by ninety-nine individuals representing the Asmaul Husna (the 99 names of Allah), don masks with sinister and

⁸ Kastolani dan Abdullah Yusof, "Relasi Islam dan Budaya Lokal (Studi Tentang Tradisi Nyadran di Desa Sumowage Kecamatan Getasan Kabupaten Semarang," *Kontenplasi* 4, no. 2 (2018), 53.

⁹ Roibin, "Agama dan Budaya; Relasi Konfrontatif atau Kompromistik," *Jurnal Hukum dan Syariah Jurisdictie* 1, no. 1 (2010).1.

¹⁰ Sardjana Orba Manullang dkk., "Understanding Islam and The Impact on Indonesian Harmony and Diversity: A Critical Analysis of Journal Publication 2010 to 2020," *Al-Ulum* 21, no. 1 (25 Juni 2021): 68–88, <https://doi.org/10.30603/au.v21i1.2188>.

¹¹ Heru S. P. Saputra, Titik Maslikatin, dan Edy Hariyadi, "Ritual Discourse: Local Wisdom In The Traditional Literature Of Using Ethnic Group In Indonesia," *Proceeding of The International Conference on Literature* 1, no. 1 (2019): 850–58, <https://doi.org/10.24815/v1i1.14827>.

¹² Tim Penyuusun, *Ensiklopedi Nasional Indonesia* (Jakarta: PT. Cipta Adi Pustaka, 1990).204

¹³ Hi Agus Jamal dan Amrullah Umar, "Menjaga Makna dari Nilai Adat Cokaiba di tengah Arus Modernitas Masyarakat Patani," *Artefak* 7, no. 2 (2021). 154.

fearsome visages, resembling jinn and demons, symbolizing the jubilation of the jinn and demons at the Prophet's Birthday.

The practice of the Cokaiba tradition might appear 'strange' to outsiders. Within the beliefs of the Fogogoru community, Islam remains the moral compass and the religion of monotheism (Tauhid). Cokaiba can be seen as an effort to invigorate Islamic proselytization during such significant moments, serving as a strategy to disseminate Islam among a community that previously held animistic beliefs or believed in supernatural entities like jinn. Cokaiba stands as a tradition that juxtaposes Islam as a religious teaching and belief held by the community prior to the advent of Islam.

Several studies related to the Cokaiba tradition have been conducted. First, research by Agus Hi Jamal sought to understand the community's characteristics and village development, particularly in terms of Cokaiba's cultural utilization, and the influence of modernity on the tradition.¹⁴ The findings revealed that amidst the impact of modernity, the Cokaiba tradition remained consistent and upheld by the Patani community during the birth of Prophet Muhammad. Second, research by Rahman A Karim aimed to describe the ceremonial process and analyze the meaning of symbols and changes within the Cokaiba ritual.¹⁵ This study found that the Cokaiba ceremony is still practiced by the Weda community to this day. The values and meanings encapsulated within the Cokaiba ritual, intertwined with the Fagogoru tradition, are distinctive traits of the Weda community and serve as guidelines for their everyday conduct.

Third, research by Rifatul Azizah aimed to explore the meeting point between pre-Islamic beliefs and Islamic values within the Seblang ritual.¹⁶ This research highlighted three intersections within the Seblang tradition: belief in God, belief in spirits, and belief in warding off harm and expressing gratitude. The belief in God reflects Islamic influences, belief in spirits is a carryover from pre-Islamic times that persists, and the belief in warding off harm stems from Hindu influences due to the region's history under the Hindu Kingdom of Blambangan, now Banyuwangi.

However, it's evident from the above studies that the context of the Cokaiba tradition has not yet fully addressed the intersection of Religion and Culture as will be explored in this study. Existing research mainly focuses on the application and process of the tradition, as well as the search for symbolic meanings within the Cokaiba tradition. This study aims to explore the significance and impact of ritual practices and deep-rooted traditions in North Maluku society. While previous research has acknowledged the existence of these rituals and traditions, there is a gap in understanding the underlying reasons for their persistence and their broader implications for social cohesion and cultural identity. By delving deeper into the socio-cultural dynamics surrounding these practices, this research seeks to uncover the intricate connections between ritual practices, traditions, and societal values in North Maluku.

One key research gap that this study addresses is the need to understand the role of these rituals and traditions in shaping social norms and fostering community cohesion. While existing literature has documented the various rituals and traditions in North Maluku, there is limited insight into how these practices contribute to the formation of social bonds and shared identity within the community. By examining the collective experiences and perceptions of individuals participating

¹⁴ Jamal dan Umar.

