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# Lamalera Women in Penetang Culture

## (Historical Study of Women's Life in Lamalera Culture)

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**Abstract:** Penetang is a one kind of work in the daily life of the Lamalera Village community that has existed since the time of their ancestors, up until now. Penetang culture is carried out only by women, and mostly consisted of mothers. In summary, this culture is conducted by roaming from one village to another bringing fish, salt and calcium which will be exchanged for products from mountain areas, such as rice, corn, bananas, tubers, vegetables and fruits. This exchange activity is often called barter (bartering). Penetang culture has provided good values and must be maintained and preserved by the people of Lamalera Village. This study uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach, which brings up authentic and targeted data, using data collection, observation and interview techniques. These data is then analyzed by focus onto data collection, data reduction, data exposure and data verification. And based on this data analysis, it was concluded that the women who lived in Lamalera is trying to seek for improvement of their standard of living through Penetang Culture. Furthermore, this research focused on highlighting the involvement of women as an actors who decide the fate of generations of the Lamalera community through Penetang tradition. Related to the timing, Penetang will be held after completing the ritual of the ie gerak when the men getting marine products in the form of fish and many more depends on the family needs of each Lamalera community.

**Keywords:** Women of Lamalera, Penetang culture.

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a large population. This large population consists of thousands of ethnicities, cultures, religions and languages. This complexity certainly has its own uniqueness. It can thus give positive and negative values in the difference. Differences can become unity, harmony that builds people's lives (Hommes, 2002). On the other hand, the diversity possessed by the Indonesian people has an impact on the existence of certain ethnic grouping or adherents of certain cultures which have downside implications for the collapsing of the diversity values that the Indonesian people have today. According to Sir Edward Tylor quoted by Horton and Hunt (Raho 2014) the living habits of a society that are passed down from generation to generation are the forerunners of the formation of culture. Which mean, habits both in the form of behavior, as well as knowledge left and inherited by the ancestors and followed by the next generation gave birth to culture in the community itself. Therefore, Koentjaraningrat said that culture is the work of the community (Danial, 2016).

As in other areas, geographically, the village of Lamalera and its surroundings depend on marine products for their livelihood. These marine products are then exchanged for agricultural products in neighboring areas. The opportunity to obtain fish products occurs in October which in the Lamalera language is known as the *lefa nuan* season (the season to go to sea) (Danial, 2016). Fishing activities involve everyone in the family starting from

preparing food and drinks that will be consumed by family members while fishing. Once the role of a woman is so central, it can be analogized as part of the balance of life in the village of Lamalera. This means that on the one hand, Lamalera women are destined to give birth to a new generation, but on the other hand, the central role of women in supporting the family economy is a characteristic of harmony in building the order of family values in the village of Lamalera.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### **Culture: Elements, Values, Functions and Forms**

*Kebudayaan* (Culture) comes from the basic word *budaya*. In Indonesian language, The terminology of the word culture itself comes from the Sanskrit words *budi* (means: mind) and *daya* (means: power) which means the power of the mind (Raho, 2014). In the Indonesian Big Dictionary or *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI), "*budaya*" (culture) is defined as something that comes from the thoughts of a group or community regarding customs, culture, which have developed or are habits that are passed down from generation to generation that are difficult to change. Linton explained that culture is the whole attitude and pattern of behavior and knowledge which is a habit that is inherited and owned by a member of a particular society or community. Sir Edward Tylor emphasized by saying that culture is the complexity of the whole point of view of knowledge, belief, art, morals, customs, all other abilities and habits acquired from members of society (Raho, 2014).

Culture also contains elements that further regulate how culture is implemented in social life. Melville J. Herskovits said that there are four main elements of culture, such as: technological tools, economic system, family, and political power. Meanwhile, Bronislaw Malinowski mentions that cultural elements also consist of four namely "a system of norms that allows cooperation between community members in controlling their natural surroundings, economic organizations, tools and institutions or educational and family officers, and power organizations" (Raho, 2014).

C. Kluckhohn further summarizes all the those elements of culture above into the seven elements of culture as "cultural universes" which include tools and equipment for human life, livelihoods and economic systems, social systems, language, arts, knowledge systems and elements of belief (Raho, 2014). These cultural elements then have an impact on the values of people's lives that contain the life of the community itself. From generation to generation these values form norms of life that are obeyed and carried out as part of local customs.

