

Cultural shifts in Lombok: During and after the COVID-19 pandemic

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Article Info	Abstract
<p><i>Article History:</i> Received 24 August 2023 Approved 18 October 2023 Published 28 October 2023</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords: COVID-19, cultural shifts, evolution, local wisdom, outbreak.</p>	<p>The COVID-19 outbreak had various impacts on human lives. The COVID-19 pandemic affected economic activities, social life, and culture, leading people to adapt to new rules and circumstances. This study aims to identify cultural activities in Lombok, such as <i>Nyongkolan</i>, <i>Begibung</i>, and <i>Maulidan</i> that were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and to analyze the pattern of their changes. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method. This study employs various data collection techniques, including observation, interviews, and questionnaires. The findings suggest that cultural activities have temporarily shifted to adhere to government instructions aimed at mitigating the spread of COVID-19. After the pandemic COVID-19 ends, these cultural activities are conducted in the same way as before the pandemic. However, a small number of community groups still carry out the culture of <i>Begibung</i> as it was during the pandemic COVID-19 on the grounds that the modifications they applied during the pandemic are more effective and efficient, so it is good to be maintained while not eliminating the essence of the <i>Begibung</i> itself.</p>

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INTRODUCTION

In late 2019, the world was struck by the COVID-19 outbreak, which eventually became a global pandemic. The virus was first discovered in Wuhan, the capital of China's Hubei province, and it quickly posed a significant risk of contagion within a brief period, the virus spread globally (Stanway, 2021). According to WHO (2021), COVID-19 is caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. On March 20, 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic (Cucinotta & Vanelli,

2020). The COVID-19 outbreak had significant impacts on various aspects of human life, including the economic sector, education, tourism, health, and socio-political issues (Pamungkas, 2021; Rakhmawati, 2021).

On March 24, 2020, the governor of West Nusa Tenggara announced that a Lombok resident had contracted COVID-19 for the first time (Tempo.co, 2020). The Governor of West Nusa Tenggara has directed all regents to enforce micro-scale public activity restrictions at the districts, subdistricts, and village levels (Pemerintah Provinsi NTB, 2021). The policies enforced by

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both the central and regional governments had an impact on the residents of Lombok. Cultural activities and other activities that have the potential to cause crowds are limited. There was a variation in the community's response to the government's policy. While some people agree with the restriction, others are not concerned.

Several studies on COVID-19 related to cultures have been conducted using different methods and objectives. For example, Pamungkas (2021), applied a survey method to study the loss of Eastern culture during the pandemic, Christin et al., (2021) conducted a phenomenology study that examined the impact of physical distancing on interpersonal communication during COVID-19. While Rakhmawati (2021), used a systematic literature review method to investigate the changes in non-verbal communication during the pandemic. Conversely, this study is a qualitative study that aims to identify cultural activities in Lombok that have been affected by COVID-19 and patterns of change in those activities. The scope of this study is to examine three cultural activities, such as *Nyongkolan*, *Begibung*, and *Maulidan* because these three cultural activities are still found during the pandemic although with a low intensity. This study provides information about the evolution of Lombok's culture due to the COVID-19 outbreak. These cultural shifts during the COVID-19 pandemic are significant phenomena that the researchers want to document.

Culture

Culture refers to the characteristics, knowledge, language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music, and arts that identify a particular group of people (Pappas and McKelvie, 2022). Thus, culture appears unique and distinct from one group to another, as it correlates with values that originate, evolve, and form within each group. Mesoudi (2011) argues that individuals raised in distinct societies display different patterns of thinking and behavior to those from different societies, owing to the acquisition of distinct cultural values and beliefs. These phenomena are observable, such as the presence of numerous spoken languages worldwide, diverse cuisines comprising different tastes and ingredients, varied music, and a multitude of art forms covering different genres.