¹⁵ Rahman A Karim, "Makna Simbolik Upacara Coka Iba Bagi Masyarakat Weda Di Kabupaten Halmahera Tengah," *Jurnal Ilmiah Society* 1, no. 17 (2015). 15.

¹⁶ Rifatul Azizah, "Pertemuan Tradisi Dan Nilai Islam Pada Tradisi Seblang Di Desa Bakungan Kecamatan Glagah Banyuwangi" (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2022).

in these rituals, this research aims to shed light on the mechanisms through which these practices strengthen social ties and reinforce cultural heritage. Furthermore, this study also aims to explore the evolving nature of these rituals and traditions in response to changing socio-cultural contexts. While these practices have persisted for generations, they are not immune to external influences and societal changes. Understanding how these rituals adapt and evolve over time can provide valuable insights into the resilience and adaptability of cultural traditions in the face of modernization and globalization.

Method

The study titled "Exploring the Intersection of Religion and Culture: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Cokaiba Tradition among the Fagogoru Community in Central Halmahera Regency" adopts a phenomenological approach to unravel the intricate meanings embedded within the Cokaiba tradition among the Fagogoru community. To ensure the richness and authenticity of the data, researchers meticulously selected informants who possess profound knowledge and direct engagement with the tradition. Informant selection criteria were established based on their depth of understanding of the tradition and their ability to articulate experiences effectively.¹⁷ Furthermore, prior to initiating the research, researchers obtained necessary permissions and ethical approvals from relevant stakeholders, including traditional leaders and local authorities, to uphold cultural norms and ethical standards. In their capacity as researchers, they conscientiously navigate the fine line between objectivity and subjectivity during data collection and interpretation. While acknowledging the potential influence of personal biases and subjectivity, researchers actively engage in self-reflection to mitigate their impact. Employing a hermeneutic approach to data analysis, the research delves deeply into the collected data to discern underlying patterns, themes, and meanings that emerge from informant experiences.¹⁸

The data, gathered through comprehensive methods such as in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and cultural documentation, serve as the cornerstone for unraveling the multifaceted dynamics of the Cokaiba tradition. The iterative and reflective nature of the analysis process takes into consideration the nuanced cultural and religious contexts that shape the interpretation of the tradition.¹⁹ Consequently, the study aims to cultivate a profound understanding of the intricate relationship between religion and culture within the context of the Cokaiba tradition among the Fagogoru community in Central Halmahera Regency. Through meticulous application of phenomenological approaches and rigorous qualitative research methods, the study endeavors to make significant contributions to the comprehension of local cultural heritage and religiosity.²⁰ By delving into the depths of the Cokaiba tradition, the research aspires to illuminate the rich tapestry of beliefs and practices that underpin the cultural identity of the Fagogoru community, thereby enriching scholarly discourse on the intersection of religion and culture.

¹⁷ Leslie A. Curry, Ingrid M. Nemphard, dan Elizabeth H. Bradley, "Qualitative and Mixed Methods Provide Unique Contributions to Outcomes Research," *Circulation* 119, no. 10 (17 Maret 2009): 1442–52, <https://doi.org/10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.107.742775>.

¹⁸ Robert Desjarlais dan C. Jason Throop, "Phenomenological Approaches in Anthropology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40, no. 1 (2011): 87–102, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092010-153345>.

¹⁹ Hans P. Neisser, "The Phenomenological Approach in Social Science," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 20, no. 2 (1959): 198–212, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2104356>.

²⁰ Dimas Assyakurrohim dkk., "Metode studi kasus dalam penelitian kualitatif," *Jurnal Pendidikan Sains Dan Komputer* 3, no. 01 (2023): 1–9.

Result and Discussion

Religion, Culture, and Their Harmony in Indonesia

There are various perspectives regarding the relationship between religion and culture. Some argue that religion is an integral component of culture, while others posit that culture is shaped by religious beliefs and practices. However, it is essential to recognize that religion and culture are distinct entities with unique characteristics.²¹ Despite their differences, religion and culture share a strong relationship. The connection between religion and culture is evident in how religion relies on culture to propagate itself, while culture relies on religion to preserve it.

