

Golok-Golok Menthok: Exploring The Relationship of Religion and Culture in Transmitting Gender Equality Values

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the stagnation of Indonesia's gender equality index score, which ranks 87 out of 146 countries, the strong influence of patriarchal values, and the high rate of gender-based violence. This condition demands a more practical approach to promoting gender equality, primarily through inclusive education from an early age. The golok-golok menthok tradition in Kudus, Central Java, was chosen as the object of study because it has great potential to integrate gender equality values into people's daily lives. The purpose of this study is to explore how the golok-golok menthok tradition can be a medium for gender-inclusive education that promotes values of justice. The method used is a descriptive qualitative approach. The results show that the golok-golok menthok tradition not only functions as a religious celebration but also as a tool to transmit gender equality values to the younger generation. This tradition emphasizes that gender justice is part of a complete faith and must be integrated into daily life. The implications of this research show that culture and religion can synergize in promoting gender equality, forming a strong foundation for future generations to be fair and respectful of gender differences.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Golok-golok Menthok, Islam; Local Tradition

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh stagnasi skor indeks kesetaraan gender Indonesia yang berada pada urutan 87 dari 146 negara, kuatnya pengaruh nilai-nilai patriarki, dan tingginya angka kekerasan berbasis gender. Kondisi ini menuntut adanya pendekatan yang lebih efektif dalam mempromosikan kesetaraan gender, khususnya melalui pendidikan inklusif sejak dini. Tradisi Golok-Golok Menthok di Kudus, Jawa Tengah, dipilih sebagai objek kajian karena memiliki potensi besar dalam mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai keadilan gender ke dalam kehidupan sehari-hari masyarakat. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana tradisi Golok-Golok Menthok dapat menjadi media pendidikan inklusif gender yang mempromosikan nilai-nilai keadilan. Metode yang digunakan adalah penelitian kualitatif dengan metode analisis deskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tradisi Golok-Golok Menthok tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai perayaan keagamaan, tetapi juga sebagai alat untuk mentransmisikan nilai-nilai kesetaraan gender kepada generasi muda. Tradisi ini menegaskan bahwa keadilan gender merupakan bagian dari keimanan yang utuh dan harus diintegrasikan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa budaya dan agama dapat bersinergi dalam mempromosikan kesetaraan gender, membentuk fondasi kuat bagi generasi mendatang untuk bersikap adil dan menghargai perbedaan gender.

Kata kunci: Keadilan Gender; Golok-golok Menthok; Islam; Tradisi Lokal

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is well-known for its diverse and unique cultures. Each region has distinct cultures and traditions that reflect the values and principles of the community groups. This aligns with the definition of culture given by Manuel Castells, which states that culture is a series of values and beliefs that inform, guide, and motivate human behavior (Naji et al., 2019). In this case, culture serves as not only a driving force for community group actions but also an identity and a means of interaction. The diversity of Indonesian culture leads to dynamic values rooted in local traditions, particularly those linked to gender justice. It turns out that Kudus, Central Java, has a very unique local tradition that promotes gender equality values called *golok-golok menthok*.

Golok-golok menthok is a local tradition held on the night of 12 Rabi'ul Awal to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. This tradition expresses the Kudus society's gratitude for the birth of the messenger of Allah, who brought a humanitarian revolution and significant social transformation, particularly for women's lives. This tradition involves children, both girls and boys. They carry *nanya*, a vividly colored woven bamboo container filled with various traditional foods such as sticky rice *serundeng* (fried grated coconut side dish). They parade around the village while chanting a Javanese song, "*Golok-golok menthok, bancaane cah wedok, cah lanang ra entuk njanthok, nek njanthok udele kethok*," which means "*Golok-golok menthok*, a celebration for girls. Boys are not allowed to ask; if they do, their navels will be exposed."

Golok-golok menthok is one of the local traditions that promotes the values of gender equality and justice, which is the message of Islam brought by the Prophet Muhammad. In particular, girls' participation in public areas, which are traditionally intended for men, conveys that they are not limited to the domestic sphere and may actively contribute to their society's social and religious life. This shift in values is evidence that local traditions can play a role in challenging detrimental traditional values and promoting more equitable practices.

