

ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL VALUES IN THE KATOBIA TRADITION: AN ISLAMIC INITIATION RITE FOR CHILDREN IN THE MUNA COMMUNITY

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Abstract

The Katoba tradition is an Islamic initiation rite that functions as a medium for value education within the Muna community. This study aims to analyze the ritual structure, symbolic meanings, and Islamic educational values transmitted through the Katoba tradition, while also examining challenges to its sustainability amid social change. The research employs a qualitative ethnographic approach, with data collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and ritual documentation. Data analysis follows Miles and Huberman's interactive model, supported by Van Gennep's rites of passage theory, Turner's concept of liminality, and Geertz's symbolic anthropology. The findings show that Katoba conveys core Islamic values, including tawhid, the shahada, honesty, responsibility, birrul walidain, and moral discipline, which are instilled through symbolic practices and community-based learning. This tradition plays an important role in shaping children's religious identity and strengthening social cohesion. However, modernization and the influence of digital media pose challenges to the continuity of Katoba, highlighting the need for adaptive efforts to preserve its fundamental values.[A1]

Keywords: Katoba, Islamic educational values, initiation rites, Muna society, modernity

Abstract

Tradisi Katoba merupakan ritus inisiasi Islam yang berfungsi sebagai media pendidikan nilai dalam masyarakat Muna. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis struktur ritual, makna simbolik, serta nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam yang ditransmisikan melalui tradisi Katoba, sekaligus mengkaji tantangan keberlanjutannya di tengah perubahan sosial. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif etnografi dengan teknik observasi partisipatif, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dokumentasi ritual. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman, dengan dukungan teori rites of passage dari Van Gennep, konsep liminality dari Turner, serta pendekatan antropologi simbolik Geertz. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Katoba mengandung nilai-nilai utama Islam, seperti tauhid, syahadat, kejujuran, tanggung jawab, birrul walidain, dan kedisiplinan moral yang ditanamkan melalui praktik simbolik dan pembelajaran berbasis komunitas. Tradisi ini berperan penting dalam membentuk identitas keagamaan anak dan memperkuat kohesi sosial. Namun, modernisasi dan pengaruh media digital menjadi tantangan terhadap keberlanjutan Katoba, sehingga diperlukan upaya adaptasi agar nilai-nilai dasarnya tetap lestari.

Kata Kunci: Katoba, nilai pendidikan Islam, ritus inisiasi, masyarakat Muna, modernitas

INTRODUCTION

Local traditions within Muslim communities across Indonesia have long functioned as important cultural spaces for transmitting Islamic teachings in ways that are socially embedded and locally meaningful (Pabbajah et al., 2021; Sanjani et al., 2024; Syah et al., 2025). Beyond formal institutions such as schools and mosques, rituals and symbolic practices play a central role in shaping religious identity and moral values (Abdullahi Maidugu & Adamu Tanko Isah, 2024; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). One such tradition is Katoba, an Islamic initiation ritual practiced by the Muna community of Southeast Sulawesi, which integrates Islamic teachings with long-standing local customs.

The Katoba tradition is traditionally performed for Muslim children who have reached an age deemed suitable for assuming moral and religious responsibilities (Subkhi Mahmasani, 2020). The ceremony involves reciting the shahada before a religious leader, followed by moral and spiritual advice delivered by elders and traditional figures (Hadiman, 2018; Ishak, 2024). Beyond its outward symbolism, the Katoba tradition represents a culturally mediated moment of transition, marking a child's readiness to enter a more mature Islamic social life. When viewed through the lens of rites of passage as formulated by Van Gennep (1960) in (Salet, 2018) Katoba tradition includes phases of separation, transition and merger, while Turner (1969) in (Wajabula, 2024) demonstrates the concept of liminality, highlighting its role in forming communal bonds and transforming children's social and religious identities. This theoretical perspective emphasizes that the Katoba tradition is not merely a ritual formality, but rather a dynamic pedagogical event embedded in local Islamic life.

