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**KATOBA: A RITE OF PASSAGE IN MUNA SOCIETY,  
INDONESIA**

As an archipelago country, Indonesia consists of more than 15 thousand islands which are habituated by more than 300 different ethnics. Each of them has their own ritual regarding the life cycle. This paper presents *katoba*, a traditional rite of passage related to the transition from childhood to adolescence in Muna society, one of the large ethnics located in Southeast Sulawesi, central region of Indonesia. The rite of passage for Muna children consists of three cycles, namely *kangkilo* (circumcision), *katoba* (ritual of Islamizing) and *karia* (seclusion). Data garnered from observation, interview, and scripts or personal communication indicates that the ritual of *katoba* is the central and pivotal ritual among those three. *Katoba*, the ceremony of being Muslim (*upacara pengislaman*), is the initiation ritual performed on boys and girls around the age of 7-14 years. The ritual is considered as public ceremony because whether it is performed on one child or more children, it involves the nuclear family, relatives, and the society as a whole. Every child in Muna must undergo the ritual and it is the obligation for parents to hold *katoba* for their children as part of a way to purify them (*ali kita*). In the procession of *katoba*, the main practice is the verbal symbol containing the pledge repentance and testimony of faith (*syahadat*) as an entry point to becoming a Muslim, and the advices passed on from imam to the children. The advices include the obedience to parents and respect to others (*lansaringino*), the way of cleansing (*ka'alano oe*), and protection of human belonging (*hakkunaasi*). In general, the advices maintain the traditional and religious morality as pivotal components of personality development to shape character and behavior as adults in their daily life. Indeed, the practice of *katoba* is not only a ritual to assert the faith as Muslims. Moreover, it contains both lessons and advices rooted in local wisdom as an educational channel that could help children during their integration into the community.

In every country, peoples have unique cultures rooted from their life experiences in the past. Such cultures or traditional cultures have an important

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role in determining the character of societies who live in (Basri et al., 2017: 33). Most of the traditional cultures exist in the form of rituals which are tightly connected to the life cycle of peoples. Such rituals are known as the rites of passage and found across the world in distinctive forms as the result of the diversity of cultural heritages and local wisdom of each community.

In his theory, Van Gennep stated rites of passage as the process of changing status in the life cycle of humans, such as birth, adolescence, marriage, and death that mark a significant transition of a person's life in the society (Parkin, 2015: 718). Such rituals have been found across the world as traditional ceremonies resulted from their life experiences in the past (Fontaine, 1985: 14). Although they are related to the age of transition, e.g. adolescence, the rituals are found to mainly focus on the changes in social life instead of physiological changes of individuals. For example, in Japanese society, the rite of passage involves the change of hairdo, clothing, and name which is then accompanied by gaining new social status in the family or the clan hierarchy (Frolova, 2008: 105). In traditional Kenyan Kikuyu, though the ceremony focuses on the circumcision, however, the ritual of initiation is full of ethical and social education as part of the integration into Kikuyu society (Mbiti and Malia, 2009: 40).

As a rite of passage, *katoba* has been traditionally practiced by peoples of Muna to facilitate the transition phase from the childhood into adolescence. This ritual is started with *kangkilo* "circumcision" and ended with *karia* "seclusion" which is only performed for the females right before they get married (Zainal, 2015). Circumcision, as found in other local communities and some regions across the world, has been obligatory practiced as the ritual of Islamisation. That ritual is also found in Indonesia such as in Java, Madura, Sumatera, Sunda, Banjar, Bima, and Ternate, where most of the societies are Muslims (Zainal and Taena, 2016: 70). However, that circumcision or *kangkilo* in Muna society is not mentioned as the ritual of Islamisation. In addition, currently *kangkilo* is practiced individually and privately.

Of the three series of rituals, *katoba* has been viewed as an important ritual in the Muna society. It is recognised as the ritual to become a Muslim and more importantly, the ritual is filled up with life lessons and advice. For our analysis, the content of advice is full of values ranging from religiosity, morality, sociality to the ecology. However, here we only describe the whole practice of *katoba* in details as the ethnological information with regard to the society of Muna which has been preserved till now. The data were obtained through an observation of every practice during the ceremony and interviews with the priests and local figures. We also collected personal communications through written data or scripts from the predecessors of Muna society who had preserved that rituals to be delivered since then. All of the data were used to compile this paper.