Besides the rich tradition that promotes gender equality in Indonesia, there are still concerning facts about it. Indonesia faces a tremendous challenge in gender inequality, as indicated by the gender equality score, which has remained stagnant at 0.697. The Global Gender Gap Report 2023 reports that Indonesia has only achieved 69.7% gender equality and is ranked 87th out of 146 countries. This score reflects ongoing gaps in various areas, such as economic participation, political representation, and education.

In addition, violence against women remains a problem. The National Women's Life Experience Survey (SHPN) reported 457,895 cases in 2022. This figure represents the number of reported cases, despite the fact that many victims do not report the violence they face. Based on the 2023 National Commission on Violence Against Women annual report (Catahu), the number of complaints they received increased from 4,322 cases in 2021 to 4,371 cases in 2022. This means that they received an average of 17 complaints per day. In terms of online gender-based violence (KBGO), SAFEnet received 275 KBGO complaints throughout the third quarter of 2023. These complaints are 46.18 percent higher than in the same three-month period in the previous year. These figures highlight the critical need for educational and cultural efforts to reduce gender inequity, which is the root of various forms of gender violence.

The *golok-golok menthok* tradition has evolved not only as a cultural and religious practice, but also represents the advancement of people's thought. It demonstrates a growing acceptance of women's roles outside the domestic life boundaries. Although it began as a rite to commemorate the Prophet's birth, the *golok-golok menthok* now conveys a more profound message about women's role in society. It highlights that women and girls have a significant role in religious and community life, which is increasingly acknowledged in contemporary discussions on gender equality. *Golok-golok menthok* shows how cultures can evolve to embrace gender equality and contribute to a more inclusive society.

Many research studies focus on formulating national strategies and policies to promote gender equality. However, as Para-Mallam argues, the effectiveness of gender equality interventions depends on their ability to engage with local cultural and religious contexts (Para-Mallam, 2010). This study aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of the *golok-golok menthok* tradition and its reflection on gender equity values. This study offers insights into how cultural practices can promote gender equity in Indonesia. Girls' participation in religious traditions exemplifies how cultural traditions can be reinterpreted to promote modern values of equality and inclusivity.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive analysis method. This method allows researchers to explain the phenomenon in detail and describe how the *golok-golok menthok* tradition reflects the values of gender justice in a cultural and religious context clearly. The data collection methods used are interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Structured interviews with community leaders and religious authorities were conducted to understand the tradition and how they perceive gender roles in this tradition. Direct observation was conducted to record social interactions, observable gender symbols, and how this tradition is carried out from a gender standpoint. Document analysis was conducted to identify literature that explains this tradition.

Data analysis was carried out in accordance with qualitative research procedures, which included data condensation, data display, and conclusion verification. Data condensation is a process of selecting, abstracting, and reducing data. Data display consists of showing previously reduced and grouped data. This procedure allows researchers to determine the data to be analyzed. Data verification is defined as the process of ensuring that data is true, accurate, and comprehensive. This is done to ensure that the data collected and used is accurate, consistent, and

reliable. Data validation is carried out with perseverance, thorough observation, repeated studies, and peer checking.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The *Golok-golok Menthok* Tradition

Golok-golok menthok is a unique tradition found solely in Kudus, Central Java, on every 12th night of Rabiul Awal month to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. This tradition is a legacy of the ancestors that is still preserved today as a symbol of gratitude for the birth of the Prophet, who freed women from the shackles of ignorance in the Jahiliyah era. At that time, women had no honor and were even considered a disgrace to the family. As a result, many babies born female were buried alive. After the Prophet Muhammad SAW was sent, discrimination against women was abolished. Islam came by changing the patriarchal culture of the Arab country during the Jahiliyah era and placing men and women in an equal position. This can be seen in the story of Aisyah binti Abu Bakar, where women can participate in congregational prayers and I'tikaf in the mosque. Amrah binti Abdurrahman also told us about their habit of attending and listening to Friday sermons (Kodir, 2019, p. 45).

