

MAKKATTE AND THE INVERSION OF AUTHORITY; Symbolic Negotiation of Living Hadith in Palopo, Indonesia

Abbas Langaji

Universitas Islam Negeri Palopo, Indonesia
abbaslangaji@uinpalopo.ac.id

M. Ilham

Universitas Islam Negeri Palopo, Indonesia
m.ilham@uinpalopo.ac.id

Muh. Irfan Hasanuddin

University of Aberdeen, Scotland-UK
m.hasanuddin.21@abdn.ac.uk

Abstract:

This article examines the symbolic negotiation of *makkatte'* (female circumcision) among Bugis Muslims in Palopo, South Sulawesi, within the global discourse on FGM/C. Despite international health frameworks and national regulations that classify FGM/C as a violation of bodily integrity, the practice in Palopo has transformed from an invasive procedure into a non-invasive symbolic ritual. Drawing on ethnographic research, including in-depth interviews and participant observation, this study employs symbolic anthropology and the living hadith framework. The findings reveal that *makkatte'* persists as a form of demedicalized symbolization, bridging modern medical ethics and socio-religious needs for identity marking. A weakly authenticated hadith gains sociological validity through collective practice, while women's agency, particularly that of mothers and grandmothers, plays a central role in sustaining the ritual as negotiated piety. This study highlights how Muslim communities reinterpret religious texts to navigate global modernity and local sacred traditions.

Keywords: *makkatte'*, living hadith, symbolic anthropology, FGM/C, Bugis muslim

Abstrak:

Artikel ini mengkaji negosiasi simbolik praktik *makkatte'* (khitan perempuan) pada masyarakat Muslim Bugis di Kota Palopo dalam konteks diskursus global FGM/C. Di tengah tekanan regulasi kesehatan dan wacana hak asasi manusia, praktik ini bertransformasi dari prosedur invasif menjadi ritual simbolik non-invasif. Berdasarkan penelitian etnografi melalui wawancara dan observasi partisipatif, studi ini menggunakan pendekatan antropologi simbolik Clifford Geertz serta kerangka living hadith. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *makkatte'* bertahan sebagai bentuk "simbolisasi terdemedikalisasi" yang menjembatani tuntutan medis modern dan kebutuhan sosial-religius. Hadis yang secara filologis lemah memperoleh "kesahihan sosiologis" melalui praktik kolektif, sementara agensi perempuan berperan penting dalam mempertahankan ritual sebagai bentuk kesalehan negosiatif. Studi ini menyoroti adaptasi kreatif komunitas Muslim dalam menghadapi modernitas global.

Kata Kunci: *makkatte'*, living hadith, antropologi simbolik, FGM/C, muslim Bugis

INTRODUCTION

The global discourse on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) has reached a critical juncture, characterized by a fundamental tension between international human rights norms and deeply entrenched socio-religious traditions. The World Health Organization (WHO) and various international bodies consistently categorize FGM/C as a severe violation of human rights and a detrimental practice to women's reproductive health.¹ Despite rigorous global campaigns and the enactment of restrictive national policies, such as the Indonesian Ministry of Health Regulation No. 1636/2010, the practice persists with remarkable resilience across the Muslim world. In the Indonesian context, particularly among the Buginese community in Palopo, South Sulawesi, female circumcision, locally known as *makkatte*, is not merely a vestige of the past but a vibrant living tradition that continues to define female identity and religious belonging.

The persistence of *makkatte* in Palopo presents a profound sociological paradox that challenges the universalist assumptions of global health interventions. While international activists often frame FGM/C through the lens of physical mutilation and patriarchal oppression,² the reality in Palopo reveals a

¹ Akhmad Iqbal Jihad Masuku, Arman Anwar, and Popi Tuhulele, 'Female Genital Mutilation Dan Pertanggungjawabannya Menurut Hak Asasi Manusia', *TATOHI: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum*, 4.9 (2024), 705 <https://doi.org/10.47268/tatohi.v4i9.2490>; Soares Clovis Oukouomi Noutchie, 'Analyzing Effective Interventions against Female Genital Mutilation across Different Regions', *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* (2147- 4478), 13.6 (2024), 189–94 <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v13i6.3545>; Massimo Pettoello-Mantovani and others, 'The Global Issue of Female Genital Mutilation', *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 266 (2024), 113906 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2024.113906>; Bettina Shell-Duncan, Zhuzhi Moore, and Carolyne Njue, 'The Medicalization of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: What Do The Data Reveal?', 2017 www.popcouncil.org [accessed 30 March 2026]; Wahyu Elvita Rohmi, Mukhammad Zamzami, and Wael Hegazy, 'Digital Hadith and Gendered Harm: Negotiating Religious Authority and Female Circumcision Discourses on Instagram', *Fikri : Jurnal Kajian Agama, Sosial Dan Budaya*, 10.2 (2025), 811–27 <https://doi.org/10.25217/jf.v10i2.6799>.