The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition/CARLA, (2019) defines culture as common patterns of conduct and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective comprehension that individuals acquire through socialization. Culture is the fundamental value

system that characterizes certain groups, transmitting from generation to generation through social interaction. Additionally, culture is dynamic as it follows the trends of the community that practices it. According to Shennan (2009), cultural transmission follows a system of "descent with modification", where cultural norms and beliefs inherited from the previous generation undergo various customizations. Therefore, culture changes during the transmission process, and there are numerous things that might have an impact on culture.

Local wisdom

The national culture of Indonesia is a collection of various traditional cultures from different regions, which together form the unified identity of the country. According to Pappas and McKelvie (2022), social habits are one of the elements or activities of culture. Social habits may take various forms, such as wedding ceremonies, processions, and feast ceremonies. Wedding ceremonies and processions are carried out by every community. However, the activities comprising the ceremony and procession are unique and different from those of other groups within the community. Such uniqueness is the result of the local values and beliefs possessed by the community, which influence the activities. These values are commonly referred to as local wisdom. Values are concepts that are considered good or worthy by a particular community, originating from the shared beliefs of that community (Purba et al., 2020). Hence, the manifestation of cultural activities among different societies varies, depending on the consensus among the members of the community.

Local wisdom is a type of knowledge that results from the crystallization of noble values within a community, which help regulate life in that community (Hunaepi & Firdaus, 2017; Naryatmojo, 2019; Purba et al., 2020; Sembiring et al., 2019). According to Pesurnay (2018), local wisdom is a social-communicative system within a culture that results in self-organization. This system is established due to the necessities of life, as well as to sustain, adapt to, and value the environment and society in which it exists. It can take the form of ideology or culture (Naryatmojo, 2019). Local wisdom can be divided into two categories: the first is the local wisdom related to interhuman relationships, and the second is local wisdom related to the relationship between humans and nature (Pesurnay, 2018). During social interactions, humans rely on local wisdom to respect each other and maintain harmony with

nature. Local wisdom functions to preserve the environment and ecosystem, resulting in balanced and harmonious relationships between humans and nature, as well as among individuals. Pesurnay (2018) goes on to say that in Indonesian philosophy, local wisdom denotes a mindset that people embrace and express through rituals and customary practices. Local wisdom also encompasses effective ways of living and the right path in life. According to this perspective, local wisdom is the outcome of centuries of spiritual development in interpersonal relations within similar cultural groups.

Cultural evolution

In his book "Cultural Evolution," Alex Masoudi (2011) mentions Darwin's idea of three preconditions that influence biological changes: variations, competition, and inheritance. Evidently, these three elements also have a role in cultural evolution, as variations prove that individuals differ in their views on faith, opinions on politics, knowledge of science, skills, and many other aspects. Regarding the second precondition, the consequences of competition include the extinction of various cultural customs and expressions. As for the third precondition, individuals learn values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge from other people through cultural transmission (Mesoudi 2011). Culture is a system in which what is inherited from the previous generations is modified by a variety of processes (Shennan, 2009). Thus, culture is dynamic, evolving in relatively slow motion. The resulting changes can be easily observed, particularly in the form of variations in societies' cultures.

Cultural activities in Lombok

Many cultures in Indonesia are shaped by traditional or local values that define the characteristics of communities (Naryatmojo, 2019). In Lombok, cultural activities commonly practiced by the local communities include *Nyongkolan*, *Maulidan*, *Begawe*, *Nyunatang*, *Molang Maliq/Ngurisan*, *Ngayu-ayu*, *Sorong Serah Aji Krama*, *Mandiq Kemanten*, *Bau Nyale*, and *Merariq* (IDN Times, 2022).