The commemoration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (Maulid Nabi) was enlivened by the tradition of *golok-golok menthok* to emulate and continue his struggle to elevate women's status to become honorable human beings. *Golok* is a Javanese word that means a sharp weapon. Some interpret the symbolization of *golok* in this tradition as a symbol of carrying out Islamic teachings and sinking them into the heart with a strong faith, similar to a *golok* (Rahman et al., 2024). Meanwhile, *menthok* refers to the ultimate end or last point. It means that ignorance or jahiliyah behavior toward women must halt and not be repeated, as Islam places men and women in the same category.

The main subject of the *golok-golok menthok* tradition is girls aged 3-12 years. They prepared a *nanya*, or small woven bamboo basket, to be loaded with sticky rice,

serundeng, and traditional snacks. After that, they carry it around the village while singing *golok-golok menthok* song in Javanese, “*golok-golok menthok, bancakane cah wedok, cah lanang ra ntuk njantok, nek njanthok udele ketok*”. In Indonesian, the *golok-golok menthok* song implies thankfulness for girls. Hence, boys are not permitted to ask, and if they do, their navels will be exposed. After going around the village, the final stop is the musholla or mosque, where the event is held. There, the *nanya* will be collected and distributed randomly to all the congregations after the recitation is finished.

In fact, the *golok-golok menthok* tradition is indeed identical to girls. However, conditions in the field show that boys are welcome to join, even though the main actors are still girls. This process is part of an effort to establish gender equality in children from an early age, i.e., equal conditions for men and women to get opportunities and rights as human beings. Although the *Golok-golok menthok* song is only sung during the Prophet's birthday celebration, all children know it well. However, the songwriter remains unknown and has yet to be officially documented. This tradition is still oral, known solely through word of mouth.

This celebration is traditionally aimed at girls to reflect the values of gender justice. It provided an opportunity for girls to appear in public, whereas previously, their role was limited to only domestic life. *Golok-golok menthok* is more than just a cultural product of the Kudus community. It is an integration between local traditions and religious values, as it is characteristic of religions in Indonesia (Agis et al., 2018; Kasdi, 2018; Thahir, 2021). This practice makes culture a forum to express gratitude for the transformation of humanity introduced by the Prophet Muhammad. More than that, it offers an interesting understanding of how local traditions can include gender justice values in religious festivities.

Religion and culture are two elements that shape the way people perceive things. Religion serves as an institution that influences an individual or group of people's values, norms, and beliefs. Meanwhile, culture is a medium through which they can express themselves (Edara, 2017). In some societies, religious and cultural

teachings influence how they construct gender roles and provide boundaries for what is allowed and what is not. Gender roles derived from religious and cultural interpretations frequently impede progress toward gender equality.

Islam, being a religion that brings mercy to all, seeks to eliminate detrimental traditions to humanity, such as subordination and violence against women. Historically, women have no power over their lives. Their birth was considered a disgrace. Thus, a father could decide to let them live or bury them alive (Faqih, 2021). Surviving this phase, their presence as human beings was still not appreciated because they were considered only second creatures. After Islam came through the Prophet Muhammad's mission, the practice of violence and the assumption that women were inferior humans or second creatures began to be eliminated.

The Prophet Muhammad, as the messenger, began to prohibit practices that were detrimental and dangerous to women, such as killing, inheriting, and making them dowry (Rofiah, 2020). It is an effort of Islam to revive the essence of monotheism, which lies at the heart of Islamic teachings, by rejecting all forms of exploitation and oppression of humanity. The Qur'an also emphasizes the equality of men and women as *khalifah fil ardh* and servants of Allah (Kodir, 2019; Umar, 2001). Both are tasked with spreading kindness on earth because they are leaders for the welfare of the earth and perform various forms of worship to Allah SWT.

Shaheed notes that local traditions can reinforce gender stereotypes. On the other hand, culture can also challenge traditional gender roles that are constructed by society and have long been believed in (Shaheed, 2009). This is also supported by other studies, which show that while culture often perpetuates gender inequality and reinforces patriarchal norms, it can also play a role in promoting a more equitable life and more open opportunities for both women and men (Ezebuilo, 2019; Fu & Modupe, 2020; Scarborough & Moeder, 2022).