### **Lamaholot Culture**

Lamaholot culture is spread in several areas in East Nusa Tenggara Province which includes the mainland of East Flores, Adonara, Solor and parts of Lembata and Alor. Lamaholot becomes a cultural identity that binds people in those four regions. The Lamaholot community forms a distinctive social order that is explicit in various systems of Lamaholot cultural life such as livelihoods, kinship, marriage, death customs, governance and so on. The system has been around for a long time until now. People belonging to and living in the Lamaholot culture are better known as the Lamaholot people. This gives rise to its own designation, and is an identifying mark (Bebe, 2018).

The embodiment of Lamaholot culture as a unit is reflected in the Lamaholot community poems "*Kame ata Sina Jawa warat wakon hakat*" and "*Kame ata Serang Goran, Kei timu lera matan lodo*" which means, we come from China-Java and we come from east Seram Goron, Kei. This shows that the direction of their arrival is different, one coming from the west, the other coming from the east. Based on historical searches of speech culture in the life of the Lamaholot community, Lamaholot consists of two syllables: lama which means *lewo* and *holo* which means *bersambung* (means: continued). In this context Lamaholot can be

interpreted *lewo bersambung* or continued Iewo in English.

Meanwhile, in the form of words, etymologically Lamaholot consists of the words *Lama* and *Holot*. *Lama* means village and *Holot* which if removed the suffix *h = olot* which means to stick. So it can be said that Lamaholot means a village that is glued or united. This search was found by naming several settlements in areas such as Lamatukan, Lamakera and Lamalera (Bebe, 2018). Respect for the highest form in the Lamaholot culture is known as *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*. Lamaholot cultural beliefs that Gods or the Creator as the guardian of the unity and survival of each generation of Lamaholot.

### **Women: Terms and Roles in Lamaholot Culture**

Several terms for women in the Lamaholot tradition such as *ina waem kebarek*, *kewahek*, *wahek* and *binek* represent the position and role of women in Lamaholot cultural habits. *Ina* means Mother or Mama, *Wae* indicates sex. *Kebarek* is intended for unmarried women, *kewahek* for married women, *wahek* for aunt which some areas such as in the Solor region call *tia*. While *binek* is a brother's call for his sister (Bebe 2018).

Some other terms are becoming a form of tribute for Lamaholot women such as *Ina Tanah Ekang* which means mother as a symbol of giving her womb to form a new life. *Ina Tuso Tapo Bali* which means Mother's Milk which is analogous as coconut water that quenches thirst. In a deeper sense, it can be interpreted that Mother is willing to give her flesh and blood for the growth and development of children born from her womb or for a new life. *Ina Wai Matan* (Mother of the Symbol of Life) which further means water that comes from the sacrifice of one or two women. *Ina Ata Ape Luran Tukan* (Mother Like a Fireplace) which means a mother who is always ready to let her burnt by the fireplace in order to cook and provide food menus for all her family members. *Wato Ina Wato Ana* (mother stone child stone).

For the people of Lamaholot, the "stone" symbolizes a woman or girl. This equipment can be used to process corn kernels into corn husks. *Bine Raga Kara* (*Guardian of the Rice Basket*) which means the role of mothers or sisters in traditional celebrations performed by their brothers and sisters. Their role is to divide the rations or portions of food from a large rice basket placed on the main pillar of the house or in the Lamaholot language called *ri'e hikun* (Bebe, 2018). Another term that exists in the Lamaholot tradition is *Tonu Wujo*, a woman who is willing to sacrifice herself for the survival of her brothers and sisters in danger of starvation. It is believed that *Tonu Wujo's* body transformed into a rice plant which is a food source plant.

### **Women Roles in the Catholic Church**

Some interpretations of the Holy Bible of the Catholic Church reflect how important the role of women in the Teaching of the Catholic Faith is. In fact, several passages in the Bible explicitly tell of the role of women who are separated from the role of husbands. It is explicitly said that women has to be submit, as the Torah also says (Benedikta Yosefina Kebinjin, 2020). Because it is not polite for women to speak in congregation meetings (1 Cor 14:34-35). Women are limited in their space of movement, that women get salvation because they give birth to children and live a simple life (1 Tim 2:15). These restrictions contradict what Gal. 3:28 says, that baptism removes all differences between people. Baptism makes one see himself as equal to others in equality. Equality does not mean that women and men are the same. Both are different but differences as discrimination need to be rejected. The term used by Paul, "There is no male or female" (Clifford, 2002).

