



CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND VALUES OF THE PUPUTAN BAYI TRADITION IN MEDAN: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Keywords	Abstract
<i>Puputan Bayi, Cultural Transformation, Traditional Values, Cultural Anthropology, Birth Ritual, Cultural Identity.</i>	<i>This study aims to analyze the cultural transformation and values in the puputan bayi tradition in Medan using an anthropological approach. Applying Giddens' (2013) theory of social change, the research focuses on how this tradition adapts and evolves alongside social and cultural developments influenced by modernity and globalization. This study employs a qualitative method with data collection techniques including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The informants consist of traditional leaders, families who practice the tradition, and local community members directly involved in the puputan bayi ceremony. The findings reveal that while traditional values are preserved, adjustments in the practice of the puputan bayi tradition reflect the influence of social changes, including aspects of gender roles, family participation, and the understanding of ritual meanings. The study also reveals that the people of Medan, particularly those of Javanese and Batak ethnicity, demonstrate openness to integrating modern values into their traditional practices. This cultural transformation reflects a process of acculturation and integration between local and global values, shaping a new social identity within urban communities.</i>

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has had a significant impact on local traditions and cultures worldwide. The process of globalization, characterized by intensive interaction between societies and the spread of information, influences how traditions are practiced and understood within communities. Some traditions persist despite being influenced by global values, while others undergo change or adaptation to survive in a modern context (Giddens, 1990). This process creates a dynamic tension between preserving local culture and external influences, where societies must adapt to social changes without losing their identity. Previously isolated traditions begin to transform, blending local and global cultural elements to create new forms that are more relevant to changing social conditions. As Ritzer (2019) points out, globalization generates tension between global cultural homogenization and local cultural heterogenization, resulting in new forms that reflect this process. Furthermore, research by Appadurai (2020) highlights how globalization contributes to the transformation of local cultural values, often

leading to a fusion of traditional and modern values. In this context, Giddens' theory of social change can be used to analyze how traditions adapt to global changes while preserving essential values within specific societies. The Impact of cultural globalization due to urbanization and intermarriage has led to transformations in traditions, one of which is reflected in the *puputan bayi* tradition of the Javanese community in Medan. The transformation of the Javanese *puputan bayi* tradition in Medan demonstrates adaptation to social and cultural developments that are increasingly open to modernity (Arianto, et al, 2024). While maintaining core elements such as name-giving, prayers, and rituals for newborns, several practices have evolved over time. One of the most significant changes is the simplification of the ritual process without diminishing its spiritual meaning, influenced by the more practical modern lifestyle. Traditional practices such as *berkak* (arranging baby supplies), giving offerings to the baby and parents, and cutting the newborn's hair are still performed. However, there is a growing tendency to adopt new elements, such as using technology for event documentation and offering more inclusive prayers. This adaptation reflects how the Javanese community in Medan preserves their traditions while adjusting to the dynamics of urban life and contemporary demands.

Anthony Giddens, in his theory *The Consequences of Modernity* (2013), explains that changes in traditions occur due to the dynamics of modernization and globalization. Traditions that were once static now undergo transformation through interaction with new values. In the context of the *puputan bayi* ritual, changes are evident in gender roles, family participation, and the adaptation of rituals to religious norms and social developments. While the ritual was traditionally led by a *dukun bayi* (traditional midwife) and involved only the immediate family, today midwives and ustaz (Islamic religious leaders) play a more prominent role. Additionally, the use of photo and video documentation shows how society has begun integrating modern elements into their traditional practices.

This study focuses on the transformation of values and practices within the *puputan bayi* tradition in Medan. Using an anthropological approach, it examines how this ritual adapts to social changes, particularly in terms of gender roles, community participation, and the reinterpretation of traditional and religious values. It also explores how modernization and globalization influence the continuity of this tradition in the future and the extent to which younger generations continue to uphold it.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Giddens (year) developed the theory of social change, focusing on how external factors such as modernization, globalization, and technology influence the social and cultural structures within society. According to Giddens (year), the transformation of culture and values within traditions occurs through a process of social change driven by modernity, globalization, and social interaction. Here are four key points that explain the transformation of culture and values within traditions according to Giddens:

1. Modernity and Social Structure

Giddens states that modernity transforms social and cultural structures, influencing how societies organize their lives, including values and traditions. This process often leads to changes in cultural practices that were previously stagnant and closely tied to specific traditions (Giddens, 1990).

2. Globalization and Social Interaction

The process of globalization introduces cultural influences from various parts of the world. This leads to changes in how people perceive and practice traditions. Societies

begin to adopt external cultural elements and blend them with local values, creating a hybrid culture that reflects both external and internal influences simultaneously.

