Research/Review

The Cultural Transformation of Tumbilotohe in Responding to the Changing Times: a Case Study in Gorontalo City

Sri Yulianty Mozin[1]*, Alfridho Musa[2], Nurul Khikmah[3], Dwi Rahmatia Nurkamiden[4]

1. Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia; yulmozin@ung.ac.id
2. Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia; ridomusa02@gmail.com
3. Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia; nkhikmah58@gmail.com
4. Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia; tiaranurkamiden525@gmail.com

* Corresponding Author : Sri Yulianty Mozin

Abstract This research discusses the transformation of Tumbilotohe culture in Gorontalo City as a response to the dynamics of the times and technological advancements. Tumbilotohe, which initially was a tradition of lighting oil lamps to mark the end of Ramadan, now experiencing significant changes in form, meaning, and implementation. This study uses qualitative approach with case study method, relying on in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation to explore the community's perceptions of the changes. The research results show that although the spiritual substance of Tumbilotohe remains maintained, its visual and technical aspects have been modernized through the use of electricity, digital ornaments, and decorative light shows. This transformation is influenced by technological developments, demands of the creative economy, and efforts to preserve culture in a more appealing form for the younger generation. This research emphasizes that culture dynamic and adaptive, as well as the importance of collaboration between society and the government in maintaining traditional values amidst the tide of modernization.

Keywords: Tumbilotohe, Cultural Transformation, Modernization, Tradition

1. Introduction

Culture is a precious treasure that reflects the identity and character of a society. Local culture faces many challenges to survive amidst the rapid currents of modernization and globalization. Traditional cultures often undergo transformations, both in form and meaning, as a result of social changes, technological advancements, and shifts in life values. The Tumbilotohe tradition of Gorontalo is one of the local cultures that has undergone these changes. The tradition of "Tumbilotohe," which means "lighting lamps," involves lighting oil lamps on the last three nights of Ramadan as a way to welcome and mark the Night of Decree (Lailatul Qadar). This tradition has religious value in addition to being a gathering place and expressing Gorontalo culture. However, the Tumbilotohe tradition has undergone various changes over time. The use of oil lamps has been replaced by electric and LED lights, the design of decorations has become more contemporary, and the purpose of its operation usually focuses on recreation and tourism. How significantly have the original meanings and principles of the Tumbilotohe tradition been influenced by these changes? According to research conducted by Usman et al. (2024), the people of Gorontalo still understand the original meaning of Tumbilotohe, but there are differences in how it is performed. The community has started using modern alternatives such as LED lights due to economic factors like the high price of kerosene and the availability of traditional materials and tools. This shows adaptation to the times while still preserving traditional values.

Additionally, social and technological changes also influence the way the community interacts and enjoys Tumbilotohe. Research by Polnaya et al. (2023) shows that the application of digital technology in indigenous communities can change social interaction patterns

and cultural values. In the context of Tumbilotohe, the use of social media and information technology can influence the way the community prepares for and celebrates this tradition. Moreover, changes in the values of the Tumbiloto tradition are also influenced by external factors, such as tourists and trade. For example, Talumelito Village has become the center of the Tumbilotohe celebration with thousands of lamps as a tourist attraction. Although this can enhance appreciation for local culture, there are concerns that the spiritual and cultural significance of the tradition may be overlooked by tourism.

It is very important for the community and stakeholders to maintain a balance between preserving the original values of the tradition and adapting to the times in facing this transformation. To preserve the Tumbilotohe tradition, education, documentation, and involving the younger generation are very important. One way to spread the values of Tumbilotohe to the younger generation is by creating a photography storybook, an example of informational media.