Religion is often viewed as originating from a divine source, representing a set of beliefs, rituals, and moral principles that guide the spiritual and ethical aspects of human life. It provides a framework for understanding the supernatural realm, addressing existential questions, and prescribing moral codes of conduct. Religion typically involves devotion to a higher power or divine being and encompasses organized systems of faith, such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and others. On the other hand, culture encompasses the totality of human creations and practices within a society, including customs, traditions, languages, arts, social norms, and material artifacts. It reflects the shared values, beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that define a particular group of people or community. Culture is dynamic and continually evolving, shaped by historical, geographical, social, and economic factors, as well as interactions with other cultures.

While religion and culture may intersect and influence each other in various ways, they maintain distinct domains. Religion often plays a significant role in shaping cultural practices and values, influencing art, architecture, literature, music, and social institutions. At the same time, cultural norms and traditions can impact religious expression and interpretation, leading to diverse religious practices within different cultural contexts. Culture that thrives within a nation is called local culture. Local culture is the result of creativity, imagination, and sentiments that emerge and develop within a tribe or nation in a particular region. Within a culture, there are certainly certain beliefs that can be regarded as religion.²² Meanwhile, religion itself is a principle of belief in God with various appellations such as Deity and others, each of which has rules associated with the beliefs upheld by a particular tribe or ethnicity.

In society, there exists a phenomenon of religion and culture intertwined with each other, often misunderstood by some individuals who fail to grasp how to position religion and culture in society. The presence of religion does not automatically eliminate the long-standing culture within the community as a whole, some of which may not align with the values of religion.²³ However, if religion is propagated using cultural values as a medium, then religion functions as a filter to sift through various norms and values of the culture.

The phenomenon of religion in Indonesia is a reflection of cultural diversity, long history, and social dynamics that encompass this archipelagic nation. From ancient times to the present, Indonesia has been a field for the encounter and blending of various religions and traditional beliefs, creating a unique and rich religious landscape. Islam, as the majority religion, has played a

²¹ Jaco Beyers, "Religion and culture: Revisiting a close relative," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 73, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i1.3864>.

²² Dri Santoso dkk., "Harmony of religion and culture: fiqh munākahat perspective on the Gayo marriage custom," *Ijtihad: Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam dan Kemanusiaan* 22, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.18326/IJTIHAD.V22I2.199-218>.

²³ Mariam Rawan Abdulla, "Culture, Religion, and Freedom of Religion or Belief," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 16, no. 4 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2018.1535033>.

central role in shaping Indonesia's religious identity.²⁴ The introduction of Islam to Indonesia began in the 13th century through trade routes and the spread of Sufi teachings. However, Islam in Indonesia is not monolithic; it encompasses various sects and diverse local traditions. Islamic movements such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, for example, wield significant influence in Indonesian society and politics, while pesantrens, as centers for religious, cultural, and social learning, also play a crucial role in shaping the religious character of the nation.²⁵

Christianity also has a significant following in Indonesia, with the majority concentrated in Java, Sumatra, and Papua. Christianity exists in various denominations, including Catholic and Protestant, each with its unique history and traditions in beliefs and religious practices. Christian churches and schools have become integral parts of Indonesian society and have contributed to education, healthcare, and social development.²⁶ Interreligious tolerance has been a hallmark of Indonesian society, although there have been challenges and conflicts throughout its history. The principle of religious pluralism is reflected in the Indonesian constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion for all citizens. However, religious politics also play a significant role in social and political dynamics in Indonesia, often becoming sensitive issues in elections and policy-making.²⁷ The encounter between religion and culture in Indonesia serves as the primary foundation in shaping a rich and diverse identity. In daily life, the close relationship between religion and culture is reflected in various aspects of Indonesian society. Religious rituals, for example, are an integral part of everyday life, where ceremonies such as Idul Fitri, Christmas, Nyepi, and Waisak are celebrated with joy and reverence, while also reinforcing the religious identity of the community.²⁸

Indonesian arts and culture are also heavily influenced by religious teachings and values. Traditional art forms like wayang kulit and wayang golek, for instance, serve not only as entertainment but also as vehicles for conveying moral values and religious teachings. Similarly, dance, music, and painting often draw upon religious themes, illustrating the close connection between religion and culture in the context of art.²⁹ Local traditions and wisdom are also integral parts of the encounter between religion and culture in Indonesia. Customary traditions in weddings, funeral ceremonies, and harvest seasons often blend religious and customary elements that have been passed down through generations. Ethical values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, and justice are also often influenced by the teachings of the religion practiced, strengthening the harmonious relationship between religion and culture in the daily lives of Indonesian society.³⁰

Thus, the intersection of religion and culture in Indonesia not only gives rise to a plethora of rich and diverse traditions but also serves to fortify and enhance an inclusive national identity.