² Atu Setiati, Aziz Muslim, and Farhana Sabri, 'The Polemic of Female Circumcision in Garut West Java Indonesia: Clash of Culture and Regional Policy', *Fikri : Jurnal Kajian Agama, Sosial Dan Budaya*, 8.1 (2023), 69–81 <https://doi.org/10.25217/jf.v8i1.267>; Nabiela Naili and Rustriningsih, 'The Makkatte' Tradition in The Bugis Muslim Community: A Gender and Cultural Analysis', *IBDA': Jurnal Kajian Islam Dan Budaya*, 23.1 (2025), 135-154 <https://doi.org/10.24090/IBDA.V23I1.13015>; Jacqueline G. Parchem and others, 'Adverse Infant and Maternal Outcomes among Low-Risk Term Pregnancies Stratified by Race and Ethnicity',

more nuanced symbolic negotiation. Recently, scholars have noted a global trend toward the medicalization of female circumcision, where trained health professionals perform the procedure to minimize harm while satisfying cultural demands.³ In Palopo, this negotiation goes a step further. The ritual has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from invasive surgical intervention to a highly ritualized, symbolic act, such as using a needle or the blood from a rooster's comb.⁴ This adaptation serves as a cultural defense mechanism, allowing the community to preserve its religious-cultural identity while responding to modern medical critiques.⁵ At the heart of this resilience lies the concept of living hadith.⁶ From a traditional theological perspective, the legal basis for female circumcision

Obstetrics and Gynecology, 135.4 (2020), 925–34 <https://doi.org/10.1097/AOG.0000000000003730>; Zerihun Mekuria Tesfaye, Dejene Gemechu Chala, and Jira Mekonnen Choroke, 'Forbidden, yet Common: Female Genital Cutting among the Oromo in Central Ethiopia', ed. by Joyce Jebet Cheptum, *PLOS ONE*, 19.12 (2024), e0315566 <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0315566>; Michela Villani, 'Changing Gender Norms around Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): A Key Role for Social Work in the Global North', *Frontiers in Sociology*, 8 (2023), 1187981 <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1187981>.

³ Tammay Esho, 'The Future of Female Genital Cutting: An Evolution of Its Medicalization in: African Futures', *Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies*, 23 (2022), 338–46; Irwan Martua Hidayana, 'The Medicalization of Female Genital Cutting (FGC) in Indonesia: A Complex Intersection of Tradition, Religion, and Human Rights', *Current Sexual Health Reports*, 16.4 (2024), 217–20 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11930-024-00393-2>; Nik Soffiya Nik Mat, Surinderpal Kaur, and Stefanie Pillai, 'Discursive (de)Legitimation Strategies in Malaysian News Media Discourse on Female Circumcision (Sunat Perempuan)', *3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 29.3 (2023), 166–79 <https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2023-2903-12>; Nina Van Eekert and others, 'The Medicalisation of Female Genital Cutting: Harm Reduction or Social Norm?', *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 43.2 (2021), 263–80 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13153>.

⁴ Deden Ilham Rahmani and Neni Zakiyah, 'Analisis Hukum Islam Terhadap Tradisi Makkatte Khitan Anak Perempuan Bugis: Islamic Law Analysis of the Makkatte Circumcision Tradition of Bugis Girls', *Bustanul Fuqaha: Jurnal Bidang Hukum Islam*, 4.3 (2023), 517–31 <https://doi.org/10.36701/bustanul.v4i3.1076>; Al-Firqa Ramadhany, 'Menilik Pengalaman Perempuan Dalam Tradisi Makkatte': Studi Kasus Pada Perempuan Yang Merantau Keluar Dari Komunitas Bugis Di Sulawesi Selatan.'

⁵ Nurlaelah Abbas and ST. Rahmatiah, 'The Tradition of Female Circumcision (The Integration of Religion and Culture)', *Jurnal Adabiyah*, 22.2 (2022), 191–219 <https://doi.org/10.24252/JAD.V22I2A2>; Rusdaya Basri and others, 'Female Circumcision in Bugis-Makassar Society of South Sulawesi: Between Cultural Symbolism and the Islamic Law', *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam*, 8.3 (2024), 1503–25 <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i3.22381>.