Therefore, the transformation of Tumbilotohe culture should be seen as an opportunity to strengthen and enrich the cultural identity of Gorontalo, not as a threat. The aim of this research is to observe how the Tumbilotohe culture has changed over time, with a particular emphasis on the changes in form, meaning, and values contained within it. With deep understanding and a wise approach, this tradition can remain relevant and evolve in the modern era without losing its essence. This research is expected to contribute to the preservation and development of local culture amidst technological and social advancements.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

Tumbilotohe as a Cultural Tradition of Gorontalo

Tumbilotohe is a unique Gorontalo tradition performed before Eid al-Fitr. This tradition has existed for years and holds strong symbolic meaning for the community. "Tumbilotohe" comes from the Gorontalo language, which literally means "lighting lamps." This is done during the last three nights of Ramadan by lighting traditional oil lamps placed in front of houses, on streets, and in mosques. This tradition not only serves as a form of illumination but also as a religious expression and a demonstration of community solidarity in welcoming the day of victory.

The religious, social, and aesthetic values of the Gorontalo community have been passed down through generations by Tumbilotohe, which is more than just a cultural event.
As part of the intangible cultural heritage, Tumbilotohe shows how the people of Gorontalo maintain the relationship between traditional principles and contemporary development. The organization of Tumbilotohe involves the entire community, from children to the elderly, to strengthen social bonds and togetherness. This tradition continues to be a unique and meaningful local cultural identity over time. The local government's policy, established as a cultural tourism agenda each year, also supports the preservation of tradition.
In cultural anthropology, Tumbilotohe can be viewed as a means of symbolic communication that reinforces community identity boundaries and strengthens social solidarity.

This tradition is more than just a habit; it is a place to actualize the shared values embraced by the community. Azis and Monoarfa (2021) state that Tumbilotohe serves as a medium for the Gorontalo community to foster religious and cultural spirit. This shows that local cultural practices can serve as an important tool to strengthen strong social principles. Besides its symbolic and social nature, Tumbilotohe has significant spiritual qualities. Lighting lamps is considered a way to welcome and embrace the blessed nights, especially the Night of Decree, which is one of the last ten nights of Ramadan. This tradition is considered an act of worship and reverence for the sacred times in Islam. This belief enhances the relationship between culture and religion in Gorontalo, making Tumbilotohe a religion integrated into local values.

The Meaning and Value of Nonverbal Symbols in Tumbilotohe

The nonverbal symbols used in the Tumbiloto practice are very important for communicating a strong cultural message. This tradition uses lamps as the main symbol, both in traditional forms (bottle oil lamps) and modern forms (electric and LED lamps), which represent spiritual illumination, inner enlightenment, and guidance for the angels. Salam's study (2020) found that nonverbal symbols in Tumbilotohe are closely related to the religious context of the Gorontalo community, which strongly upholds Islamic principles. Lighting the lamps is a way to visually express the hope for blessings and the beauty of the night of Lailatul Qadar. The way the community arranges and decorates these lamps reflects other nonverbal values. Many times, the lamp designs resemble Arabic calligraphy, miniature mosques, or other Islamic symbols. This shows that Tumbilotohe is a creative process of the community to convey its religious values, not just a ritual performed quietly. Respect for public and spiritual spaces, as well as the principles of discipline and beauty (aesthetics), is reflected in the orderly and aesthetic arrangement of the lights. Uniform lighting also creates a calm and sacred atmosphere, enhancing the religious experience of the community.

In Tumbilotohe, nonverbal symbols also demonstrate the social cohesion of the community. The lights are installed cooperatively by families and the village community. Things like this bring people together, talk, and cooperate, which in turn enhances social relationships among residents. Salam (2020) states that this nonverbal symbol also represents the value of huyula, or togetherness, which is a unique cultural value of Gorontalo. Therefore, the nonverbal communication of Tumbilotohe has meanings beyond religious ones and is useful for uniting the community.

Moreover, the symbolic meaning in the Tumbilotohe belief is not rigid. The interpretation of this nonverbal symbol can change over time depending on the generation. While younger generations might see it as a cultural expression or entertainment, older generations might view it as part of worship. This variation in meaning shows how flexible culture is in adapting to the changes of time. Therefore, in order for the symbolic value of Tumbilotohe to remain relevant in contemporary society, understanding it must be cross-generational and contextual.