From an Islamic educational perspective, the transmission of values is closely related to moral development (*tahdzib al-akhlāq*) and spiritual purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*). These dimensions are reflected in the Katoba tradition through teachings on monotheism, obedience to parents, honesty, humility, and shared responsibility. Geertz's (1973) interpretative framework of symbolic anthropology in (Marshall, 2024) shows that the verbal formulas, gestures, and interactions in the ritual encode deeper meanings that guide children toward an ethical Islamic way of life. This is in line with studies of vernacular Islam (Benkari et al., 2021; Marsden et al., 2023), the Katoba tradition exemplifies the negotiation between normative Islamic principles and local cultural expressions, revealing how Islamic values are localized without losing their doctrinal essence.

The role of Katoba has become particularly significant in a context of rapid social change. Modernization, digital exposure, and intergenerational shifts in attitudes have influenced how young Muslims view ritual practices. In many communities, Katoba is increasingly viewed as an outdated tradition, performed merely as a social formality rather than as a substantive educational process. This reflects a growing disconnect between the intergenerational transmission of Islamic values, raising concerns about the future relevance of local religious traditions. As digital religious content becomes more accessible, children may learn doctrinal aspects of Islam online, but lack the moral guidance traditionally provided through rituals like Katoba. This tension highlights the need to reexamine the pedagogical significance of Katoba in contemporary Muslim life.

Despite its cultural significance, scholarly studies on Katoba remain limited and tend to emphasize descriptive ethnography or cultural symbolism (Bahtiar et al., 2021; Hadiman, 2018; Ishak, 2024). Notably missing from the literature is a systematic study of Katoba as an educational institution, particularly how Islamic values are conveyed, interpreted, internalized, and practiced by children after the ritual. Few studies have analysed Katoba through theoretical frameworks such as rites of passage, symbolic anthropology, or vernacular Islam, resulting in only a partial understanding of its pedagogical and theological functions. This gap highlights the need for integrative studies that connect ritual practices with Islamic educational theory and contemporary challenges in religious socialization.

This study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the meaning, structure, and function of Katoba traditional education among the Muna community. The research focuses on the symbolic phases of the ritual, the values embodied in its practice, the role of

religious and customary authorities, and the perceptions of children and parents. It also examines how the values taught in Katoba are internalized in daily life after the ceremony, and how these values contribute to shaping an Islamic moral identity in a rapidly changing social environment. By situating Katoba within broader theoretical and contemporary discussions, this study seeks to contribute to the development of a culturally rooted model of Islamic education and offers insights into preserving local religious traditions in ways that remain relevant and meaningful.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative ethnographic approach to explore the meaning and function of the Katoba tradition in the lives of the Muna community. The research was conducted in Muna Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, among communities that still actively practice Katoba. Informants were selected purposively, including religious leaders, traditional elders, parents of participants, and religious education teachers. Although the number of informants appears small, thematic saturation was achieved because the ritual role in Katoba is highly centralized, with only modhi, traditional elders, parents, and educators possessing authoritative and interpretive knowledge about the ritual. This number is considered adequate in ethnography because the emphasis is not on the number of participants, but on the depth of involvement, intensity of interaction, and the adequacy of information obtained from informants who truly understand ritual practices. In the context of the Katoba tradition, which is carried out by a limited social group and has a clear actor structure, informants are sufficient to achieve data saturation and representation of roles in the ritual.

Data were collected through participant observation, where the researcher was present during the ritual without actively participating, complemented by semi-structured interviews and ritual documentation. Van Gennep's (1960) rites of passage framework of separation, liminality, and reintegration was used to observe the ritual structure as a process of socio-religious transformation. The entire process was conducted with consideration of research ethics, informant confidentiality, and researcher reflexivity. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation of sources, techniques, and member checking. Analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model and Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2023). To deepen the interpretation, this study utilizes three analytical tools, namely Turner's concept of liminality (1969) to interpret the threshold phase as a space for internalizing Islamic values; Geertz's symbolic anthropology (1973) to read symbols, speech, and ritual actions as systems of meaning; as well as Van Gennep's framework of rites of passage (2004) as a basis for understanding the changing status of participants in the Katoba tradition. The integration of these analytical procedures yields a coherent and credible interpretation of the ritual dynamics and their accompanying socio-religious values.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Katoba Tradition as a Religious Initiation Rite for Children in the Muna Community