⁶ Rani Pudji Astuti and Muhammad Nuh Siregar, 'The Suroan Tradition: Living Hadith as a Shaper of Spiritual and Social Relations', *Al-Irfan: Journal of Arabic Literature and Islamic Studies*, 8.2 (2025), 112–34 <https://doi.org/10.58223/al-irfan.v8i2.505>; Tiara Ningsih and others, 'Living Al-Qur'an: Sebuah Pendekatan Kontekstual Dalam Memahami Al-Qur'an', *Journal Hub for Humanities and Social Science*, 2.1 (2025); Abbas and Rahmatiah; Basri and others.

is often grounded in specific prophetic traditions (hadith), which many contemporary scholars classify as *da'if* (weak).⁷

However, in the sociological reality of Palopo, the technical authenticity of these texts is secondary to their functional role in society. This phenomenon demonstrates that the authority of a religious text is often constructed through its social reception rather than its philological status alone.⁸ Furthermore, the practice is often driven by female agency, where mothers and grandmothers act as the primary custodians of the tradition, viewing it as an essential rite of passage that grants their daughters social and religious legitimacy.

Although several studies have documented the prevalence of female circumcision in various regions of Indonesia, existing studies have largely approached this topic from an epidemiological perspective, a legal-normative framework, or through anthropological surveys that view the practice as a uniform cultural phenomenon.⁹ These studies have not examined the specific mechanisms of symbolic transformation, particularly the shift from invasive to non-invasive rituals as a complex theological and sociological negotiation within a transitional urban community. Furthermore, no research has yet specifically applied the “living

⁷ Norazam Khair Mohd Ithnin, Ishak Suliaman, and Abdul Halim Ibrahim, ‘Re-Evaluating the Authenticity of Hadith on the Shariah Ruling of Female Circumcision in Malaysia’, *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies*, 21.2 (2023), 217–42 <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-20230133>; M. Ihsan Karaman, ‘Female Circumcision Debate: A Muslim Surgeon’s Perspective’, *Turkish Journal of Urology*, 47.3 (2021), 193 <<https://doi.org/10.5152/tud.2021.20546>.

⁸ Zikri Darussamin, ‘The Relevance of Textual and Living Hadith Studies in Indonesia: Methodologies and Their Contributions to the Comprehension of Hadith’, *Al-Bukhari*, 8.1 (2025), 37–59 <https://doi.org/10.32505/Al-Bukhari.V8I1.9125>; A.M. Ismatulloh, Ismail Ismail, and Muhammad Fuad Zain, ‘Between Text and Practice: The Reception of Ja’far Bin Abi Thalib’s Hadith in the Nyusur Tanah Tradition’, *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education*, 6.3 (2025), 716–26 <https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v6i3.1865>; Oliver Leaman, *Routledge Handbook of Islamic Ritual and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2022); Edriagus Saputra and others, ‘Living Hadith: Concept, Role, and Development in Indonesia’, *Islam Transformatif: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 8.2 (2024), 148–62 <https://doi.org/10.30983/IT.V8I2.8884>; R.S. Wiwaha and others, ‘The Social Context of Hadith History from The Perspective of Hadith Sociology’, *JISIP (Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Pendidikan)*, 8.1 (2024), 96–105.

⁹ Rachmah Ida dan Muhammad Saud, “Female Circumcision and the Construction of Female Sexuality: A Study on Madurese in Indonesia,” *Sexuality & Culture* 2020 24:6, 24.6 (2020), h. 1987–2006, doi:10.1007/s12119-020-09732-6; Anne-Marie Morin, Sean Callaghan, dan Safiya Riyaz, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) in Indonesia and Malaysia, 2025, doi:10.53832/evidence-fund.0071.

hadith” framework in conjunction with Geertzian symbolic anthropology to analyze how weak (*da'if*) hadiths gain sociological validity through lived collective practices, and how women’s active roles function not merely as passive cultural compliance, but as active forces in reconstructing religious legitimacy. This is particularly the case within the Bugis Muslim community in Palopo, a context where Islamic identity, Bugis culture, and global health discourse interact in complex and distinctive ways. Therefore, this article poses two fundamental questions: how does this community reinterpret “weak” religious texts to sustain “strong” social practices? And how does the symbolic nature of makkatte challenge global definitions of FGM/C?