Comparison of Tumbilotohe and Similar Traditions

The Tumbilotohe tradition is similar to Monuntul, a local tradition in East Bolaang Mongondow that is also performed on the last nights of Ramadan. According to Dunggio's research (2020), Monuntul also involves lighting lamps in one's surroundings as a way to welcome the arrival of Lailatul Qadar night. Both of these traditions have different cultural contexts, although they have similar implementation patterns. Monuntul is more rooted in the local community than in the Tumbilotohe institution, which has been incorporated into the cultural program of the Gorontalo regional government. The symbolic meaning and the intensity of community participation are the main differences. In Tumbilotohe, the symbol of the lamp has been sanctified and has become part of a strong religious narrative, while in Monuntul, that symbolism has not yet fully integrated into the story.

In Gorontalo, Tumbilotohe is supported by the local government, social institutions, and schools. On the other hand, in East Bolaang Mongondow, certain community groups still control Monuntul without strong institutional support. This shows variation in the process of cultural institutionalization that affects the preservation of traditions.

Tumbilotohe tends to be more inclusive and involves people from all walks of life. This tradition has even evolved into a competition between neighborhoods and villages to decorate the lights. In the end, this increases the appeal and participation of the community. Meanwhile, Monuntul is still very simple and only used in a few communities. But if done correctly, both can serve as tools for learning about culture and strengthening local identity.

This comparative study is crucial for understanding that each local tradition has its own unique dynamics and features. The survival and development of Tumbilotohe depend on the Gorontalo community's ability to manage their cultural heritage collectively and flexibly. However, to prevent degradation, Monuntul requires strengthening in documentation, education, and community participation. As a result, the development of local traditions must be carried out by considering the social context and existing support structures in each region.

Cultural Transformation in the Tumbilotohe Tradition

The transformation occurring in the Tumbilotohe culture shows that culture is not static and continues to change with the passage of time. Now, electric lights, LED diodes, and even digital accessories are replacing oil lamps. According to Niode and Aziz (2020), the reasons for this change are efficiency, utility, and aesthetics. However, these changes do not eliminate the essence of tradition. The use of technology to update the appearance of Tumbiloto also makes it more attractive and relevant to the tastes of the younger generation.

These changes, however, face obstacles. Many people argue that due to the excessive elements of entertainment and aesthetics, the spiritual and sacred aspects of Tumbilotohe are starting to diminish. It is believed that the main religious significance of this tradition can change when music performances, carnivals, and inter-village competitions emerge.

Therefore, to address cultural modernization, a balanced cultural approach is necessary. This means preserving the values and meanings of Tumbilotohe amidst innovations in its form and presentation.
The social dimension of this tradition is also undergoing transformation. If previously Tumbilotohe was done at home and simply carried out by family or the surrounding community, now it is more massive and supported by various institutions. Thus, the pattern of community participation has shifted from informal to more organized. This tradition has served as a tool to promote cultural tourism, which indirectly impacts the community's economy. However, the original meaning and cultural value should not be diluted by the commercialization of Tumbilotohe.

In the end, the transformation of Tumbilotohe should be regarded as part of a reasonable and necessary cultural dynamic. Changes in form will only strengthen its existence in the contemporary era, provided that the underlying principles of local wisdom are preserved. It is important for the government, historians, and society to document, revitalize, and recontextualize this tradition so that it remains alive and meaningful for all generations.

3. Proposed Method

This research uses a qualitative research method. According to Moleong (2011), qualitative research "is research aimed at studying phenomena experienced by research subjects holistically or comprehensively, and through the description **of words and language, in a** specific natural context and utilizing various natural methods." The ultimate goal of using qualitative methods is to explain the meaning of various hidden phenomena.

Data Collection Technique

The researcher collects data through direct activities with the object being studied. In this case, the researcher used the following methods to collect data:

- Observation: the researcher examines the existing literature and the research subjects directly;
- Interview: the researcher speaks with the subject (informant) to obtain the necessary data;
- Documentation: the researcher collects a number of data or information relevant to this issue.

Data Analysis

Data reduction, data presentation, drawing conclusions, and verification are the data analysis techniques used.