²⁴ Anif Luthfia Valentina, "Various Tribes of Indonesian Students Have a Spirit of High Solidarity for Tolerance in RAS, Religion and Culture in Indonesia," *International Journal of Business and Applied Economics* 2, no. 3 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.55927/ijbae.v2i3.2229>.

²⁵ I Sumarsam, M Taufik, dan A I Fajri, "An Analysis of Archipelago Religion and Culture Indonesia and Islamization," *Research*, 2023.

²⁶ Muhammad Taufik, "Harmoni Islam dan Budaya Lokal," *Ilmu Ushuluddin* 12, no. 2 (2019): 255–70.

²⁷ Evita Yuliatul Wahidah, Sangkot Sirait, dan Erika Setyanti Kusumaputri, "The Religious Harmony Tolerance in Indonesia: An Islamic Perspective of Pluralism and Multiculturalism," *Proceedings of Annual Conference for Muslim Scholars* 6, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.36835/ancoms.v6i1.340>.

²⁸ I. Ketut Ardhana, "State and Society: Indigenous Practices in Ritual and Religious Activities of Bali Hinduism in Bali-Indonesia," *International Journal of Interreligious and Intercultural Studies* 3, no. 1 (28 April 2020): 20–26, <https://doi.org/10.32795/ijiis.vol3.iss1.2020.681>.

²⁹ Anif Luthfia Valentina, "Various Tribes of Indonesian Students Have a Spirit of High Solidarity for Tolerance in RAS, Religion and Culture in Indonesia."

³⁰ Sumarsam, Taufik, dan Fajri, "An Analysis of Archipelago Religion and Culture Indonesia and Islamization."

This symbiotic relationship underscores the significance of safeguarding and commemorating diversity as a paramount cornerstone of Indonesia's societal fabric. Embracing this diversity not only fosters societal harmony but also underscores the country's resilience in the face of various challenges. By valuing and cherishing this multiplicity of beliefs and practices, Indonesia continues to forge ahead as a nation that embraces inclusivity and tolerance on both a domestic and global scale. Therefore, the celebration and preservation of diversity stand as essential pillars for Indonesia's pursuit of a peaceful and sustainable future.

The Cokaiba Tradition Among the Fogogoru Community in Central Halmahera Regency

Historically, the Cokaiba Tradition among the Fogogoru community is an integral part of the Bon Mayu Dance, which is a masked dance that expresses the maritime traditions of the coastal society of Central Halmahera. This socio-cultural history is situated within the region of Sangaji (Adipati) Gamrange (Tiga Negeri), encompassing Weda, Patani, and Maba.³¹ The term 'Bon Mayu' is derived from a segment of the kabata chant (an inspirational or march song) sung by the Gamrange sailors when providing assistance to the King of Cirebon, whose realm covered Cirebon, Indramayu, Pekalongan, and Semarang.³²

The choreography of the Bon Mayu dance originated from a legend or story within the Central Halmahera community, narrating the valor of the Gamrange naval forces when aiding the Javanese King of Cirebon in battling the Dutch colonizers. The account unfolds with the Dutch East India Company (VOC), based in Ambon, Maluku, aiming to control Java.³³ The VOC leadership dispatched a message to the King of Cirebon, expressing their desire for submission and tribute to the Dutch. This message was rejected by the King. Enraged, the Dutch threatened to attack Cirebon and its territories. Upon learning of this threat, the King of Cirebon sent a message via an envoy who traveled aboard a Tidore Sultanate merchant ship, governed by Sultan Jamaluddin, also known as Ciliriyati, seeking assistance from Cirebon against the Dutch invasion.³⁴

After receiving the message from the Cirebon King's envoy, Sultan Tidore commanded the captain of the Tidore Sultanate fleet (armada), stationed in Weda, Patani, and Maba, to dock at the sultanate's port in preparation for departing to Java to aid the King of Cirebon.³⁵ The Gamrange naval fleet was chosen due to their reputation as skilled mariners capable of navigating the open seas and excelling in naval combat. Upon receiving Sultan's orders, three Kora-Kora warships of Gamrange, led by Admiral Ali, set sail toward the northern coast of Java and arrived in Cirebon within three days and nights. Upon their arrival, they were warmly received by the King of Cirebon and joined the royal elite forces of Cirebon.³⁶

During the battle against the Dutch, the Gamrange forces sought permission from the Cirebon commanders to disguise themselves with masks they had prepared since their departure. These masks were made from pandan leaves, sago palm fronds, and wood, designed to resemble terrifying demon faces. These masks had been commonly used by the Gamrange community during the celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birthday (Maulid Nabi Muhammad SAW).³⁷

³¹ Jamal dan Umar, "Menjaga Makna dari Nilai Adat Cokaiba di tengah Arus Modernitas Masyarakat Patani."