The Katoba tradition in the Muna community represents a religious initiation rite that marks children's transition toward moral and religious responsibility while internalizing Islamic values through culturally meaningful practices. This tradition is not merely a formal ceremony but rather reflects the process of internalizing Islamic values and transforming a child's religious identity. The Katoba tradition is usually performed on boys and girls who have reached the age of tamyiz, which is around 7–12 years old, who are considered spiritually ready to understand and practice Islamic teachings. Historically, Katoba is believed to have emerged concurrently with the process of Islamization in the Muna Islands in the 17th century. The spread of Islam in this region was carried out by preachers and royal nobles who then harmonized Islamic teachings with local values. According to M, a traditional figure in Muna Regency:

"When Islam first arrived in Muna, the scholars did not immediately change existing customs, as the people at that time strongly held onto ancestral traditions. They understood that to spread Islam, it was not enough to simply teach religious laws; they also had to respect the customs of the community. Therefore, many Islamic teachings were then conveyed through customs and traditional ceremonies, so that they would be easily accepted and not provoke rejection. From this adaptation process, the Katoba tradition was born. This tradition is the result of the meeting between Islam and Muna customs, so that it takes the form of a traditional ceremony, but its contents are rich with Islamic values." (Interview with traditional figure M, February 13, 2025)

Thus, the Katoba tradition is a form of acculturation between Islam and local culture, where sharia and tradition do not negate each other, but rather coexist harmoniously. In practice, the Katoba tradition consists of several important stages, each with spiritual and social significance. The first stage is self-purification, performed by bathing, which symbolizes physical and spiritual readiness to accept Islamic teachings. Afterward, the child will dress in all-white clothing, a symbol of purity and holiness, and then sit cross-legged in front of a modhi (religious figure) and traditional elders. The main process of the Katoba is the recitation of the two sentences of the shahada, guided directly by the modhi. In an interview with Ustadz H, a modhi in Muna Regency, he explained:

"The Katoba tradition is not just about reading the shahada, but it contains religious advice that we convey to children so that they know how to live according to Islamic teachings. We teach them about prayer, fasting, respecting parents, speaking politely, and living simply." (Modhi H interview, January 23, 2025)

This advice is usually delivered in the form of a short lecture, using the local language for easy comprehension by the children. It's sometimes interspersed with Islamic stories, such as those of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), his companions, or local figures considered pious. After the main procession concludes, the event continues with a communal prayer and a traditional meal attended by the extended family and local residents. This activity not only strengthens family ties but also fosters social solidarity within the community. In an interview with SA, a parent of a Katoba participant in Muna Regency, he said:

"Since my son joined Katoba, I've seen a lot of changes in him. While he used to be lazy about praying or had to be reminded before he would recite the Quran, now he's the one reminding us to pray in congregation. He feels a sense of responsibility as a grown-up and should be more diligent in his worship. He's also become more polite in his speech and more careful in his actions. Every time he wants to do something, he often says, 'I can't because it's Katoba, or I'll sin.'" (Interview with a parent of a SA participant, January 28, 2025)

This statement suggests that Katoba serves as a turning point in children's religious lives, where they begin to feel responsible for their worship. Katoba's function as an initiation rite also marks the child's social transition from a family member to a formally recognized member of the Muslim community. In the Muna community, children who have not yet undergone Katoba are considered spiritually immature and therefore unable to fully fulfil their religious responsibilities. This was emphasized by Ustadz H, a Muslim priest in Muna Regency, who explained:

"Until now, in our village, the rule still applies that children who have not yet completed the Katoba are not allowed to lead prayers or fast during the full month of Ramadan. This is because, according to local beliefs, before the Katoba is performed, a child is not considered legally a Muslim, according to custom and religion, as an adult. The Katoba is like a sign of self-validation that the child has understood the teachings of Islam and is ready to carry out religious obligations. So, if they have not completed the Katoba, they are not allowed to lead prayers, cannot be an imam, and cannot participate in adult religious activities. Only after the Katoba procession is carried out is the child considered pure, having recited the Shahada with the guidance of a religious teacher, and is now

worthy of accepting moral and social responsibilities in community life." (Interview with Modhi H, January 23, 2025)