Golok-golok Menthok as a Media for Gender-Inclusive Education

Traditions, as part of culture, play an important role in influencing human life, such as shaping identity, commitment, and norms. A group of people from the same

culture shares a collective memory that guides and drives them to follow mutually agreed-upon norms. Overall, tradition has the power to influence human perspective, both individually and collectively.

Given the important role of tradition in shaping human perspectives and attitudes, the *golok-golok menthok* tradition, which contains messages of equality and justice, can be an effective medium for transmitting these values to society, particularly among the younger generation. According to Suryawan, tradition can be an educational tool to promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills because learners are directly and actively involved in the activity (Suryawan, 2020). The implementation of the *golok-golok menthok* tradition, which makes women the main characters while allowing men to participate, makes it more relevant and impactful in shaping sensitivity and increasing a more equal understanding of men's and women's roles.

Before discussing the role of the *golok-golok menthok* tradition as a medium for gender-inclusive education, the meaning of this tradition and its purpose will first be explained linguistically. In terms of language, *golok-golok menthok* indicates that the teachings of *tauhid*, which are the core of Islamic teachings, must be believed and firmly believed in the hearts of every Muslim (*golok*). This belief then influences behaviour and attitudes. Believing *tauhid* as the core of Islamic teachings means that we only acknowledge and deify Allah. Hence, there should no longer be any belief or thought that men have a superior position than women (Rofiah, 2020). Humans, both men and women, are prohibited from deifying other humans. *Tauhid* also rejects all forms of oppression, slavery, subjugation, violence, and colonialism in any name because the only being who has the right to feel powerful is Allah. Furthermore, it encourages any detrimental attitudes to be ended immediately (*menthok*).

The value of *tauhid* or monotheism in the *golok-golok menthok* tradition not only teaches humans to strengthen their faith in Allah SWT but also invites Muslims to eliminate all sorts of discrimination, including gender-based discrimination. By only deifying Allah, humans are taught not to deify other humans. *Tauhid's teachings*

strongly oppose the concept of gender hierarchy adopted by patriarchal societies because it considers one gender to be more noble than another. In other words, *tauhid* rejects the concept of gender hierarchy that often places women in a subordinate position. The *golok-golok menthok* tradition serves a vital role in imparting the ideas of gender justice to the younger generation.

Before Islam arrived in Nusantara, women's conditions were exceedingly worrying. They experienced various discriminations rooted in the patriarchal system adopted by society (Abdullah, 2019). They must accept their constrained roles and live in ways dictated by men. They must also endure the weight of multiple obligations while gaining only a few rights. Their existence is defined by their ability to perform the roles determined by society, such as domestic and reproductive roles. As a result, traditionally, they are known as *kanca winking* (friends of the back), which may be translated as those who work behind (the kitchen) or in a position beneath men.

Then, Islam arrived, and changes began to occur in women's lives. Islam emphasizes full respect for women as human beings and provides clear rights in domestic and social settings. The *golok-golok menthok* tradition reflects the mission of women's freedom. It places women as the central figures, while previously, they were only kept or hidden in the house since their roles were limited or considered a disgrace. In this tradition, their presence is celebrated as society celebrates men's presence. This signifies Islam's appreciation and recognition of women's role, which is translated into the *golok-golok menthok* tradition.

The active participation of women in the *golok-golok menthok* tradition reflects broader societal changes in Javanese Muslim society. Women are no longer restricted to household tasks but are recognized and valued in public. The implementation of the *golok-golok menthok* tradition shows that it not only aims to preserve cultural heritage but also encourages social transformation towards gender equality. Women are given the opportunity to express themselves and contribute to society.