³² Maryono, Pengurus Organisasi Wahdah Islamiyah Maluku Utara, *Wawancara*, 11 Juli 2022.

³³ Husen Ali, "Tari Mayu Bond," *Direktorat Jendral Kekayaan Intelektual* (Jakarta, 2019).

³⁴ Husen Ali.

³⁵ Husen Ali.

³⁶ Husen Ali.

³⁷ Arman Alting, Pembina Sanggar Kabata, *Wawancara*, 11 Juli 2022.

These masks were named 'Cokaiba,' which translates to 'devil's face.' The Cirebon commanders granted permission for the Gamrange forces to wear the Cokaiba masks and lead the frontlines of the battle against the Dutch. The Gamrange forces launched a nighttime attack wearing these masks. Witnessing the sudden assault by masked forces wielding hard wooden weapons (known locally as 'kayu Tawwabi') in a chaotic frenzy, the enemy forces scattered and fled in disarray. In short, the combined forces of Cirebon and Gamrange (from Central Halmahera) emerged victorious. After the battle, the Gamrange forces (from Central Halmahera) requested permission to return home, tracing their journey along the northern coast of Java. During this homeward journey, the kabata chant 'Bon Mayu' was sung to invigorate the brave sailors as they rowed across the open ocean, accompanied by the beating of the tifa drum and the resonating sound of the violin. The kabata chant 'Bon Mayu' was subsequently adapted into the choreography and music of the Bon Mayu dance.³⁸

As it developed, the Cokaiba ceremony became a commemorative practice for the birth of Prophet Muhammad, also known as the Maulid Nabi Muhammad. The Cokaiba tradition is observed one day prior to the celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birthday.³⁹ Ros Aiza explains that the intersection of religion and culture essentially embodies a form of syncretism.⁴⁰ Syncretism refers to the process or phenomenon where elements from various religious or cultural traditions are combined or unified to form a new, unique expression. In the context of the intersection between religion and culture, syncretism may involve the merging of beliefs, practices, or symbols from different religions or cultures.⁴¹

In its execution, the tradition generally begins with an opening and welcome from cultural figures (Sangadji). Particularly, the residents of Patani prepare and design masks and costumes depicting terrifying devils, creating a fearful impact on onlookers. The Cokaiba masks and costumes were initially designed to closely resemble ghosts, but with technological advancements and variations in costume design, they now portray a comical and attractive appearance.⁴² To achieve high-quality Cokaiba results, many are willing to invest significantly in the production process.⁴³

Continuing on the night preceding the Cokaiba event, the Patani residents gather at the mosque to collectively read the Syarafal Anam, a story about the lives of the prophets, accompanied by praise verses (particularly of Prophet Muhammad SAW).⁴⁴ The function of these verses and praises is to express the local Muslim community's joy over the blessings brought by the prophet. The reading of the Sarawan Anam is led by the Kadhi or mosque administrators, continuing until the dawn prayer.⁴⁵

Following the dawn prayer, the process involves gathering numerous Cokaiba participants in the mosque courtyard, followed by their release by Sangadji or elder cultural leaders. The selection of the Cokaiba leaders is based on who possesses the most frightening mask. The Cokaiba leaders are referred to as Cokaiba Yani and Cokaiba Gof. Subsequently, the Cokaiba groups parade around the village, accompanied by music and dance. During this process, each Cokaiba participant's role is to ensure that residents are inside their homes as a symbolic gesture of gratitude

³⁸ Karim, "Makna Simbolik Upacara Coka Iba Bagi Masyarakat Weda Di Kabupaten Halmahera Tengah."

³⁹ Jamal dan Umar, "Menjaga Makna dari Nilai Adat Cokaiba di tengah Arus Modernitas Masyarakat Patani."

⁴⁰ Ros Aiza dkk., "Konsep Sinkretisme Menurut Perspektif Islam," *Ajkar* 17 (2015): 51–78.