Nyongkolan is a traditional procession to escort the groom to his in-laws' house, typically accompanied by *Gendang Bleq* music. *Begawe* is a large banquet celebrated by the community, the tradition of inviting relatives to share prepared dishes; *Maulidan* marks the observance of the prophet Muhammad's birthday; *Nyunatang* is a procession for circumcising boys; *Molang Maliq* is

the naming ceremony for newborns; *Ngayu-ayu* is a custom expressing gratitude for a plentiful harvest. The tradition of carrying out these processes is done once every three years in Sembalun Village. *Sorong Serah Aji Krama* is a proposal tradition commonly performed in the process of proposing to the bride-to-be. *Mandiq Kemanten* is a tradition that involves bathing the bride-to-be before her marriage. *Bau Nyale* is a custom of catching sea worms known as *Nyale*, believed to be the incarnation of Princess Mandalika. *Merariq* is the process of taking the betrothed bride-to-be for marriage. In addition, there is a communal dining tradition called *Begibung* among the Sasak People of Lombok. Usually, this tradition is practiced during the *Begawe/Rowah* event. The people of Lombok are familiar with their many cultural activities. These activities are passed down through generations to ensure their conservation (IDN Times, 2022).

METHODS

The study employs a qualitative descriptive method. Multiple techniques were used for data collection, including observation, interview, and questionnaire. To collect data on cultural shifts during the COVID-19 in Lombok, the researchers conducted observations within the Lombok community to document cultural practices that continue to be performed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in Lombok society. To further validate the data of the observations, the researchers interviewed one of Lombok's culturalists, three traditional leaders, three village elders, and five indigenous villagers from Lombok. The researchers selected the interviewees on the basis of their direct involvement in cultural activities and their role as cultural practitioners. The study also utilized a questionnaire to collect data on the kind of cultural activities that were most observed and involved by the respondents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was in the form of a Google Form, which was distributed through WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram groups. The data from the questionnaire was utilized to corroborate the data obtained from observation and interviews. Finally, the researchers analyzed data on cultural shifts during COVID-19 obtained through observation, interviews, and questionnaires. Then identified findings that address the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cultural activities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, there were many cultural activities in Lombok. Those activities often involved large groups of individuals. These cultural activities play an essential role in the tourism industry of the region. They are utilized to welcome and entertain guests and visitors to Lombok. As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, the government has delayed most crowd-related activities, including cultural events organized by the local community. In Lombok, several community groups are disregarding or are indifferent to the government's appeal. Therefore, the community in Lombok is still conducting three main cultural activities, such as *Nyongkolan*, *Begibung*, and *Maulidan* during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Nyongkolan

Nyongkolan is a traditional wedding ritual frequently carried out by the Sasak community in Lombok. The procession includes the groom's family and friends visiting the bride's parents' home. During the ceremony, the bride and groom are paraded ceremoniously. The ceremony is marked by an atmosphere of joy and is typically accompanied by *Gendang Bleq*, a traditional music of the Sasak tribe in Lombok. According to Hernawati et al., (2020), *Nyongkolan* aims to establish a relationship between the groom's family and the bride and to introduce the marriage to the community.

The *Nyongkolan* procession aims to introduce the bride and groom to the community, particularly where the bride resides, since traditionally, the groom carries out the wedding events (Munawir, 2020). During *Nyongkolan* tradition, the bride and groom are accompanied by *Sasak dedare-dedare* (girls), *terune-terune* (boys), as well as religious leaders, community leaders, or traditional leaders, together with their relatives, as they parade around the village. To take part in the procession, the participants must wear traditional Lombok clothing such as *Baju Lambung* or *kebaya*. Additionally, they should adorn themselves with *Kereng Nine* or *Songket* cloth, a bun, and other accessories (Hernawati et al., 2020; Munawir, 2020).

Generally, the *Nyongkolan* procession is not mandatory, and the bride's parents do not require the groom and his family to organize it. In some areas of Lombok; however, the *Nyongkolan* procession is mandatory, as it is believed to uphold the prestige of both families -the groom and the bride. In some communities, a feast is considered

sufficient to express gratitude for the successful wedding event, where relatives and close neighbors are invited. Alternatively, in some Lombok communities, the groom's family visits the bride's family to express gratitude for the wedding, not wearing traditional outfits or performing *Gendang Beleq* music, but bringing some traditional snacks, fruits, and other crops to give to the bride's parents and family. The *Nyongkolan* procession has educational values that can be learned from. Munawir (2020), notes that the *Nyongkolan* Procession has educational values, including responsibility, socializing, bonding, togetherness, building relationships, and the value of working with each other.