This article addresses these questions by employing Clifford Geertz’s symbolic anthropology and the living hadith framework. It argues that female circumcision in Palopo is a sophisticated cultural adaptation that bridges the gap between religious idealism and modern reality. By analyzing the ritual not as a form of violence, but as a system of symbols that establishes powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations, this study provides a new perspective on the endurance of controversial rituals in the modern world.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. The Global-Local Nexus of FGM/C: From Mutilation to Symbolic Negotitation

The global discourse on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) has long been trapped in a dichotomy between universal human rights and cultural particularism. International organizations such as the WHO tend to adopt a medico-legal approach that reduces this practice to the dimension of physical trauma alone.¹⁰ However, contemporary sociological literature is beginning to

¹⁰ Fuambai Sia Nyoko Ahmadu and others, ‘Harms of the Current Global Anti-FGM Campaign’, *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 2025 <https://doi.org/10.1136/jme-2025-110961>; Asteray Assmie Ayenew and others, ‘Healthcare and Community Perspectives on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): A Qualitative Study’, *EClinicalMedicine*, 90 (2025) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2025.103604>; ‘Female Genital Mutilation’ <https://www.who.int/health-topics/female-genital-mutilation> [accessed 29 March 2026]; Els Leye and others, ‘Debating Medicalization of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Learning

shift by recognizing the phenomena of “medicalization” and “symbolization” in Southeast Asia, where this practice is no longer aimed at organ mutilation but rather serves as a marker of ethno-religious identity.¹¹

This study positions the practice of makkatte in Palopo not as a form of rigid patriarchal oppression, as is often assumed in some global literature, but rather as a form of female agency and cultural resilience.¹² Amid the tide of modernity, the Bugis community in Palopo negotiates by transforming surgical procedures into symbolic acts (using needles or other tools). This indicates that the community does not blindly reject global health campaigns but instead engages in a hybridization of medical demands and spiritual obligations to maintain social cohesion.¹³

2. Living Hadith: Negotiating Religious Authority and Social Compliance

Theoretically, this study employs the living hadith lens to examine how religious texts function in the public sphere. In traditional hadith studies, the primary focus lies on textual authenticity (*isnād and matn*). However, the Living Hadith perspective shifts the focus to “social reception,” how a hadith that is philologically considered weak (*daʿīf*) can possess very strong sociological authority.¹⁴

from (Policy) Experiences across Countries’, *Reproductive Health*, 16.1 (2019), 158 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-019-0817-3>; Shell-Duncan, Moore, and Njue.

¹¹ Abdul Rashid and Yufu Iguchi, ‘Female Genital Cutting in Malaysia: A Mixed-Methods Study’, *BMJ Open*, 9.4 (2019), e025078 <https://doi.org/10.1136/BMJOPEN-2018-025078>; Basri and others; Hidayana.

¹² Samuel Kimani and Bettina Shell-Duncan, ‘Medicalized Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Contentious Practices and Persistent Debates’, *Current Sexual Health Reports*, 10.1 (2018), 25–34 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11930-018-0140-y>; Basri and others; Leye and others.basbas

¹³ Ida and Saud; Kimani and Shell-Duncan; Leye and others; Morin, Callaghan, and Riyaz.

¹⁴ Walusimbi Abdul Hafiz, “Female Circumcision Between Juridical-Religious And Medical Revelations: A Critical Analysis,” *Pakistan Journal of Women’s Studies*: Alam-e-Niswan, 19.1 (2012), h. 1024–256; Yasser Mulla Shadra, Saddriana Saddriana, dan Muhammad Saleh Tajuddin, “Living Hadith And Local Wisdom: A Phenomenological Study Of The Annyorong Lopi Tradition In Southeast Asia,” *Harmoni*, 24.1 (2025), H. 106–27, doi:10.32488/harmoni.v24i1.854.