⁴¹ Aiza dkk.

⁴² Arman Alting, Pembina Sanggar Kabata, *Wawancara*, 11 Juli 2022.

⁴³ Alting, *Wawancara*.

⁴⁴ Alting, *Wawancara*.

⁴⁵ Jamal dan Umar, "Menjaga Makna dari Nilai Adat Cokaiba di tengah Arus Modernitas Masyarakat Patani."

for the birth of the Prophet. Cokaiba participants fulfill this role for three days, from dawn prayer until sunset.⁴⁶ The final process involves the Pantaeng ritual (closing ceremony of the Cokaiba event), where the elders and community members gather to ask for forgiveness from one another.⁴⁷ This gesture serves to nurture bonds of kinship and solidarity among the residents, given that there might be individuals who feel aggrieved during the Cokaiba event."⁴⁸

The Cokaiba Tradition from the Perspective of Religious Figures in Central Halmahera Regency

The celebration of Maulid Nabi (the Prophet's Birthday) combined with the Cokaiba tradition in a region like North Maluku, although carrying strong positive values, also invites both support and opposition from different communities and groups. On one hand, proponents see this integration as a powerful means to teach religious teachings to the community through a culturally recognizable language.⁴⁹ They believe that incorporating local cultural elements into the celebration of Maulid Nabi helps stimulate interest and participation from a wider audience, bridging the gap between religious teachings and their everyday reality. This can also enhance a sense of unity, local identity, and empowerment of arts and culture.⁵⁰

However, on the other hand, opponents are concerned that the adoption of cultural elements in the celebration of Maulid Nabi might lead to deviations from pure Islamic teachings. They argue that integrated local traditions could potentially contain elements that are not aligned with religious principles, possibly diluting the essence of the celebration. Additionally, they worry that the incorporation of local culture might cause ambiguity and confusion regarding the message and purpose of the celebration, and might introduce innovations without a basis in religious teachings, known as *bid'ah*.⁵¹

Nevertheless, despite these differences, there's a possibility for both sides to find common ground. An approach based on open communication, deep dialogue, and involving religious leaders and community figures can help mitigate conflicts and find mutually respectful solutions.⁵² By maintaining the simplicity and essence of Islamic teachings as a top priority, while drawing inspiration from positive local culture, the integration of Maulid Nabi and local culture can bring benefits to the community as a whole.

In the context of North Maluku, a region characterized by diverse ethnic and cultural groups, this debate also reflects the complexity of identities and social dynamics within the community. Diversity can be a strength if managed wisely and utilized to enrich our understanding of religious teachings and local culture.⁵³ Therefore, it's important to create spaces for dialogues among various stakeholders, including religious figures, academics, and the broader community. By listening to different perspectives and striving to find a middle ground that respects core values,

⁴⁶ Arman Alting, Pembina Sanggar Kabata, *Wawancara*, 11 Juli 2022.

⁴⁷ Alting, *Wawancara*.

⁴⁸ An'im Fatahna Jabir, Pimpinan Pesantren Harisul Khairaat Tidore, *Wawancara*, 11 Juli 2022

⁴⁹ Jabir, *Wawancara*.

⁵⁰ Maryono, Pengurus Organisasi Wahdah Islamiyah Maluku Utara, *Wawancara*, 11 Juli 2022.

⁵¹ Engkizar Engkizar dkk., "Model Pencegahan Konflik Antarumat Beragama Berbasis Kegiatan Masyarakat," *Harmoni* 21, no. 1 (2022): 110–29, <https://doi.org/10.32488/harmoni.v21i1.603>.

⁵² Kasno, "Relasi Antar Umat Beragama" (UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2017).

society can create a safe and inclusive environment for celebrating Maulid Nabi that harmoniously blends religious and cultural elements.⁵³

Furthermore, implementing the celebration of Maulid Nabi by incorporating local culture like the Cokaiba tradition is important because it brings many benefits. One of them is connecting religious teachings with a more recognizable culture, making the celebration more meaningful and relevant to daily life.⁵⁴ This integration also enriches the celebration with vibrant local arts and cuisine. Moreover, this approach strengthens the sense of nationalism and unity within a religious framework. It also empowers local arts and culture while preserving traditions.⁵⁵ Through a harmonious relationship between religion and culture, the community can feel more connected to religious teachings while respecting their cultural heritage.