Begibung or Ngandang Dulang

Begibung is the eating together of the Sasak community during the feast of *Begawe* or *Rowah*. The dishes and rice are served in a large tray for a group of three, four, or five people to share. The dishes served in a large tray are called *Dulang*. Interestingly, in *Begibung*, there is an unwritten rule that the dishes on the large tray should not be consumed entirely, but shared with friends on the same tray. Plastic bags are already placed on the tray to wrap the remains of dishes. *Begibung* or *Ngandang Dulang* originates from the Sasak language, where *Ngandang* and *Dulang* have specific meanings. *Ngandang* means to face something while sitting cross-legged, while *Dulang* refers to dishes (Abi, 2021). Literally, *Ngandang Dulang* means sitting cross-legged in front of dishes. Sitting cross-legged is considered polite in the Sasak community. This sitting position reflects the community's grateful attitude toward the sustenance provided by God. *Begibung* reinforces the values of togetherness and brotherhood, which promote a culture of mutual cooperation and helping others (Mansyur, 2005).

Maulidan

Maulidan is an event where the host prepares food and invites family, friends, and colleagues to share it. *Maulidan* is derived from the Arabic word *Maulud*, which means 'birth' (Mansyur, 2005). Among the Sasak people, *Maulidan* is a celebration of the birth of the prophet Muhammad. This event is part of a series of commemorative events marking the birthday of the prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). *Maulidan* is conducted during the month of *Rabiul Awwal* which is the third month of the Islamic calendar. Prophet Muhammad was born on the 12th of *Rabiul Awwal* in the year 571 AD. The Muslim community celebrates *Maulidan* from the

12th to the 30th of *Rabiul Awwal*. Every region in Lombok celebrates *Maulidan* in a unique way. For example, in Bayan Village, located in the North Lombok region, they name it *Maulid Adat* and celebrate it for two days with various cultural activities and several villages in the eastern region of Lombok hold *Maulidan* only in mosques. In the central and western regions of Lombok, on the other hand, most communities hold *Maulidan* both in mosques and in community houses. The community leader invites other leaders and people from neighboring villages. They then read religious remarks (*Selakaran*) and have the dishes together. In the community houses, they invite their relatives, neighbors, and friends to come and have various dishes prepared by the hosts. According to Mansyur (2005), *Maulidan* is motivated by some traditional fanaticisms, including the historical belief of the Sasak community that Prophet Muhammad was instrumental in building a new world civilization. Theological motivation stems from the instruction of Islamic scholars to maintain good traditions such as this *Maulid*, while philosophical-sociological motivation contains the values that strengthen friendship and togetherness. This *Maulidan* is marked by the tradition of inviting close friends and relatives.

The trend of cultural shifts

Hernawati et al., (2020) state that *Nyongkolan* tradition began to change from its sacred social function to mere entertainment and efforts to preserve the tradition. Hernawati et al., (2020), identified four factors that contribute to the shift of *Nyongkolan* from its main function. These include the acculturation and assimilation of cultures, an advanced formal education system, globalization, and other socioeconomic factors. However, they did not consider a pandemic as one of the factors that can influence the *Nyongkolan* tradition, among others. During the COVID-19 pandemic in Lombok, *Nyongkolan* activities have been scaled back in terms of the activities involved in the procession, the number of participants, and the event agendas. In normal circumstances before the COVID-19 pandemic, the procession was accompanied by *Gendang Beleq* or *Kecimol* music. Also, the number of participants is relatively numerous, given that this activity is attended not only by immediate and extended families but also by people residing in the same locality or village.