This concept aligns with the thinking of Brown,¹⁵ who emphasizes the importance of understanding hadith within its historical and social context, where the authority of a hadith is not determined solely by textual validity, but also by how it is produced, understood, and utilized in the life of the community. Within this framework, hadith can be understood as possessing an ever-evolving social life. In Palopo, the hadith regarding female circumcision is not understood as a static legal dogma, but rather as a functional text that constructs public morality. Although its hadith status is academically debated, sociologically, this hadith has become a truth claim that binds the community. This demonstrates that in the sociology of religion, the power of a text is not determined by its degree of authenticity on paper, but rather by the extent to which the text is “brought to life” in collective rituals.¹⁶

3. Symbolic Anthropology: Religion as a System of Meaning

To deepen the cultural analysis, this study integrates the theory of symbolic systems, which defines religion as a system of symbols that functions to establish powerful and enduring moods and motivations within individuals.¹⁷ In the context of *makkatte*, ritual symbols such as the use of rooster blood or symbolic incisions serve as vehicles of meaning that communicate the transition of a child into a fully recognized Muslim woman. This analysis draws on the Geertzian distinction between “pattern for behavior” (religious ideality) and “pattern of behavior” (social reality), arguing that the Palopo community employs symbolic mediation to bridge the gap between the normative ideals of hadith and the realities of modern medical discourse. By transforming physical acts into symbolic gestures, they preserve the spirit of the tradition while avoiding direct conflict with global health norms. This process can be understood as a form of

¹⁵ Daniel W. Brown, ‘Western Hadith Studies’, *Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Hadith*, 2019, 39–56 <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118638477.ch2>.

¹⁶ Brown; Saputra and others.

¹⁷ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Fontana Press, 1993).

adaptive symbolism, in which religious practice is continuously reinterpreted within its socio-cultural context.¹⁸

Drawing on these three theoretical pillars, this study proposes a conceptual framework that maps the relational dynamics among four core concepts: living hadith, social authority, situational symbolization, and female agency. Within this framework, the living hadith serves as the central axis of a text that is religiously weak yet socially strong, giving rise to normative claims within the community. This textual authority, once collectively accepted and internalized, transforms into social authority, that is, legitimacy constructed by the community that operates independently of formal philological validation. Social authority, in turn, is maintained and reproduced through ritual symbolization, the transformation of invasive procedures into symbolic gestures such as needle pricks or the use of rooster blood, which preserves the sacred meaning of tradition while adapting to modern medical pressures and regulations. This entire process is driven and sustained by female agents, where mothers and grandmothers act not as passive recipients of patriarchal prescriptions but as active custodians who negotiate, reinterpret, and transmit these rituals across generations. These four concepts form a dynamic cycle in which living traditions legitimize social authority, social authority is manifested through ritual symbolism, and ritual symbolism is preserved by female agents, who in turn reinforce communal acceptance of living traditions. The phenomenon of makkatte in Palopo must be understood within the framework of this cycle.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative design with a phenomenological-interpretive approach to explore the “lifeworld” of the participants in the *makkatte*’ ritual in Palopo.¹⁹ This approach was chosen because it aligns with the

¹⁸ C Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Basri and others; Leye and others.

¹⁹ J. W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Coosing Among Five Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2016); Sarah Lewis, ‘Qualitative Inquiry and

living hadith paradigm, which views hadith not merely as a static text (text in a book), but as a dynamic social phenomenon (text in action).²⁰ This strategy enables the researcher to capture the essence of informants' subjective experiences in negotiating religious identity amidst the pressures of modernity. The study is located in Palopo, South Sulawesi, an urban-transitional area with strong Bugis cultural roots, where informants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure analytical depth and representativeness of perspectives.²¹ Participants included *Sandro* as a ritual authority figure, religious authorities (MUI and academics) as representatives of theological discourse, domestic actors (Mothers) as bearers of cultural agency, and medical practitioners as a counterbalance to health perspectives. The number of informants was determined based on the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection was halted when no new themes emerged.²²

Data was collected using three primary methods to ensure the validity of the findings: in-depth interviews employing a semi-structured protocol to explore the informants' internal logic regarding the use of *da'if* hadiths as a basis for action, as well as participant observation. In line with Clifford Geertz's symbolic systems theory,²³ the researcher closely observed symbolic units in the ritual, such as needles, turmeric, and chicken blood, as "vehicles of meaning" representing a shift from physical mutilation toward sacred symbolization. Additionally, a documentary study was conducted on local hadith texts and national health regulations, such as Ministry of Health Regulation No. 1636/2010, to map the structural tensions between the state and tradition. Data analysis was conducted

Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches', *Health Promotion Practice*, 16.4 (2015), 473–75 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839915580941>.

²⁰ Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsy, 'Living Hadis: Genealogi, Teori, Dan Aplikasi', *Jurnal Living Hadis*, 1.1 (2016), 177–96 <https://doi.org/10.14421/LIVINGHADIS.2016.1073>; Shadra, Saddriana, and Tajuddin.

²¹ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice* (California: SAGE Publications, 2014).