Despite all of this, the pros and cons surrounding the celebration of Maulid Nabi integrated with local culture like the Cokaiba tradition reflect the dynamics of change and diversity in society. Although varying perspectives may arise, it's crucial for the community to maintain constructive discussions and take cautious steps when involving cultural elements in religious practices. Upholding values of understanding, tolerance, and respect for both cultural and religious heritage, the community can create harmony that respects both aspects, all while remembering the primary essence of celebrating Maulid Nabi: honoring and loving Prophet Muhammad and his teachings.⁵⁶ In doing so, the diversity and complexity of the community can be a source of strength that enriches the celebration's experience and provides profound meaning to each individual involved.

The Harmony between Religion and Culture in the Cokaiba Tradition

Amidst the stunning natural beauty and ethnic diversity of North Maluku, Indonesia, an intriguing fusion occurs between religious traditions and local wisdom within the Cokaiba tradition and the celebration of Maulid Nabi (Prophet Muhammad's birthday). Maulid Nabi, which commemorates the birth of Prophet Muhammad, takes on a distinctive form when intersecting with local traditions that shape the identity and uniqueness of North Maluku's communities. Amidst religious and cultural nuances, this convergence creates layers of profound meaning and reflects how religion and culture can harmoniously unite.

The North Maluku region boasts a rich and diverse history, comprising tribes such as Ternate, Tidore, Tobelo, and more. Each tribe brings a unique cultural heritage, ranging from dances and music to cuisine and local beliefs.⁵⁷ As the celebration of Maulid Nabi emerges within this diversity, it assumes a unique form in each community.⁵⁸ Local influences shape the colorful tapestry of this celebration, generating a distinctive atmosphere that mirrors the grand tale of Prophet Muhammad against a backdrop of diverse cultures.

The harmony between religion and tradition in the Maulid Nabi celebration, integrated with the Cokaiba tradition, is the result of a collaborative effort filled with respect and wisdom. This creates a space for the values of religion to merge with the rich cultural heritage, resulting in a

⁵³ Ahamad Suriadi, "AKULTURASI BUDAYA DALAM TRADISI MAULID NABI MUHAMMAD DI NUSANTARA," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora* 17, no. 1 (2019).

⁵⁴ Mochamad Syaifudin, "Pendidikan Rahmatan Lil Alamin ; Internalisasi Nilai Pada Peringatan Maulid Nabi Muhammad Saw," *Qudratuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 2 (2021): 74–95.

⁵⁵ Abidin Nurdin, "Integrasi Agama dan Budaya: Kajian tentang Tradisi Maulod dalam Masyarakat Aceh," *El Harakah Jurnal Budaya Islam* 18, no. 1 (2016): 47–64.

⁵⁶ Syaifudin, "Pendidikan Rahmatan Lil Alamin ; Internalisasi Nilai Pada Peringatan Maulid Nabi Muhammad Saw."

⁵⁷ Jamal dan Umar, "Menjaga Makna dari Nilai Adat Cokaiba di tengah Arus Modernitas Masyarakat Patani."

⁵⁸ An'im Fatahna Jabir, Pimpinan Pesantren Harisul Khairaat Tidore, *Waravancara*, 11 Juli 2022.

unique and meaningful celebration for the local community.⁵⁹ Within this harmony, the community can celebrate both aspects with pride, transforming the celebration into a tribute not only to Prophet Muhammad but also an expression of their cultural and spiritual identity.

From this tradition emerges an integration of religion and culture. In the Maulid Nabi celebration in North Maluku, a harmonization process fuses Islamic teachings with unique aspects of local culture. This forms a platform where the spiritual values of Islam and the richness of local culture can unite in a strong expression. This harmony and integration manifest through various means:

1. Symbiosis of Meanings in the Celebration⁶⁰

The Maulid Nabi celebration becomes a platform where religious messages advocating goodness, brotherhood, and cooperation blend with Cokaiba traditions that carry similar meanings. For instance, the traditional masks that symbolize unity and harmony physically complement the spiritual teachings.

2. Use of Symbols⁶¹

Local cultural symbols like costumes, ornaments, and decorations used in the celebration can be integrated with the religious meanings. Traditional motifs within the Cokaiba tradition, incorporated into clothing or adornments, can convey profound religious messages, reminding individuals of the necessity to live with respect and compassion.

3. Interpretation of the Prophet's Stories in a Local Context⁶²

Stories of Prophet Muhammad's life in Islamic teachings can be interpreted within the context of local culture. These stories can serve as a means to convey religious messages through locally known tales. In this process, religion and local culture complement and enrich each other's meanings.