Research Subject

One of the things that makes the research unique is its subject. This special attention consists of the material or substance that has been researched or addressed by the researcher regarding the issues using the theories mentioned above. Every activity and message conveyed in the Tumbilotohe tradition is the subject of this research.

Data Source

The data sources chosen by the researcher are:

Primary Data

Data collected by researchers through the observation of the Tumbilotohe tradition and direct interviews to understand the activities of individuals or groups occurring in the community is known as primary data in this study.

Secondary Data

Secondary data is obtained through intermediary media. The researcher in this case collected secondary data through books and online learning sites such as journals and articles relevant to the research subject.

Algorithm/Pseudocode

Writing algorithms or pseudocode can be an alternative for explaining scientific paper content. The algorithm must be cited in the main text. Below is an example of writing an Algorithm. You need to use "Algorithm_head_FAITH" and "algorithm_step_FAITH" styles.

4. Results and Discussion

Shift in the Implementation of Tumbilotohe

The form of Tumbilotohe implementation in Gorontalo City has undergone significant transformation. In the past, kerosene bottle lamps with wicks were the main lighting elements installed collaboratively by the residents. Now, that scene is gradually being replaced by colorful electric lights, LED lights, and even automatic lighting systems based on digital technology. This has emerged as an adaptation to technological advancements as well as the scarcity of kerosene.

In an interview with one of the traditional leaders in Gorontalo, he stated:

"If in the past, we lit bottle lamps to welcome the night of Lailatul Qadar, all the residents would pitch in. But now the children are more interested in using twinkling lights. Although different, the spirit of togetherness remains alive, that's what matters."

This change in implementation is also marked by the emergence of visual creativity in the inter-village competition. Several strategic points such as the courtyard of the grand mosque, the village office, and the city park are adorned with visual concepts that depict the identity of Gorontalo, such as Islamic calligraphy and local ornaments.

According to **Rahmat** (21 years old), a representative of the creative youth community:

"We're not just putting up lights." We design the concept, starting from the light patterns, Islamic symbols, to the unique themes of Gorontalo. So, Tumbilotohe also becomes a venue for artistic and cultural expression.

This proves that modernization does not erase tradition, but rather serves as a means to enrich the aesthetics of local culture. This shift is also supported by the high enthusiasm of the

residents in adopting technology to support traditions.

Transformation of Meaning and Cultural Values

Along with the change in form, the meaning of Tumbilotohe has also shifted. The older generation still interprets Tumbilotohe as part of worship at the end of Ramadan, while the younger generation is starting to see it as a cultural and entertainment event.

The younger generation tends to give a new interpretation to this tradition. Tumbilotohe is considered a space for creative expression, community entertainment, and a moment for social documentation on digital media.

Sinta (17 years old), a high school student, recounted:

"For me, Tumbilotohe is like an 'annual event'. But I also know this is a cultural heritage. If possible, both can coexist: there's joy, but there's also prayer."

Even though there are differences in meaning, social values such as mutual cooperation and family ties are still maintained. This tradition becomes a moment for the community to gather, from putting up lights, cleaning the streets, to breaking the fast together.
Thus, the transformation of meaning does not erase the core values, but rather adds a new dimension to the cultural interpretation.

The Role of the Government and Media in the Modernization of Tradition

The Gorontalo City Government has taken strategic steps in preserving Tumbilotohe through the annual Tumbilotohe Festival. This program involves schools, youth communities, and social organizations in the form of decoration competitions, cultural parades, and art performances.

The Head of the Gorontalo City Tourism Office, during an interview, stated:

"We want this tradition to stay alive, that's why this festival is packaged to attract the attention of young people and tourists." But we still maintain the cultural and religious essence."

The government also facilitates additional electrical installations, lamp installation safety training, and awards for the best environmental participation. This support shows that the state is not just preserving but also modernizing the implementation of traditions through a participatory approach.

Digital media has become an important catalyst in the transformation of traditions. Posts on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram are driving the popularity of Tumbilotohe among Generation Z. However, there are concerns about the potential commercialization that could shift its spiritual meaning.