²² Sirwan Khalid Ahmed, 'Sample Size for Saturation in Qualitative Research: Debates, Definitions, and Strategies', *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, 5 (2025), 100171 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2024.100171>.

²³ C Geertz.

inductively using the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana,²⁴ which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The researcher employed thick description to present findings so that readers can understand the socio-cultural context of Palopo holistically, while data validity was ensured through source triangulation and member checking.²⁵ Given the sensitivity of the issue of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) at the international level, this study applied strict ethical standards through the acquisition of informed consent and the guarantee of absolute anonymity using identity codes.²⁶ Researchers also consistently maintained a “neutral-empathic” stance to avoid moralistic bias throughout the entire data collection process.

RESULT

1. The Typology and Symbolic Construction of the *Makkatte*’ Ritual in Palopo

Research findings indicate that the practice of female circumcision in Palopo, locally known as *makkatte*’, has undergone a process of sublimation from a surgical procedure to a symbolic act. Unlike the invasive categorization of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), the people of Palopo have adapted ritual tools for safety and health reasons. Based on observations of the practice performed by *Sandro* (as in the case of a girl named Zakiah), the tools used were a new sewing needle, turmeric, and white cloth. The *Sandro* only performed a light scratching on the clitoral hood without removing any tissue at all.

The use of rooster blood is found to be a crucial substitute element in fulfilling the ritual’s sacred requirements. A man named *Sandro* explains the logic behind this substitution:

“We don’t cut the animal; we just fulfill the requirement. The rooster’s blood serves as a substitute, so that blood is shed as a sign of the validity

²⁴ Elmar Hashimov, ‘Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook and The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers’, *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 24.1 (2015), 109–12 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2015.975966>.

²⁵ Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (California: SAGE Publications, 1985).

²⁶ Mary Phelan, ‘Codes of Ethics’, *Ethics in Public Service Interpreting*, 2019, 85–146 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315715056-3>.

of the conversion to Islam. The requirement is that something must come out (blood), but it must not harm the child.”²⁷

This claim is reinforced by another *Sandro*, who emphasizes the shift in the tool used:

“In the past, we might have used a razor blade, but now we use a needle just to make a slight touch on top (of the clitoris). What matters is the prayer and that the requirement of the rooster’s blood is met. That is sufficient to fulfill the customary and religious obligations.”²⁸

From a Geertzian perspective, these elements are not merely inanimate objects, but “vehicles of meaning.” Turmeric functions as both an antiseptic and a symbol of fertility, while the white cloth symbolizes the purity of the child’s transition into a Muslim woman.

2. The Reception of Living Hadith: The Social Authority Behind Weak Texts

This study reveals that religious authorities in Palopo do not rely on the strength of hadith transmission (*isnād*), but rather on the community’s functional reception. Religious leaders and field educators acknowledge the existence of debates regarding the authenticity of the hadith of Ummu ‘Atiyyah, yet this does not diminish the community’s sociological adherence.

A local religious figure stated:

“It’s true that some scholars say the hadith is weak, but this practice has been passed down through generations. We don’t focus on the weakness of the isnad. Instead, we see its benefit as part of Muslim women’s identity. If a girl isn’t circumcised, it feels like her Islam isn’t complete.”²⁹

In line with this, a religious counselor added:

“The community doesn’t ask whether this is a hadith from Bukhari or not. For them, circumcision is the Prophet’s sunnah. If we prohibit it merely because the hadith is weak, the community will be confused because they already consider this an integral part of sharia.”³⁰

²⁷ Informant S1, *Sandro*.

²⁸ Informant S2, *Sandro*.

²⁹ Informant T1, Religious Counselor.

³⁰ Informant T2, Religious Counselor.

This phenomenon demonstrates that, within the context of the living hadith, a text that is philologically weak (*dha'if*) transforms into a “strong sociological text” because it is capable of organizing collective compliance through mechanisms of value transmission and religious truth claims.

3. Women's Agency and Negotiation in the Domestic Sphere

The preservation of *makkatte* in Palopo relies heavily on women's role as gatekeepers of tradition. The mothers' motivation is not driven by a desire to inflict pain, but rather to provide “social legitimacy” and uphold their children's morality. There is a strong belief that circumcision can control women's “sexual desires” in the future.