### Existence and Practice of *Katoba*

In the region of Muna, *katoba* has been practiced since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which was first initiated by King of Muna, La Ode Husaini, also known as Titakono. *Katoba* is a traditional rite of passage that is performed by elders for their children aged 7-14 years. The origin of word *katoba* is generated from Arabic word *tawba* or “a retreat or a repentance”, which in the local language is pronounced as *toba*. Addition of prefix *ka-* prior the word *toba* forms the meaning of “the process of repentance”. Locally, peoples of Muna refer to *katoba* as an Islamic ceremony and therefore it is only carried out by Muslims of Muna. In the past, *katoba* was intended as a way for parents to pay off debt or sin (*odoso*) attached to them. Therefore, it was mandatory for every parent to carry out this rite for their children.



Figure 1: The involvement of whole local communities in the ritual of *katoba*

*Katoba* can be performed either individually or collectively with relatives and neighbours. During the implementation, however, there is no difference with regard to patterns or stages of the ceremony and both of them still involve other parties such as *sara'*guiders and even the whole communities (Fig. 1). The difference between the individual and collective rituals is the number of participants, the focus of attention, and the person in charge (host) of the ceremony.

In the collective ritual of *katoba*, one becomes *puuno* or *parapu* which means the host bears greater costs than other families. The host is usually someone who is economically and socially more established than the others and sometimes might also be the first descendant of a family. As the person in charge, the host takes more responsibility and can decide the expense, time and location of the ceremony, whereas others involve voluntarily. As the

consequently, the child of the host becomes the central subject of the ceremony and usually placed in front of other children, directly confronted by the priest during the ritual of *katoba*, his/her *haroa*<sup>2</sup> is blessed as the representative of the whole *haroa* of children, and other main treatments.



**Figure 2: The priest was showering the youth with blessed water**

The day before the initiation of *katoba*, some preliminary rituals should be performed. At night, children are given the blessed drinking water and led by the priest to a temporary place called *kaghombo*, a house of seclusion. In that place, they must undergo a cleansing ritual by taking a bath with water that has been blessed by the priest (Fig. 2). Two types of water are used. The first water is poured to the children while facing west. The children are ordered to deflect the water three times when it is poured overhead. Then, they are told to turn the body to the right until facing east. By using the second water, one after another is splashed overhead. In this time they do not deflect the water, but wipe it all over their face and body. After taking a bath, they change clothes that have been prepared by parents or relatives. They are fed by the hand of assigned elders or their parents. The boys are usually fed by male priests and the girls are fed by parents. The portion of food is not much, just a handful of rice and a boiled egg. The food is given only three times a day; breakfast, lunch, and dinner. During the seclusion, they should not defecate. According to the elders, their stomachs are locked, so they cannot even feel of defecating. In addition, the limited portion of food that did not meet the daily portion is given on purpose.



**Figure 3: Heading to the house of *katoba*. The boys walked (left) and the girls were shouldered (right)**

On the following day of the ceremony, the children and their parents gather at the house of the responsible person, the host, where the ritual of *katoba* will take place. The children are dressed up in traditional clothes of Muna and shouldered from *kaghombo* to house of *katoba* by adult men. Here, the boys should be shouldered ahead girls. In certain cases, boys walk whereas girls are shouldered (Fig. 3). Such carrying is meant so because children are not allowed to touch the earth before the ceremony.

To initiate *katoba*, the children sit cross-legged and confronted by the priest. If the number of children is quite a lot, the boys are first confronted and then followed by the girls, but if the number is a little, the boys and girls are confronted together, where boys on the right and the girls on the left side of the priest. A long white cloth is then stretched and tied up around the fingers of every child. On top of the cloth is placed a white bowl containing raw rice and a raw egg, called as *pitara*<sup>3</sup>. Additional elements, but should be present at the ceremony are *haroa* and incense (Fig. 4).