Furthermore, the Katoba tradition serves as an important medium for reinforcing Islamic values, encompassing spiritual, moral, and social aspects. Honesty, discipline, responsibility, and respect for parents and others are integral to the messages conveyed in Katoba. According to MR, an Islamic Religious Education teacher in Muna Regency:

"We've observed that children who have completed their Katoba (Islamic fasting) are more responsive to religious lessons. They're easier to engage in discussions about morals, perhaps because they've gained a foundation at home and through the ritual. Compared to children who haven't completed their Katoba, they usually have a harder time understanding the meaning of worship. Children who have completed their Katoba tend to be calmer and more polite while studying. Perhaps because they've been taught to respect their parents, teachers, and friends, they've been taught to respect their peers. So, there's a lingering sense of moral value from the process." (Interview with religious teacher MR, January 25, 2025)

This statement demonstrates that Katoba has direct implications for children's religious behavior and understanding, even within the context of formal education. The Katoba procession also demonstrates the integration of the roles of family, religious leaders, and the community. Parents are responsible for preparing their children mentally and materially, the modhi serves as a spiritual guide, while the community acts as a witness and moral supporter. This collective involvement demonstrates that Katoba is not merely a personal matter, but rather a social responsibility that reflects the unity of values within Muna society. However, amidst the changing times and the currents of modernization, Katoba faces serious challenges, particularly from the younger generation who are beginning to view this tradition as an outdated practice. In an interview with Ustadz H, he stated:

"Many children today prefer birthday parties to Katoba. They say it's more modern. This is our challenge: how to keep Katoba relevant and engaging. Katoba used to be a big, eagerly awaited event. Now, some children are embarrassed to participate because they consider it old-fashioned. Katoba isn't just a traditional event; it's also part of religious teachings. It includes prayers, advice, and confessions of faith. So, if this tradition starts to fade, we worry that children will lose the values previously taught through Katoba." (Interview with Modhi H, January 23, 2025)

This reflects his concern about the shift in cultural values among the younger generation in Muna. The Katoba tradition, once a symbol of maturity and moral learning, is now being replaced by modern culture, such as birthday celebrations. Therefore, innovation is needed in the implementation of Katoba to maintain its context without losing its core values. For example, using digital media to introduce the meaning of Katoba, or involving the younger generation in the process to foster a sense of belonging. From a sociological perspective, Katoba serves as a tool for social control and the formation of religious identity (Ardianto et al., 2020). This tradition not only introduces religious norms to children but also strengthens the social structure of a community that upholds Islamic values. Values such as obedience, honesty, and social piety are instilled through meaningful symbols and ceremonies. Consequently, Katoba serves as an instrument for transmitting local Islamic culture, bridging religious doctrine with everyday life.

From a sociological and character education perspective, the Katoba tradition serves as a mechanism for transmitting values and social control that strengthens children's religious identity in Muna society. Islamic values such as obedience, honesty, responsibility, social piety, and respect for parents are instilled through ritual experiences involving family, religious figures, and traditional elders, so that moral learning is not only cognitive but also affective and practical (Ardianto et al., 2020; Sukmawati et al., 2025). Empirical findings indicate that children who practice the Katoba tradition tend to demonstrate increased awareness of worship and interpersonal ethics, confirming Katoba's role as a contextual and holistic non-formal education. Within the framework of Islamic education, this pattern of internalization of

values aligns with the concept of Islamic moral pedagogy, which emphasizes character formation through social interaction, role models, and symbolic experiences (Memon, 2021; Parhan et al., 2024; Qasserras, 2024). Thus, the Katoba tradition is not merely a traditional ritual, but rather a community-based pedagogical system that connects family education, local customs, and Islamic ethics, while also serving as an intergenerational bridge to maintain the Islamic values that live within Muna culture.