3. Increased Social Mobility

In modern society, increased social and geographical mobility exposes individuals to various traditions and values from different cultural backgrounds. The blending of these cultures leads to a transformation in how society views traditions, making them more flexible and adaptable to changing social contexts.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study method to analyze the transformation of the *puputan bayi* tradition in Medan. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with three key informants: Rusmiati, Sutini, and Dewi Sulistiani. The interviews were conducted using semi-structured questions focusing on three main aspects: gender roles, family participation, and the understanding of the ritual's meaning. Additionally, the researcher conducted participant observation during the *puputan bayi* ceremony to directly observe the ritual's implementation and the involvement of various parties. Document analysis was also conducted to complement information from literature reviews related to this tradition and Giddens' (2013) theory of social change.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis by identifying key patterns in the informants' responses and field observations. This process involved data reduction, categorization by themes, and interpretation to understand the factors influencing the transformation of the tradition. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation by comparing interview results, observations, and literature, as well as conducting member checking with informants to verify the accuracy of the findings. This methodology enables the researcher to understand how the *puputan bayi* tradition adapts to social change, modernization, and religious influences in Medan society.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

1. Gender Roles in the Puputan Bayi Tradition

Historically, the Puputan Bayi tradition in some Javanese communities was led by a traditional birth attendant (*dukun bayi*) as the main figure. The baby's mother played a passive role, merely observing the ritual without active involvement. Informan 1, 2025, a community elder and primary informant, explained: "In the past, only the birth attendant led the ritual. The baby's mother was merely a witness and had no active participation." (Informan 2, 2025)

However, there has been a shift where mothers now take an active role, especially during symbolic acts like the *tepung tawar* (blessing ritual with scented water) and the hair-cutting ceremony. Informan 3, 2025, a local community leader, confirmed this change: "Nowadays, the mother holds the baby during prayers and the blessing ritual. She is now an essential part of the ceremony, not just a bystander." (Informan 3, 2025)

This change aligns with Giddens' (1990) Theory of Reflexive Modernity, which argues that in modern societies, traditions are no longer rigid but are reinterpreted to respond to new social demands, including the push for gender equality. Furthermore, Appadurai's (2020) Theory of Cultural Hybridization supports this analysis by explaining how local traditions adapt to incorporate modern values. The active involvement of mothers reflects how inclusive gender norms are being integrated into cultural practices

2. Family Participation in the Puputan Bayi Tradition

In the past, the Puputan Bayi tradition was exclusive and only attended by the immediate family, particularly the grandparents. Informan 2, 2025, who has observed this tradition for decades, described the limited participation: “In the past, only close family members, especially grandparents, were invited. Neighbors or distant relatives were not involved.” (Informan 2, 2025)

Today, participation has expanded to include neighbors, friends, and distant relatives, turning the ceremony into a community celebration. Informan 3, 2025 emphasized this broader involvement: “Now, this tradition is a community event. We invite neighbors and distant relatives as a form of social solidarity.” (Informan 3, 2025)

According to Rogers’ (1962) Diffusion of Innovation Theory, this shift represents the implementation and confirmation stages, where social innovations are adopted and adjusted to broader community needs.

Additionally, Ritzer’s (2019) McDonaldisation Theory suggests that this change reflects efficiency and inclusiveness, making the tradition more adaptable to the demands of modern social and economic structure.

3. Understanding the Meaning of the Puputan Bayi Ritual

The *Puputan Bayi* ritual holds profound symbolic and spiritual meanings for the community. Traditionally, this ritual signifies the transition from infancy to early childhood, marking the baby’s physical and spiritual maturity. The ceremony is not merely a cultural formality but a sacred act that reflects the community’s collective beliefs about life, protection, and the child’s future.

Informan 1, 2025, explained the significance of the ritual during an interview: “This ritual is more than just a tradition—it’s a blessing for the child’s well-being and a way for the family to express gratitude for the child’s safe arrival and future protection.” (Informan 1, 2025)

This perspective aligns with Giddens’ (1990) Theory of Structuration, which explains how traditions are continuously reproduced and transformed through human action. The *Puputan Bayi* ritual, while rooted in ancestral customs, evolves to remain relevant to the community’s spiritual needs. By continuing this ritual, families reaffirm cultural identity while adapting to modern influences that shape their spiritual outlook.

Moreover, Appadurai’s (2020) concept of Cultural Dimensions suggests that rituals like Puputan Bayi serve as cultural markers that reflect the community’s worldview. This ritual not only celebrates the child’s growth but also represents collective hopes for a prosperous and protected future. Through symbolic acts like *tepung tawar* (ritual blessing with sacred water), the ritual conveys prayers for health and strength.

During the ceremony, specific objects and gestures carry deep symbolic meanings. For example, *tepung tawar* symbolizes purification and spiritual protection from misfortune. According to Rogers’ (1962) Diffusion of Innovation Theory, maintaining these symbolic acts reflects the community’s decision to preserve meaningful customs while adopting new practices such as religious prayers. This hybridization allows the ritual to maintain cultural integrity while incorporating modern religious influences.