4. Harmonization of Ceremonies and Rituals⁶³

The procedures of ceremonies and rituals in the Maulid Nabi celebration can be integrated with local traditions. For instance, local dance rituals or music can be incorporated into the ceremony, creating a unified experience of spiritual and cultural aspects.

5. Involvement of Religious and Community Leaders⁶⁴

Religious leaders and community figures play a vital role in guiding and overseeing this integration. By ensuring that religious values are preserved and respected, they can ensure that the integration of religion and culture does not lead to deviations.

6. Education and Knowledge⁶⁵

During the Maulid Nabi celebration, education about Islamic teachings and cultural values can be enhanced. This helps the community understand the balance between these two elements and encourages respect for both. Rofiqi explains that in the current era, there is a need to integrate

⁵⁹ I Wayan Wirata, "Kohesifitas Sosial Harmoni Umat Beragama Pada Masyarakat Lombok (Pendekatan Sosiologi Agama)," *Jurnal Penelitian Agama Hindu* 7, no. 3 (2023): 267–74, <https://doi.org/10.37329/jpah.v7i3.2424>.

⁶⁰ Dewi Tika Lestari, "Merawat Harmoni Agama melalui Kolaborasi Musik Hadroh dan Trompet di Ambon," *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama dan Lintas Budaya* 4, no. 3 (2020): 215–26, <https://doi.org/10.15575/rjsalb.v4i3.8880>.

⁶¹ Lestari.

⁶² Nurdin, "Integrasi Agama dan Budaya: Kajian tentang Tradisi Maulod dalam Masyarakat Aceh."

⁶³ Gayatri Dyah Suprobawati, "DCF (Dieng Culture Festival), Wujud Harmonisasi Antara Kearifan Lokal, Agama dan Sosial Ekonomi di Masyarakat Dataran Tinggi Dieng," *Journal of Law, Society, and Islamic Civilization* 9, no. 1 (2021): 22, <https://doi.org/10.20961/jolsic.v9i1.51714>.

⁶⁴ Muhammad Taufik, "Harmoni Islam dan Budaya Lokal."

⁶⁵ Nur Syam, *Menjaga Harmoni Menuai Perdamaian (Islam, Pendidikan, dan Kebangsaan)* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2018). 11

local traditions with various aspects, particularly education. Established traditions need to be contextualized to provide strong meaning to the local community.⁶⁶

Through this integration process, a close relationship is established between religion and culture, where both contribute to a deeper understanding of values like life, brotherhood, and morality. This integration not only enriches the experience of the Maulid Nabi celebration but also provides an opportunity for reflection on religious messages within a familiar cultural context. Thus, the integration of religion and culture in the Maulid Nabi celebration in North Maluku becomes not only a festive occasion but also a rich and meaningful learning and reflection experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Cokaiba tradition emerges as a fascinating manifestation of cultural acculturation stemming from the encounter between the Fagogoru community's culture in Central Halmahera Regency and the Maulid Nabi event rooted in Islamic heritage. This tradition, symbolized by the mask of a demon, signifies the universal jubilation at the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, seen as a harbinger of blessings for humanity. Embedded within this tradition is a moral ethos reflecting the monotheistic principles of Islam, serving as a vehicle for Islamic outreach and propagation, particularly in Halmahera, North Maluku.

While religious leaders exhibit differing stances towards the Cokaiba tradition, with some embracing its integration into Maulid Nabi celebrations as a cultural means of spreading Islam, and others cautioning against potential deviations from authentic Islamic teachings, the convergence of religion and cultural tradition within Cokaiba fosters a harmonious coexistence. This harmony, achieved through mutual respect and wisdom, allows for the synthesis of religious values with local cultural heritage, resulting in a unique and meaningful celebration for the community. Ultimately, the Cokaiba tradition exemplifies the dynamic interplay between religion and culture, showcasing how cultural expressions can enrich religious festivities while maintaining reverence for core religious principles. As such, it stands as a testament to the adaptive nature of Islam and the resilience of local traditions in fostering a cohesive and inclusive societal fabric.

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⁶⁶ Rofiqi, *Pendidikan Islam di Era Industri 4 . 0 (Studi Analisis Terhadap Tantangan Profesionalisme Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam)*, Fikrotuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam dan Manajemen Islam, vol. 10, 2019.

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