Viewed from the perspective of classical theory, the Katoba tradition reflects the structure of the rite of passage as formulated by Van Gennep (2004) separation through a cleansing bath, transition through the liminal moment of reciting the shahada and moral advice, and integration through prayer and communal meals that affirm the child's religious status as a full member of the Muslim community. Meanwhile, Turner's (1969) concept of liminality is evident in the process when children enter a symbolic space that suspends previous social roles and opens a space for internalization of values. Meanwhile, ritual symbols such as white clothing, cross-legged sitting positions, and sacred speech can be read through Geertz's (1973) symbolic anthropology as representations of humility, purity, and obedience that culturally reinforce Islamic values in a form that is easily understood by children. The function of Katoba as a moral initiation has similarities with various Islamic educational rituals in West Africa and the Middle East that also combine doctrine with local cultural practices (Chaachouay & Zidane, 2022; Flaskeurud, 2022). This synthesis shows that the Katoba tradition is a form of vernacular Islam (Benkari et al., 2021; Marsden et al., 2023) namely the integration between sharia principles and local customs which produces a value education mechanism that is relevant, adaptive, and deeply rooted in the social life of the Muna community.

Islamic Values in the Katoba Tradition

The Value of Monotheism as the Core of Faith

Tawhid is the spiritual core of the Katoba tradition and the religious foundation of Muna children, affirmed through the recitation of the two sentences of the shahada as a renewal of faith and commitment to Allah SWT and His Messenger. The recitation of the shahada is understood not as a formal ritual, but as a sacred moment that strengthens divine awareness, while also serving as a moral bulwark against the influence of materialistic and secular culture. Through symbols, prayers, and guidance from traditional and religious leaders, children are guided to make Allah the centre of their life orientation, thus forming a solid spiritual foundation amidst the dynamics of modernity. Advice delivered in the local language emphasizes that tawhid must be embodied in daily behaviour, such as avoiding polytheism, not relying on anyone other than Allah, maintaining worship, and respecting parents. Thus, the Katoba tradition serves as a medium for faith education based on local culture that combines theological, moral, and social dimensions, and is an effective means of strengthening the faith, morals, and character of the younger generation of Muna.

Tawhid is the spiritual core of the Katoba tradition and serves as the foundation for the formation of children's religious identity in the Muna community. The recitation of the shahada in the Katoba procession is not understood as a formal ritual, but as a liminal moment that renews awareness of faith and affirms life's orientation to God, in line with Turner's concept of rites of passage (1969) and Islamic moral pedagogy which emphasizes the internalization of values through symbolic experience (Tambak et al., 2021). Guidance from religious figures and the use of local languages form a pattern of vernacular Islam (Agus Effendi et al., 2023), so that monotheism is translated into moral practices such as honesty, respect for parents, and responsibility. When compared to Islamic initiation rituals in West Africa or the Middle East (Chaachouay & Zidane, 2022; Flaskeurud, 2022). The Katoba tradition demonstrates a universal pattern that internalizing monotheism occurs through a combination of ritual, community, and values education. Thus, Katoba is not only a confirmation of faith but also an effective pedagogical-cultural mechanism for strengthening the character and moral resilience of the younger generation of Muslims amidst social change.

The Value of the Shahada as a Commitment to Islamic Life

The shahada in Islam is not simply a declaration of faith, but rather a sacred promise and total commitment to live according to the guidance of Allah SWT and His Messenger. In the Katoba tradition of the Muna people, the shahada holds a very special place because it is the core of the entire ritual process. Children participating in the Katoba recite the two sentences of the shahada in front of their parents, traditional leaders, and religious leaders as a symbol of the transition from childhood to religious maturity. The recitation of the shahada not only confirms Islam but also signifies spiritual readiness to live a life based on Islamic values. Through this process, children are taught that the recognition of the oneness of God must be manifested in concrete behaviors such as establishing prayer, fasting, respecting parents, and avoiding sin. Thus, Katoba serves as a means of internalizing concrete Islamic values and is the starting point for developing the character of a true Muslim who is disciplined, honest, and virtuous.

Religious figures leading the Katoba procession emphasize that the shahada must be lived as a spiritual contract between a servant and his God, not merely a verbal formality. Reciting the shahada in front of the community also strengthens a sense of togetherness within a shared faith, serves as a unifying symbol between the older and younger generations, and instils social responsibility as exemplary Muslims who contribute to the welfare of society. The value of the shahada in Katoba thus has a dual meaning: as a theological foundation that strengthens individual faith, as well as a social instrument that builds ethics, solidarity, and the collective Islamic identity of the Muna community. This tradition emphasizes that true Islam does not stop at words but is manifested in concrete actions that reflect a balance between faith, good deeds, and morality that aligns with universal Islamic values. This reflects the concept of taklif (taking moral responsibility according to Islamic law). In line with Bowen's (1993) idea in (Laki, 2024) about Islam as practiced in the local language, the shahada serves as a culturally grounded public declaration that binds children to Islamic norms. The Katoba setting transforms the shahada from a mere theological doctrine into a lived ethical framework.