Another critical aspect of this ritual is its role in fostering social cohesion. Informan 2, 2025 emphasized: “When we perform the Puputan Bayi, it’s not just for the family—it’s for the whole community to come together and celebrate. This gathering strengthens our bonds and reminds us of our shared responsibilities.” (Informan 2, 2025)

This reflects Ritzer's (2019) McDonaldization Theory, where rituals are adapted to modern life while retaining their core meanings. The communal participation in *Puputan Bayi* supports social solidarity, allowing the ritual to serve as both a spiritual and social event. This dual function ensures the ritual remains an integral part of the community's identity.

In conclusion, the *Puputan Bayi* tradition reflects a dynamic interplay between continuity and transformation. Through modern adaptations—such as medical involvement, technological documentation, and religious integration—the ritual remains a living tradition that bridges the past, present, and future. While external influences reshape certain aspects, the ritual's essence as a symbol of blessing, protection, and community unity endures.

4. Transformation and Continuity of the Tradition

The *Puputan Bayi* tradition has undergone significant transformations over time while maintaining core cultural values. These changes reflect societal shifts, technological advancements, and religious influences, as observed through the perspectives of the interviewees. Despite modern adaptations, the tradition remains a symbolic milestone in a child's life and continues to be a cultural anchor for the community.

One of the most notable transformations involves the shift of authority from the birth shaman (*dukun bayi*) to modern healthcare professionals, especially during the hair-cutting ceremony. Informan 2, 2025 explained this change: "In the past, the *dukun bayi* led everything—from the prayer to the hair-cutting. Now, a midwife performs the hair-cutting because people trust medical professionals more for these tasks." (Informan 2, 2025)

This shift aligns with Giddens' (1990) Theory of Modernity, which argues that institutional changes in expert systems lead to a greater reliance on scientific knowledge over traditional practices. The transition to using midwives reflects how modern medical authority has replaced the spiritual and ritual expertise of the *dukun bayi*. However, the symbolic essence of the ritual—protecting and blessing the child—remains intact.

Additionally, the ritual's inclusivity has expanded. Historically, only immediate family members participated, but today, the ceremony involves extended relatives and neighbors. Informan 3, 2025, emphasized the social aspect of this evolution: "Now, we invite more people—not just family but also neighbors. It's a celebration for everyone, reflecting our desire to share joy and togetherness." (Dewi Sulistiani2025)

This transformation aligns with Appadurai's (2020) Cultural Dimensions of Globalization, which suggests that global influences encourage greater social openness. The broader participation reflects modern values of inclusivity and community engagement, transforming the ritual from a private to a communal event while reinforcing collective identity.

Technological advancements also play a role in shaping the ritual. Documenting the event through photographs and videos has become a common practice. Sutini(2025) highlighted this shift: "We always record the ceremony now. These photos and videos help us remember and pass down our traditions to future generations." (Sutini,2025)

This modification reflects Giddens' (2013) Theory of Self-Identity, where modern individuals negotiate between traditional customs and religious identities. By incorporating Islamic prayers, the ritual remains spiritually meaningful while aligning with the community's religious beliefs, ensuring its relevance in contemporary society

Despite these changes, the core values of the *Puputan Bayi* ritual—blessing the child, ensuring well-being, and strengthening community bonds—persist. Rusmiati (2025) expressed optimism about the tradition's endurance: "Even if some steps change, we will continue this ritual. It connects us to our ancestors and unites our families." (Rusmiati, 2025)

This aligns with Ritzer's (2019) McDonaldization Theory, which suggests that cultural practices may become simplified but retain their essence. While some ceremonial stages have been streamlined, the symbolic meaning remains a vital part of the community's cultural identity.

In conclusion, the *Puputan Bayi* tradition reflects a dynamic interplay between continuity and transformation. Through modern adaptations—such as medical involvement, technological documentation, and religious integration—the ritual remains a living tradition that bridges the past, present, and future. While external influences reshape certain aspects, the ritual's essence as a symbol of blessing, protection, and community unity endures.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the *puputan bayi* tradition in Medan has undergone significant transformation in line with social and cultural developments. First, in terms of gender roles, there has been a shift where women, who previously had a background role, now actively participate in the ceremony, especially in the *tepung tawar* ritual and prayer recitation. This reflects a social norm shift that provides greater space for women's involvement in this tradition.

Second, family participation has also changed; while the ritual previously involved only the nuclear family and the traditional birth attendant (*dukun bayi*), it now includes neighbors and extended family members, as well as healthcare professionals such as midwives to perform the baby's hair-cutting ceremony.

Third, regarding the understanding of the ritual's meaning, the tradition is still viewed as an important part of cultural heritage that should be preserved, although some traditional elements—such as the role of the *dukun bayi*—are gradually being abandoned. No specific myths or beliefs were found to influence the practice of this ritual, and most of the community integrates Islamic values into the ceremony, particularly through prayers led by an ustaz.

Despite the influence of modernization and globalization on its implementation, the *puputan bayi* tradition continues to be practiced, albeit with practical adjustments to fit the context of contemporary society.

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