A mother in Tompotikka Village expressed her agency:

“I was circumcised, and so was my mother. This isn't about hurting the child, but about blessings. I'm afraid that if she isn't circumcised, she'll grow up to be a naughty or wild child. This is for her own good so she can preserve her honor.”³¹

Another informant added the dimension of social pressure faced if the ritual is not performed:

“If my child isn't circumcised, later when she grows up, she might be mocked by the extended family. People will ask, ‘Is she Muslim yet?’ So this is more of a moral burden to ensure our child is fully accepted as a Bugis-Muslim.”³²

This dynamic reveals the presence of “negative agency,” where women in Palopo strive to balance health regulations prohibiting FGM with the need to remain within the circle of “inherited piety” and social acceptance.

³¹ Informant I1, Parents.

³² Informant I2, Parents.

DISCUSSION

1. Symbolic Demedicalization: Deconstructing the Hegemony of Global Narratives on FGM/C

The findings of this study regarding the use of symbolic instruments such as sterile sewing needles, turmeric, and rooster comb blood mark the emergence of the phenomenon of “adaptive symbolization,” which fundamentally challenges the hegemony of global health narratives. As stated in the introduction, international discourse on FGM/C is often trapped in a binary dichotomy between “invasive-barbaric” traditional practices and “medicalization,” which the WHO continues to deem illegal.³³ However, sociological evidence from Palopo offers a “third way”: a process of symbolic demedicalization. The people of Palopo do not bring this practice into the operating room to be performed clinically, but rather bring it back into the ritual space to be performed non-invasively yet still in a sacred manner.

The use of rooster blood as a symbolic surrogate is evidence of the Bugis people’s cultural intelligence in responding to the pressures of modernity. In line with Clifford Geertz’s symbolic systems theoretical framework,³⁴ this chicken blood functions as a “vehicle of meaning” that fulfills the theological requirement of “blood that hatches” without violating the child’s physical integrity. This expands upon the findings of Hidayana³⁵ that medicalization often fails to curb traditions because it overlooks the transcendental dimension. In Palopo, the community engages in a more radical negotiation by transforming mechanical actions into performative-semiotic acts. Thus, the makkatte ritual is no longer a matter of bodily anatomy but a matter of religious semiotics that serves to maintain a balance between the obligations of identity and medical safety.

³³ ‘Female Genital Mutilation’.

³⁴ C Geertz.

³⁵ Hidayana.

2. The Vernacularization of Hadith: The Dialectic Between Textual Authenticity and Social Authenticity

An analysis of the reception of the hadith on female circumcision in Palopo reveals an epistemological anomaly that is crucial to the study of living hadith. In the formal discourse of *mustalah al-hadith*, a text categorized as *da'if* (weak) should lose its legal authority (*hujjah*) in matters of worship.³⁶ However, at the grassroots level in Palopo, what the researcher terms an “inversion of authority, social authenticity trumps philological authenticity” occurs. The community does not practice hadith based on the degree of authenticity of its chain of transmission on paper, but rather based on the degree of its “aliveness” (livingness) within collective memory and social structures.

The primary textual basis used to justify the practice of makkatte is a hadith attributed to Umm ‘Atiyyah al-Anṣariyyah, a woman who underwent female circumcision in Medina and was advised by the Prophet Saw, “*La tanhaki, fa inna žālika ahzā li al-mar’ah wa aḥabb ilā al-ba’l*” (Do not be excessive, for that is better for the woman and more pleasing to her husband). Critically, Abū Dāwūd himself, as the compiler of this hadith, added three critical notes in succession immediately following the hadith, stating, “*laysa huwa bi al-qawī wa qad ruwiya mursalan*” (this hadith is not strong and has been transmitted in mursal form), and further concluding, “Muhammad ibn Hassan is unknown, and this hadith is weak.”³⁷ This criticism, voiced by the compiler himself, plays a significant role in the science of hadith, as it constitutes a rejection originating directly from the primary source, rather than an external assessment that emerged later.

It is precisely this philological instability that makes the Palopo case so analytically intriguing. Although the hadith is classified as “*da'if*,” a designation explicitly noted by Abu Dawud himself and affirmed by the majority of classical scholars, the Palopo community treats this tradition not merely as a weak legal

³⁶ Hafiz.