The position of women in the life of the world then by Jesus Christ taught that men and women both experience unity and equality in Him. The interpretation of this unity and equality can be found in Jesus' attitude of involving women in His life and work, even the

fact that the incarnation is the starting point for the intended gender justice perspective. The disciples he gathers in large groups (72) and smaller groups (12) are a community that symbolizes the existence of the Church. The church consists of women and men. So in discipleship, there is no difference between men and women. Elsewhere, the declaration of confession and self-declaration of Jesus is the expected Messiah, revealed from the mouths of Peter and Martha (John 11:27; Matt 16:16).

Jesus' own taught affirms that he created woman by his own image, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27b). In the Song of Solomon, women are placed in a decisive position. The role of women is shown as initiating love, enjoying and wanting natural erotic needs (Song 8:5). Women no longer have to be punished or flattered because of their sexuality (Benedikta Yosefina Kebinjin 2020).

These gospel values above are expressed in a not so gender friendly situation and time frame, however Jesus still displays the identity of God who does not monopolize any one human identity, either as male or female, as shown in the way He acted. The apostolic inheritance from Jesus to the apostles needs to be seen as the reality of the Church formed from the Easter experience. The group of apostles is the Church. The church is all those who believe in Christ: men and women. So the involvement of women in building the Church, should have a space that is not distinguished from men. On the other hand, the Catholic Church's view of women is that they are gentle but hard individuals (Wijanarko and Riyanto, 2021).

This highlights the special side of women who are able to overcome harsh and dangerous situations with courage and humility. When faced with problems, women generally do not want to make matters more complicated. Women choose to keep the event to themselves and keep it private. Women have the ability to cover the pain of his heart. This also positions women with the central figure in the New Testament Scriptures, namely Mary. Furthermore Mary plays a special role in elevating the dignity and majesty of women. and in the Catholic Church, Mary is seen as the Mother of the Church, the Mother of all nations. This view immediately gained universal recognition in the lives of all women (Clifford, 2002).

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a qualitative research (Sugiyono, 2008) with an ethnographic approach which by John W. Creswell, argues that ethnographic studies seek to examine a particular cultural group, especially in the presence of researchers in the field (John W. Creswell, 2015). Meanwhile, James P. Spradley argues that ethnography is a job of describing culture with the main aim being to understand a native view of life (Spradley, 2006). Likewise, Raymond Rede Blolong said that ethnography is a description of the way of life or culture of a society (Blolong, 2008). The instrument used in this study was an interview guide that was made in the form of questions addressed to research informants using an observation approach and interviewing research informants. All interview results were analyzed through the stages (data reduction), data presentation (data display) and drawing conclusions and verification (concluding darwing/veryfing) (Lexy J Moleong, 2017).

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The ancestors of the Lamalera community were immigrants from outside the island of Lembata. They come from several areas with different routes of arrival, called the "*Serang Gorang* Tribe" who came from the land of Luwuk-Southeast Sulawesi. They traveled to the south coast of the island of Lembata (Yosep Raja Tapooona, 2011). Based on the results of the interview, it is known that the *Levohajo* Tribe is the ancestor of the Lamalera people. This tribe consists of the *Bataona*, *Blikololong* and *Levotukan* tribes who were the first immigrants from the east to reach Lamalera. The land of Lamalera currently belongs to *Libu Lamamau* and *Gesi Raja* (the ancestors of the *Tufaoana* tribe and the ancestors of the *Langovjusun*

tribe). *Libu Lamamau* gave a plot of land to the *Levohajo* tribe to settle on the land. As a thank you, the *Levohajo* tribe gave a gold chain called "*Loda*". Then it was agreed to build a boat called "*Baka Fallang*" which later changed its name to "*Baka Tena*".

The harshness of life in the land of Lamalera finally gave rise to the agreement of Penetang culture that were generally carried out by mothers in Lamarera. The concept of agreement in Penetang tradition is to use a barter system or exchange. Practically this system has existed from the time of their ancestors and has been passed down from generation to generation until now. This concept raises the noble values of culture which are reflected in values such as the value of love, the value of mutual cooperation, the value of brotherhood, the value of tolerance, the value of responsibility. The meaning of these values is that the penetang culture is not just a routine inherited from the ancestors in the process of survival, but as well as an offering. An offering that is oriented towards the human life of Lamalera which is a gift from *Alepte* (the term for God in the Lamalera language) that should be grateful for. This means that the process of the Lamalera community in making a living, which begins with wading through the fierce seas, ends with exploring the vastness of land as a symbol of respect for *Alepte* which is implied in the form of hard work and sacrifice to be grateful for the breath of life.