The Value of Honesty in Confession

A central element of the Katoba tradition is the confession process, in which children are trained to be honest, brave, and humble before religious leaders, parents, and the community as a concrete form of moral learning. This practice is not seen as a demeaning act, but as an expression of spiritual courage and sincere repentance that aligns with Islamic teachings, particularly the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as Al-Amin. Through this process, children realize that honesty is the key to self-purification, inner peace, and the basis for the acceptance of good deeds by Allah SWT, while simultaneously building a culture of mutual trust and social solidarity in the Muna community. Pedagogically, confession serves as a reflective experience that helps children understand the moral consequences of their actions and fosters a commitment to self-improvement, reinforced by the guidance of religious leaders and parental blessing. Thus, Katoba becomes an effective vehicle for Islamic moral education, instilling the value of honesty as a foundation for moral integrity and developing responsible and noble individuals.

The confession process in Katoba serves as an effective mechanism for internalizing honesty, as children are trained to openly admit their mistakes before religious figures and parents, a practice that reflects Islamic moral values and serves as a social control. From an Islamic pedagogical perspective, this practice aligns with the concept of tazkiyatun nafs (self-control) and experience-based character education, where honesty becomes the gateway to self-improvement and the formation of integrity (Suhendro et al., 2025). Confession is a liminal moment in Turner's rite of passage (1969), when individuals are in a transitional phase that opens up space for moral transformation. Through the language and performativity of Muna culture, this practice becomes a moral text that instils courage, sincerity, and a sense of responsibility, and shares similarities with the tradition of collective repentance in other Muslim communities. Thus, the value of honesty in Katoba is not merely a ritual aspect, but a pedagogical-cultural instrument that strengthens children's character and maintains the moral integrity of the community.

The Value of Responsibility in Self-Development

The value of responsibility is a crucial aspect of the Katoba procession, where children are asked to pledge before religious leaders and parents not to repeat mistakes, a moment that fosters moral awareness that every action has consequences. This procession serves as experiential character education, introducing the cause-and-effect relationship between actions and accountability within the framework of Islamic teachings of hisab and taklif. Through the advice of religious leaders on the importance of self-improvement, maintaining worship, and avoiding reprehensible behaviour, children understand that responsibility is a prerequisite for receiving God's forgiveness. This value also develops into social awareness, as self-reflection encourages children to assess the impact of their behaviour on their family and society, strengthening social bonds in line with the principle of tarbiyah (Islamic education), which demands a balance of responsibility to God, oneself, and others. Thus, Katoba not only instils normative morals but also builds a spiritual commitment that shapes the younger generation of Muna into individuals with discipline, integrity, and strong faith in facing life's challenges.

The value of responsibility in the Katoba tradition is instilled through a process of confession and a promise of self-improvement, where children are asked to commit to not repeating their mistakes before religious leaders and parents. This practice reflects the Islamic concept of taklif and hisab, which states that every action has moral consequences (Fatthurohman et al., 2023), as well as being a form of experience-based character education that emphasizes reflection and self-transformation (Naor & Mayseless, 2020). This commitment is the reintegration phase in Van Gennep's rite of passage.(2004), when individuals return to the community with a new moral identity. In addition to strengthening personal responsibility, the Katoba tradition fosters social awareness because children are taught that personal behaviour affects family and society, in line with the principle of tarbiyah (Islamic education) that balances responsibility to God, self, and others. Thus, the value of responsibility in the Katoba tradition is not merely a ritual symbol, but a pedagogical-cultural instrument that shapes the discipline, integrity, and spiritual maturity of the younger generation of Muna.