### **Lessons in *Kotoba***

The practice of *katoba* consists of three main rituals, namely the practice of repentance (*dotoba*), the pledge of repentance and the Testimony of Faith, and advice of *katoba*. The advice includes the obedience to parents



Figure 4: Practice of *katoba*. The priest was teaching and giving advice to youth

and respect to others (*lansaringino*), the way of cleansing (*ka'alano oe*), and protection of human belonging (*hakkunaasi*).

#### ***Practice of repentance (dotoba)***

As mentioned by Ngkalusa in his script collection “*Langku-langkuna dadi tutura pakalente bhae kafoinaghuno toba*” (personal communication), *dotoba* is emphasized through the pronunciation of repentance (*istighfar*) and followed by *shahada*, the Testimony of Faith, the sentence that one should declare to become a Muslim. Therefore, *katoba* is also known as the ritual of entering Islam. However, declaring the words of repentance is not enough, certain conditions are needed to attain the God’s forgiveness. Some traditional and religious figures in Muna divided the pronunciation of repentance into several stages. Some divided into *isaratintoba* (guidance of *toba*) and *ihino toba* (contents of *katoba*). Some divided into pre-*katoba*, *katoba*, and post-*katoba*. Others mentioned it as *isaratino toba* (guidance of repentance), *wambano toba* (pronouncing of repentance), and *kafoenaghuno toba* (advice on good and bad behaviour in *katoba*). However, all of them emphasize two things, the preparation of children mentality before uttering repentance and the practice of declaring words of repentance. The act of atoning is not only spoken verbally, but also the appreciation of the meaning and consequences thereafter. Therefore, the priest informs and teaches them the practice of

repentance. It is pivotal in the life of the children later and when they make mistakes they are expected to repent correctly as they have been taught.

In *isaratino toba* or guidance of repentance, as obtained from the interview of priests and local figures, children should pay attention to four things. Three of them relate to the individual and the rest relates to God. They are described as follows:

- Regret all misdeeds (*dososo*) that have been done consciously or unconsciously. They are three sins generated because of the bad intention from the bottom of the heart (*dukuno lalonto modaihana*); because of words (*parapu modaihana*); and because of the act (*feelino podiu modaihana*). All these misdeeds are related to human beings, the universe and God (Allah). Here, the children should regret past sinful activities and firmly resolve to avoid them in the future.
- Stay away from anything that may lead to the same or new mistakes (*dofekakodoho*) by avoiding something wrong, resulting from the heart, words, and deeds, as well as the protection of human belonging (*hakkunaasi*).
- Eliminating the tendency of misdeeds (*dofomiina*), including mistakes in the heart, mistakes due to words, or mistakes due to deeds.
- The last is the rights of God (*botuki*). Here, the decision to be forgiven is the right and authority of God, so the servant is only entitled to ask forgiveness.

Here we found that the guidance of repentance, though it is performed in cultural and traditional manner, it is still relevant and followed with what *‘Ulama* (Muslim scholars) has taught for centuries (Shafi, 1998:569)

### ***Pledge of the repentance and the Testimony of Faith***

The ritual of *katoba* is neatly and coherently arranged. To pledge their repentance, children either are guided by the priest or do it by their selves if they know and are able to say it correctly. Here, the priest only fixes the pronunciation of repentance if it is incorrectly uttered. The children are also asked whether they are able to speak or understand Muna language or not. If not, then the priest uses the national language of Indonesian (Bahasa) where it is often used in urban areas. The priest asks the children to follow every word or sentence that he has spoken. The first is Chapter 1 of *Quran* (*Al-Fatihah*) and then followed by *istighfar* to seek God’s forgiveness, either with the short one “*Astagfirullah*” which means “I seek Allah’s forgiveness”, or mostly with long sentences as follows:

“I ask forgiveness of God that there is no God but He who is alive and Standing Alone and I repent to Him from all sins that I have committed both hide and outright, minor sins or great sin. Actually, You are the Great in Forgiving

sins, Greatest of hearts, All-encompassing, Most Disclosing sadness/anxiety and I repent to Him from sins I know and I do not know. Indeed, You know all that is hidden; there is no power and strength except the Almighty Allah, the Supreme”.