The recognition of women presence can be seen in the *golok-golok menthok* song, which goes, "*golok-golok menthok, bancakane cah wedok, cah lanang ra ntuk njantok, nek njanthok udele ketok.*" The word *bancakan* used in the song indicates acceptance and an expression of gratitude from the community for the birth of a girl. *Bancakan* in Javanese tradition is carried out as a form of gratitude from parents for the birth of a child (Nashihin, 2017). The lyrics of "*bancakane bocah wedok*", which means "celebration for girls", indicate that this traditional celebration is held to express the community's happiness and joy over the birth of a girl. The birth of a girl is no longer considered a disgrace but a blessing. Interestingly, this song is performed cheerfully and supported by a child-like and playful atmosphere, allowing the message to be transmitted naturally. Children can easily understand it, and it becomes a habit in their daily life.

According to Gordon, playing is a typical activity for children (Gordon, 1994). Playing, including singing, can be one of the right strategies for transmitting gender-conscious values without force. Children naturally learn to value equality and justice from this. This tradition teaches children that men and women have the same opportunities in any activity, and both can work together to create harmony.

The *golok-golok menthok* tradition primarily aims to transmit gender-conscious values to children. In reality, the implementation of this value is to develop both knowledge and attitudes, promoting equality and justice. It needs to be instilled in children from an early age. The discourse of gender equality is closely related to children and their roles in childhood, and the relationship between construction is seen from the perspective of race, social class and social status of children in schools (Zulkarnaini, 2021, p. 72). The *golok-golok menthok* tradition is an effective method for forming inclusive thinking in children at a young age, especially in a patriarchal culture.

The media used in the *golok-golok menthok* tradition is also captivating. It seems that this tradition appeared to be prepared very well by the ancestors as a means to introduce gender discourse to children from an early age. The media, in the form of

colourfully painted *nanya*, is attractive to children. Furthermore, these diverse colours indicate that there is no gender-specific colour selection. Thus, the basket made of woven bamboo painted in various colours is a cultural strategy to convey the essential message of the *golok-golok menthok* tradition.

In addition, the *golok-golok menthok* tradition can be an important learning tool for the lives of girls. This tradition teaches girls independence by preparing snack fillings and placing them in *nanya*. Then, they should be taught to have the courage to appear in public by going around the village carrying *nanya* while singing the *golok-golok menthok* song. This process teaches girls that in addition to having to be independent, they must also be brave. After going around the village, the activity will end at the mosque or *musholla*. Activities carried out together also encourage a sense of community and solidarity.

Women who participate in this tradition have the opportunity to express themselves while also demonstrating their courage and independence. Ultimately, this tradition will shape their self-confidence. In the long term, developing women's self-confidence will improve their participation and influence in social, economic, and political life. Increasing their participation will undoubtedly benefit Indonesia's gender equality index.

The values of gender justice contained in the *golok-golok menthok* tradition can be used as a medium for gender inclusion learning for children. Thus, the tradition that develops is not only a routine for celebrating the Prophet's birthday but also an indirect gender inclusion education process.

The *golok-golok menthok* tradition demonstrates how religion and culture can promote gender justice. Maintaining this practice ensures that the ideas of gender equality are not only debated but also passed down to future generations, providing a firm foundation for their behaviour. The values of gender justice from this tradition will encourage children to appreciate gender diversity.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the role of the *golok-golok menthok* tradition as an effective gender-inclusive educational medium for children. This tradition not only enriches religious and spiritual values but also serves as a tool to promote gender equality and justice among younger generations. In this context, the *golok-golok menthok* can be a bridge between culture and Islamic teachings, demonstrating how they can collaborate to promote and enhance social justice values.

The study found that this tradition teaches the fundamental values of *tauhid* or monotheism, which are then interpreted as a recognition of gender equality, and encourages its implementation. Through the participation of women in the tradition and the use of captivating songs and media to children, the *golok-golok menthok* becomes an essential foundation for teaching gender justice values to children that can form a more inclusive mindset.

This study provides an opportunity to develop more inclusive and culturally based education policies and initiatives. Therefore, the *golok-golok menthok* tradition is not only a cultural heritage but also a strategic tool to create a more just and equal society. Further research is needed to explore how similar traditions in other parts of Indonesia play a role in gender equality education and how the integration of these local values into education policy can be improved.

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