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Response and Participation of the People of Gorontalo City

The enthusiasm of the people of Gorontalo in preserving Tumbilotohe is very high. Residents voluntarily decorate their surroundings with their own creativity.
In fact, several youth communities have formed special work teams for planning light designs and installation.

Edo (25 years old), the head of the youth community in Buliide Village, stated:

"We first discuss the concept, using sketches, sometimes making small mock-ups. This also becomes a learning opportunity for us. And most importantly, this is for Gorontalo."

Besides the youth, families and children are also involved in this activity. This strengthens cross-generational social relations while also creating collective memories within the community.

Mrs. Tiara, a resident of the Botu neighborhood, stated:

"The children come to know that this is their parents' tradition. We involve them from cleaning to putting up the lights. So they can also feel a sense of ownership."

However, there is a challenge from a handful of young people who have started to view Tumbilotohe merely as a seasonal ritual that is just "following the crowd." Their involvement is more of a formality and they lack an understanding of its spiritual and cultural dimensions.

Yuyuu (19 years old), a student, honestly expressed:

"Honestly, I helped out because my friends were also participating." But after hearing the stories from the elders, I started to realize this is not just about decorating with lights, but a part of our beliefs and history."

Therefore, involving the younger generation needs to be accompanied by an educational approach, whether through schools, media, or communities, so that the noble values of Tumbilotohe remain internalized and sustainable.

5. Conclusions

The Tumbilotohe tradition in Gorontalo City demonstrates a high cultural resilience in facing the changes of the times. This study found that although there have been significant transformations in the form of implementation, such as the use of modern lights, artistic designs, and the involvement of digital technology, the essence of togetherness and spirituality that is the core of this tradition has been maintained by the community. This transformation is a form of cultural adaptation to the continuously evolving social, economic, and technological conditions.

In terms of meaning, Tumbilotohe is now understood in various ways by the community. The older generation maintains the spiritual meaning, while the younger generation sees it more as a cultural festival and an expression of creativity. These differences do not damage the tradition; rather, they showcase a healthy cultural dynamism.
Values such as mutual cooperation, social solidarity, and togetherness remain alive and even strengthen thanks to cross-generational participation in their implementation. Local governments and the media play an important role in the modernization and preservation of this tradition.

The government actively promotes the sustainability of Tumbilotohe through annual festivals, supporting facilities, and cultural awards. Meanwhile, social media serves as a channel for documentation and promotion, expanding the reach of the tradition to a broader public domain. However, it is necessary to anticipate the potential shift in focus from spiritual values to purely commercial and aesthetic aspects.

Community participation remains the backbone of the sustainability of this tradition. Although there are indications of a decline in the understanding of its philosophical meaning among the youth, there is still high enthusiasm for this celebration as a symbol of local cultural identity. Therefore, educational efforts involving cultural leaders, religious figures, and educational institutions are needed to ensure that the noble values in Tumbilotohe remain preserved and relevant to the times.

Overall, the Tumbilotohe tradition has not only managed to survive amidst the tide of modernization but has also undergone creative transformations without losing its identity. This proves that local culture has the ability to transform dynamically, becoming a bridge between ancestral heritage and contemporary society.

Author Contributions:

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UNG Computer Laboratory for its facilities in processing and analyzing qualitative data, as well as access to qualitative data analysis software to process interview and observation results. In this research, the authors used AI (Artificial Intelligence) tools in a limited capacity for audio interview transcription using speech-to-text software to expedite the transcription process with thorough manual verification to ensure accuracy, assistance in translating and explaining Gorontalo cultural terms into a more universal Indonesian language, and the use of AI tools to identify initial patterns in qualitative data which were then manually analyzed by the researchers. All interpretations, substantive analyses, and conclusions of the research are the result of manual thinking and analysis by the research team without AI involvement, where the use of AI is purely technical and does not affect the validity and originality of the research findings.

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Conflicts of Interest:

The author declares no conflict of interest. The authors have identified and ensured that there are no circumstances or personal interests that could be deemed inappropriate to influence the representation or interpretation of the research results reported in the study "The Cultural Transformation of Tumbilotohe in Responding to the Changing Times: A Case Study in Gorontalo City."

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