³⁷ Sulaiman bin Al-Asy‘asy bin Ishaq bin Basyir bin Syaddād bin ‘Amru Al-Azdī As-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (al-Riyād: Dār Al-Ḥaḍārah li Al-Nasyri wa Al-Tauzi‘a, 2015), 649.

text but as a fundamental religious truth. This is what researchers refer to as the “Inversion of Authority.” The sociological weight of the hadith in Palopo far exceeds its philological status. The community does not evaluate hadith through the methodological lens of *rijāl al-hadīth* (narrator criticism) or *dirāyah* (textual analysis), but rather through the lens of collective practice and intergenerational transmission, specifically the mechanism described by Daniel Brown as “the social life of hadith.”³⁸

Although religious elites are aware of the academic debate regarding its textual weaknesses, the text continues to function as a constitutive text that upholds public morality and gender identity. The power of this hadith does not lie in the chain of narrators (*isnād*), but in its ability to construct a “collective truth” that circumcision is an absolute prerequisite for purity (*tahārah*) and the legitimacy of one’s Islam. Epistemologically, this shifts the paradigm of Islamic studies from hadith-as-text to hadith-as-ritual identity. The living hadith in Palopo functions as an identity defense mechanism: the more this tradition is suppressed by secular-global narratives, the more strongly the community embraces the hadith as a symbol of “lived truth” within the framework of the vernacularization of Islam.

3. The Negative Agency: Ritual Matriarchy at the Crossroads of Tradition and Modernity

This study offers a new perspective on the debate regarding women’s agency as presented in the theoretical framework. The dominant international narrative often reduces women who perform female genital mutilation to passive victims of patriarchy or subjects who have internalized masculine values. However, data from Palopo show that women (mothers, grandmothers, and Sandro) are sovereign actors who actively negotiate within the domestic sphere. Following the ideas of Saba Mahmood regarding the Politics of Piety³⁹, the practice of *makkatte*’ in Palopo is a manifestation of “negotiative agency.”

³⁸ Daniel Brown

³⁹ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb04721.0001.001>.

Mothers in Palopo (such as Informants I3 and I4) are caught between two risks: the health and legal risks posed by state pressure, and the risk of “social death” (the stigma of an impure or wild child) from the community. The choice to use symbolic methods (needles and chicken blood) is their way of protecting their daughters from both threats simultaneously. This is a form of “pious femininity,” a pragmatic and intelligent form of female piety. They do not blindly submit to external authority. Rather, they themselves manage, modify, and transmit the tradition so that it remains intact without sacrificing the child’s physical safety. The preservation of makkatte in Palopo, therefore, must be interpreted as a form of “subtle resistance” against the state’s efforts at cultural homogenization (Ministry of Health Regulation No. 1636/2010), which often fails to understand that for the Bugis-Islamic community, religious identity cannot be separated from the integrity of its rituals.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that makkatte in Palopo City is a phenomenon of adaptive symbolization that bridges the tension between religious-cultural identity and global health demands. Through Clifford Geertz’s symbolic anthropology, it was found that this ritual has undergone a deconstruction of tools and methods, shifting from invasive surgical procedures to a performative act using a sewing needle and a rooster’s blood, as documented in Sandro’s practice on a girl named Zakiah. This finding indicates that within Palopo’s socio-religious context, the Bugis-Muslim community does not rigidly reject modernity but engages in a negotiation to preserve the spirit of tradition without compromising the physical integrity of young girls.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse on the living hadith by introducing the concept of social sahih, wherein the authority of hadiths regarding female circumcision in this community no longer rests on the philological validation of a *ḍaʿīf* isnad but rather on their sociological function as reinforcers of morality and communal identity. This is reflected in the acknowledgment of local religious figures who, despite recognizing the hadith’s

academic weaknesses, still view it as an integral part of the identity of Bugis Muslim women. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that the preservation of the makkatte in Palopo is driven by female agents, mothers, and Sandro, who act as guardians of morality through mechanisms of subtle resistance against restrictive state regulations.

These findings suggest that coercive regulatory approaches, such as Minister of Health Regulation No. 1636/2010, may have limited effectiveness in communities where practices are deeply rooted in symbolic and theological frameworks, as observed in Palopo. Therefore, the government is advised to consider a cultural harmonization strategy that explores forms of non-invasive symbolic circumcision as a middle ground between respect for human rights and the preservation of cultural identity. This study is limited to a single transitional urban area, so comparisons with the more conservative inland regions of Sulawesi need to be explored in future research. More broadly, this study suggests that the continuation of controversial rituals in similar Muslim communities may depend in part on the community's ability to engage in symbolic negotiation of their sacred texts.

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Informant T1, Religious Counselor

Informant T2, Religious Counselor

Informant I3, Parents

Informant I4, Parents

Informant S1, Sandro

Informant S2, Sandro