*Alepte* has given the breath of life for free, of course this gift must be maintained and grateful for by working hard and making sacrifices in realizing a good life. The Penetang culture can't be separated from the *leva alep* (fisherman) culture. These two things are can not be separated while maintain the existence of each other. *Leva alep* and *penetang* is a form of harmony of life. The harmony of life contained of the cooperation between men and women. These two different personalities work together to create a good life. Men work fishing in the sea in one side. The seafood, in the form of fish, is then processed by the women and sold with the goals to provide their families needed in the other side.

Cooperation has long been practiced by the ancestors of the Lamalera community. In the cultural life framework of Lamalera, the *penetang* culture and the women of Lamalera are an inseparable unit. Lamalera women became the main actors of penetang tradition. And if they refuse to do their role in *penetang*, their family life will be affected because there will be no food (other than fish) to served. So it has become the responsibility of women to do the *penetang* up until now. This responsibility, from the women's point of view, is not a tough job. For them penetang both as tradition and as a form of works is an honor, it can be as well said that this honor for women who are able to raise the dignity of women to be equal to men. This is not seen from the weight or lightness of the responsibilities carried out but in the willingness and willingness to create a good life.

This is where the Lamalera woman stands in her position to take responsibility. From the point of view of men, the responsibility given to women (doing the penetang tradition) is not a coercion or a monopoly system by men over women. Because basically, the beginning of the occurrence of *penetang* culture is the awareness of each individual from the Lamalera community to overcome their limitations such as their natural resource scarcity and harsh environment conditions. This awareness then encourages women to take part in helping their community lives. In this condition, men do not force or prohibit, and also encourage the involvement of women in helping their lives. The decision is still given to women, because they are the ones who will carry out these responsibilities. This emphasizes the position of women in the Lamaholot community who are the source of life, the bearer of blessings and the savior of life (Tukan 2014).

The concept of the Penetang culture in life in the village of Lamalera reflects back on the meaning implied in the bible which believe in existence of parallel relationship built by men and women which further has been described from the beginning in the creation story and is also shown in the stage of the role of other women in the story of the First Testament (Ester,

Deborah, Judith, ...), was manifested by Jesus through certain stories in His works and ways of acting. Jesus forgave the woman who came weeping for her sin, and rubbed his feet with perfumed oil (John 12:1-8) who was despised by men as a prostitute. Jesus acted to liberate the woman from the threat of accusations by the men who actually became a source of defamation of the woman's self and reputation. Jesus' siding with the woman exposed the tyranny of slavery that she endured as a sinner. In another story, Jesus acts to free a woman from the threat of death by stoning after she is preyed upon, tricked by men, and then demands the death penalty for her. With His attitude and way of acting, Jesus dismantled the patriarchal culture, dismantled the domination and oppression of women. What is being opposed is not men but the prevailing patriarchal system and structure.

The values of the gospel that are proclaimed in such not gender friendly situations are how to display the identity of God who does not monopolize one human identity, either as male or female, as shown in the way Jesus acted. The apostolic inheritance from the hands of Jesus to the apostles needs to be seen as the reality of the Church formed from the Easter experience. The group of apostles is the Church. The church is all those who believe in Christ: men and women. So the involvement of women in building the Church, should have a space that is not distinguished from men (Benedikta Yosefina Kebinjin 2020).

## CONCLUSION

Lamalera women in *penetang* cultures are a tradition of the life form of the Lamalera community in seeking life from a better life process. This tradition was left by the ancestors of the Lamalera community to guide their descendants to pursue a better standard of living. A tradition that specifically highlights the involvement of women as actors who fight for and determine the fate of the Lamalera generations. With this culture carried out by women, the family life of the Lamalera community can improve and survive through the rigors of life.

The women of Lamalera respond to their involvement as the main actors in this *penetang* tradition, as a form of appreciation for the life given freely by *Alepte* (a term for God). The form of appreciation is represented by the act of being willing to sacrifice to help and complement men responsibility in providing needed for their families. This act of self-sacrifice based on awareness of the natural conditions and scarcity that further makes them realize that they have not been able to meet their basic needs of life without extra effort in their life. The realization that in the end gives a place of honor to women, that makes women are not only a complement to the limitations of men, but women are a valuable value worth having by any men. Lamalera women and *penetang* cultures both further teaches us that living in a family should be built in harmony, working hand in hand so that life obstacle and challenges can be overcome towards better living.

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