After the ritual of repentance, the priest guides the children to say the Testimony of Faith (*shahada*) which is pronounced as “*Ashhadu anlaa ilaaha illallah, waashhadu anna muhammadanrasulullah*”. These Arabic words mean, “I bear witness that there is no true god (deity) but God (Allah), and Muhammad is the Messenger (Prophet) of God”. This testimony is the sufficient requirement for converting to Islam (Ruthven & Nanji, 2014; 14). Though the children are born in a Muslim family and have practiced Islamic rituals since then, this testimony confirms that they have officially become a Muslim. The declaration of Testimony of Faith, therefore, makes the practice of *katoba* as the ritual to enter Islam.

### ***Obedience to parents and respect for others (lansaringino)***

The ceremony is continued by giving some advice. Here, the children are taught an advice, *nemotehi bhe nemokado*, acts that should be kept a distance (*nemotehi*) and that should be done (*nemokado*). One of the lessons from *nemokado* is kind behaviour to family members. Regarding the lesson of *nemokado* in the ritual of *katoba*, the priest gives advice as follows:

“Your father or those who were in the same age as your father should be feared, respected, and obeyed because your father and those who were in the same age as your father was like the real God. Your mother or those who were in the same age as your mother should be feared, honoured, respected, obeyed because your mother and those who were in the same age as your mother were like the real Prophet Muhammad. Your old brother or those were being at the same age as your brother should be feared, respected, obeyed because your brother and those were in the same age as your brother were like a real angel. Your younger brother or those who were in the same age as yours should get your care and appreciation because your younger brother and those who were in the same age as yours were like the faithful. People who were at your age or whole people, should be feared, respected, appreciated, loved, because those who were in the same age as you and all humans were like yourself”. (This was directly cited without any reduction from the ceremony of *katoba* in Lapole village, Maligano district, July 1st, 2017).

The practice of *katoba* by using the complete sentences as described above, according to some traditional figures, was rarely done by priests. Nowadays, the whole concept of the sentences is shorter and no longer complete. Generally, the priests shorten the phrase as “... *moetehie amamua, sababuno amamu it lansaringino Allahu mentaleano ...*”. These mean “... obey your father, because your father is like the real God (Allah Ta’ala)... (and so on until the younger brother)”. Such advice teaches the children to be obedient and respectful to his parents, brothers and sisters.



### ***Ritual of cleansing (kaalano oe)***

After teaching the children on how they should keep their attitudes to all members of the family, the priest continues teaching the way of Islamic cleansing. In Muna society, this teaching is called *kaalano oe* which means *the way of taking water*, but it literally means *the way of cleansing*. The teaching includes *istinja*<sup>4</sup>, the introduction of the holy and sanctified water, the procedure of ablution, prayer or “*salah*”, and so on. *Istinja* rules the children about etiquettes during in the toilet, which include; which foot should be used to step in and out (*in* with the left foot, *out* with the right foot); pray before in and after out; procedures of cleaning the dirt to disappear the taste, colour and odour; the taboo during defecating or urinating in the toilet, where facing west (*means “Qiblah”*<sup>5</sup>) and east (*means evil*) is not allowed. Here, *istinja* is the first and even as the main lesson of cleansing that is taught in *katoba*. The children were also taught the difference between profane things (immense, medium and light) and how to clean them.

### ***Protection of human belonging (hakkunaasi)***

In the practice of *katoba*, there is interesting advice with regard to the protection of human belonging. The advice, as directly quoted from the priest through an interview, is as follows:

...Ane okumala omempali-mpali oomu, gara bhahiomora oomu kokantisano bakeno kapaea nao tahamo, bakeno lemo atawa bhakeno foo nookunimo, mahingga omogharo oomu atawa mahingga omoaho oomu, paeho naembali ta-omeuta oomu tabea emelai-ane oomu deki nae kakantisano itu (oghomolie oomu nae kakantisano itu)... Tabea ani omesuamoomu welo katondo-tondono itu, maka pae naembalia omefindahi kokarawuna ghofano atawa gholeno labu, kobhakeno palolano atawa kobhakeno methawa. Maanano tabea omapalie oomu welo galu, rampa sababu dofekiri dua kantisa aitu kaasi nabinasamo, bhae dofekiri dua kokantisano itu, ka-asi nabatalamo...