The Value of Respecting Parents (Birrul Walidain)

One of the most meaningful moments in the Katoba tradition is when children ask for forgiveness from their parents, kiss their hands, and sincerely apologize for any mistakes they have made, a concrete practice of the value of birrul walidain which is highly emphasized in Islam as stated in QS. Al-Isra' verse 23. This emotional procession is not just a symbol of family but becomes a space for emotional reconciliation that strengthens the spiritual bond and affection between children and parents. Through this direct experience, children learn that parental blessings are a source of blessings and a prerequisite for the acceptance of good deeds, so that respect for parents is not only understood as a social obligation, but as a form of worship that determines a servant's closeness to their Lord. In the context of character education, this moment serves as a bridge between vertical values (relationship with God) and horizontal values (social relationships), making Katoba an effective mechanism for the socialization of Islamic values in forming a young generation that is pious, has noble character, and always upholds the dignity of parents as guardians of morality and sources of blessing in their lives.

The process of a child asking for forgiveness from their parents in the Katoba tradition is a manifestation of the value of birrul walidain taught by Islam. The act of kissing hands, apologizing, and seeking blessings is a form of experiential character education that instils good manners, humility, and spiritual awareness (Suhendro et al., 2025). In the perspective of Geertz's symbolic anthropology (1973) this moment of reconciliation strengthens emotional bonds between generations and serves as a mechanism for transmitting social values that maintain community cohesion. Thus, the value of birrul walidain in the Katoba tradition is not merely a family ritual, but a pedagogical-cultural instrument that shapes the piety and noble character of Muna's younger generation.

Katoba's Challenges in the Context of Modernity and Value Shifts

The Katoba tradition has long been a vehicle for spreading Islamic and moral values within the Muna community. However, rapid developments have given rise to new social dynamics,

including shifts in the mindsets of the younger generation, the penetration of global culture, and the rapid flow of digitalization. These factors present real challenges to the sustainability and authenticity of Katoba's meaning. One of the biggest challenges facing Katoba today is the perception that some younger generations are beginning to view this ritual as irrelevant (Gonibala et al., 2018). Modernization of education, exposure to global values, and transformation of lifestyles have led young people to increasingly question the function of Katoba. They view the symbolism-rich Katoba procession as a mere customary routine with no practical value in facing modern challenges. Many young people feel that moral and religious values can be taught through formal education or other means, thus viewing traditions like Katoba as a waste of time and money (Handayani & Idrus, 2017). This perspective stems from a lack of in-depth explanation of the Katoba philosophy, which instils monotheism, honesty, responsibility, respect for parents, and Islamic brotherhood. Furthermore, some parents no longer emphasize the importance of Katoba as a religious ritual, but rather as a hereditary tradition without emphasis on spiritual meaning. As a result, the younger generation is unable to grasp the Islamic essence of Katoba and is beginning to distance itself from its practice. If this phenomenon is allowed to continue, Katoba is in danger of becoming merely a cultural formality without spiritual ties and an understanding of Islamic values, potentially even being abandoned altogether by future generations.

Furthermore, modernization brings a rational, practical, and efficient mindset. These values demand adjustments in various aspects of life, including religious traditions. Katoba, with its relatively long and symbolic procession, is considered incompatible with the fast-paced and efficient modern lifestyle. Furthermore, digital media exacerbates these challenges (Heksa & Anwar, 2017). The younger generation is more familiar with digital platforms, social media, and global content that offer individualistic lifestyles, unlimited freedom of expression, and materialistic pop culture. These values stand in stark contrast to Katoba, which emphasizes obedience, respect for elders, and a spirit of collectively. Digital media, while providing easy access to information, also encourages cultural alienation. Children in the Muna tribe are more familiar with TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube trends than with the essence of the Katoba ritual. As a result, cultural awareness is weakening, including a sense of belonging to the noble values of Islamic tradition within Katoba. This phenomenon has the potential to create a cultural discontinuity where the younger generation no longer inherits the Islamic values embodied in the Katoba ritual.

Given the above realities, the sustainability of Katoba faces two fundamental problems: First, Katoba has the potential to become a meaningless ritual if it is merely performed as a custom without instilling Islamic values. The core values of monotheism, namely the shahada, honesty, responsibility, brotherhood, and birrul walidain (brotherhood of God), can be eroded, because the younger generation only participates in the procession without understanding its rationale (Hayani & Al Kahar, 2020). Second, if the challenges of modernity continue to be ignored, Katoba could disappear altogether because the younger generation no longer sees its urgency and relevance. The loss of Katoba would mean the loss of an effective means of instilling Islamic values that have proven to be deeply rooted in Muna society for hundreds of years. This critical analysis emphasizes that preserving Katoba is not enough simply by forcing young people to participate in its rituals. An adaptive strategy is needed, where the substance of Katoba's values is maintained, but the delivery methods, language, and media used must adapt to current developments. For example, the use of digital media can be directed as a means of educating the values of Katoba through videos, visual content, or religious podcasts that discuss Katoba philosophy in depth. With this digital approach, the Islamic values of Katoba can be communicated in a more engaging way and more closely aligned with the learning styles of the younger generation.

The Katoba tradition faces significant challenges in the context of modernity because the younger generation is starting to view this ritual as no longer relevant, a phenomenon influenced by the modernization of education, the penetration of global culture, and the dominance of digital media (Chen & Bao, 2024; Mohammad Kamel Al Dwakat et al., 2023). From the perspective of cultural discontinuity theory, this change in mindset has the potential to cut off the transmission of Islamic values that previously took place effectively through

traditional rituals (Lonati et al., 2024). The fast-paced and rational lifestyle brought by modernity makes the symbolic and lengthy Katoba procession seen as inefficient, while digital media creates new preferences that encourage individualism and weaken local cultural ties (Amir & Zulkarnain, 2024). Without a philosophical explanation of the values of monotheism, honesty, responsibility, and *birrul walidain* embodied in the Katoba tradition, the younger generation tends to view this ritual as a mere customary formality. If left unchecked, the Katoba tradition could degenerate into an empty, meaningless ritual, or even be abandoned, thus eliminating one of the pedagogical-cultural mechanisms that have shaped the morals of the Muna people for centuries. Therefore, the sustainability of the Katoba tradition requires an adaptive strategy that maintains the substance of the values but changes the method of delivery through digital approaches, formal education based on local culture, and the involvement of traditional leaders and religious scholars as role models, so that the Katoba tradition continues to function as a vehicle for fostering Islamic morality that is relevant in the global era.

CONCLUSION

Tawhid forms the spiritual core of the Katoba tradition and serves as the foundation of children's religious identity in the Muna community. The recitation of the shahada functions not merely as a formal declaration, but as a liminal moment that renews faith and orients life toward God. Through guidance delivered in local language, monotheism is translated into everyday moral practices such as honesty, responsibility, and respect for parents, reflecting a form of vernacular Islam that integrates doctrine with lived experience. These findings provide an important conceptual contribution by demonstrating that the Katoba tradition is a form of vernacular Islam that reconciles sharia with custom through patterns of legal pluralism and cultural pluralism, so that the Islamic values of *tauhid*, *shahada*, honesty, responsibility, and *birrul walidain* are transmitted in a socially embedded and effective manner. Empirically, this study shows that the Katoba structure works as a model of cultural pedagogy that builds children's religious identity through symbolic experiences, cross-generational interactions, and community-based social control. This study's contribution lies in its detailed mapping of the mechanisms of value internalization that have not previously been widely explained in the literature, particularly regarding how children understand, interpret, and practice post-ritual Islamic values. Thus, this study enriches Islamic educational theory by demonstrating that local rites can be relevant sites of learning for moral formation in contemporary Muslim societies.

However, this study also highlights the pressures of digital modernity, changing preferences of the younger generation, and the weakening of customary authority, which have the potential to shift Katoba into a symbolic ritual without substance. This analysis provides significant policy implications for the preservation of local religious traditions, not simply relying on customary inheritance but requiring integrated educational and cultural interventions. Integrating Katoba values into formal education, revitalizing them through digital content, actively engaging the younger generation, and strengthening the role of traditional leaders and elders can be affirmative strategies to maintain the meaningfulness of this ritual. This research advances theoretical understanding of the relationship between ritual, Islamic education, and local culture, and offers a conceptual and practical basis for developing culture-based educational policies. By examining Katoba within the context of cultural and legal pluralism, this study demonstrates that local religious traditions can play a strategic role in shaping the moral character of Muslims, while also serving as a model for integrating Islamic values that are contextual and adaptive to changing times.

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