These Muna words mean

... If you are walking around and suddenly see the fruits of papaya, oranges or mangoes that are already ripened, although you are hungry and thirsty, you should not immediately pick the fruit without asking permission of the owner (must buy it) ... If you enter a garden and see there is a mound of yam, you should not step on the crops of yam, pumpkin fruit, eggplant or sweet potatoes of others. The plant must be removed first before stepping, because it will be destroyed and how the feelings of the owner...

In various places, the advice is often delivered in another version. The advice is different depending on the gender of the children. The above advice is given to the boys, whereas the girls, the advice is as follows:

...Neseghonu wakutuu nando bhae mosiraha oomu moghane nae salo nae gholi bakeno kapaea, naegholi bhakeno lemo atawa nae gholi bhakeno foo. Mahingga nama angkoomu soo gholino sonigholino itu, iatu kadekiho dua waane oomu nimesalono itu, bhae kadekiho dua alae oomu gholino sonigholino itu. Maka forato fekata-tae oomu moghane somegholino itu nada aini; ane

ompu-mpu omegoli mefeenaghao deki nae nae amaku bhanae inaku.  
 Nahumundagho kaawu amaku bhae ianaku itu naembalimo itu omegholi.  
 ...Ane omempali-mpali wekomegahaluno koe meuta kobhakeno palolano...

#### These words mean

... If in the future there is a man who will buy fruits of papaya, citrus fruits or mangoes. Although he will purchase, do not directly give it and do not immediately receive the purchase. Tell the man well that if he really wants to buy the fruits he should ask permission to your father and mother. If the father and mother have agreed to the purchase, then he may buy it. ... If you walk into a garden of others, do not pick any other people's eggplant ...

Those advices contain metaphors that provide some lessons with regard to the interaction between men and women and protection for others' belonging. Such advice is called *hakkunaasi*. In several practices of *katoba*, the advice is given with different patterns, but still in the similar meaning. The advice always mentions the garden, crops, and prohibitions for boys and girls to step on or pluck crops of others without asking permission.

#### Conclusion and Outlook

*Katoba* is an important part of the rites of passage in Muna society. It is also known as the ritual of entering Islam and therefore it is mandatory performed by Muslims of Muna. The practice of *katoba* is performed either individually or collectively, where both involve large families or even the whole community as a mass ceremony. During the ceremony, children are taught how to perform some of Islamic rituals in the right way and they are given pivotal advices as they are in adolescence period. In this transition, as also found across the world, is a critical period for them to engage in the real social life of their community. The ceremony of *katoba* is not only a ritual to assert their faith as Muslims, moreover, it contains both lessons and advice based on local wisdom as an educational channel that will help them during the integration into the community. In the future, studies are needed to deeply elaborate important values behind *katoba*, such as religious and moral values, and implement such values as parts of the character education based on local wisdom.

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#### NOTES

1. *Sara* is the local language for "*adat*" which means a variety of local and traditional laws and dispute resolution systems by which society was regulated.
2. *Haroa* is a set of traditional foods of Muna society which is usually served in certain traditional rituals.
3. *Pitara* is a local language and symbolises *zakah* (Arabic: *that which purifies*). *Zakah* is a form of alms-giving treated in Islam as a religious obligation for all Muslims who

meet the necessary criteria of wealth and is considered to be a tax. It is given to the group entitled to receive it (e.g. the poor).

4. *Istinja* is the Arabic term for cleaning away whatever has been passed from the urethra or anus with water, stone, etc.
5. *Qiblah* is the direction that should be faced when a Muslim prays during *salah* prayers. It is fixed as the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca.

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