Conversely, during the pandemic, the agenda has been simplified to include only the most important and relevant items. The aim of this is to prevent overcrowding and direct contact between individuals.

In *Begibung* or *Ngandang Dulang*, traditional activities that typically involve large gatherings have been simplified due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The host prepares the food, dishes, and traditional snacks in paper boxes and places them in plastic bags. After the main ritual is completed and it is time for the meal, the host distributes packages containing food, dishes, and traditional snacks to the participants. The participants do not consume the food, dishes, and snacks on site; rather, they take them home to share with their families. If the hosts decide to have a *Begibung*, they will likely invite a limited number of guests. During the event, every guest is served food and side dishes, with a separate plate provided for each person to eat on site. This method is considered effective in preventing large crowds and physical contact with others.

Similar to *Nyongkolan* and *Begibung*, *Maulidan* was modified in its implementation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Under normal circumstances, *Maulidan* includes pre-*Maulidan* and while-*Maulidan* activities. During pre-*Maulidan*, villagers organize multiple competitions, including *Adzan* Competition, Muslim Fashion Show, and Speech Contest to enliven the event. During the while-*Maulidan*, there is a lecture given by religious leaders in the mosques, while in the community houses, there is a banquet for guests such as close and distant family, friends, co-workers, and others invited by the host. During the COVID-19 pandemic, pre-*Maulidan* activities were eliminated, while the lecture by religious leaders in the mosques was eliminated in some villages, while some still conducted it but with a limited number of participants and the duration was also shortened. Moreover, the number of guests invited on the day of *Maulidan* was limited. This was done to avoid large crowds and due to austerity measures.

Cultural activities in post-COVID-19

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and questionnaires, *Nyongkolan* activities are being conducted normally after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The processions, number of participants, and agendas are being conducted as they were before the pandemic outbreak. The community argues that there is no longer a need to worry about crowds since COVID-19 no longer

exists as an infectious disease. They are also confident as most of them have received the COVID-19 vaccine. Similarly, the *Maulidan* after COVID-19 is being conducted by the community in Lombok as before the pandemic. Before the main *Maulidan* activity, the committee organizes several contests and competitions which involve mostly children and teenagers. The main activity of *Maulidan* is a lecture by a religious leader in the mosque, followed by inviting many guests, such as family, relatives, and friends, to the community houses. Nevertheless, we discovered a new fact related to *Begibung* or *Ngandang Dulang*. After the COVID-19 pandemic ends, in some areas, *Begibung* event returned to its original form. However, in several communities, the modified version of *Begibung* due to COVID-19 is still being practiced in the post-pandemic. During the pandemic, food, dishes, and snacks were packed for guests to take home or served on individual plates rather than being laid out on a big tray for sharing by three or four people. The group that maintains *Begibung* method favors it for its efficiency and effectiveness in reducing the number of dirty plates, bowls, and trays that need to be cleaned after the *Begibung* event.

CONCLUSION

Several cultural activities, including *Nyongkolan*, *Begibung/Ngandang Dulang*, and *Maulidan*, have been customized in different ways to adapt to their particular aspects, such as pre-activities and processes during the events. For instance, in *Nyongkolan*, the activities and agenda during the procession are shortened, and the number of participants joining the procession is limited. However, in the post-COVID-19 the procession is conducted normally like before the pandemic. In *Begibung/Ngandang Dulang*, the practice of having meals together on-site is eliminated. Instead, the food, dishes, and traditional snacks are packed by the host and then shared with the guests to take home. Yet, in the post-COVID-19, *Begibung* is commonly conducted normally though several communities still maintain the way that they modified during the pandemic. In *Maulidan*, the pre-activities before the main event day have been removed from the agenda. Additionally, the number of participants attending the lecture in selected mosques, as well as the number of guests invited to the banquet, has been limited. Conversely, after the pandemic ends the *Maulidan* is conducted normally. The first aim is to implement the government's measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic outbreak. In conclusion, the cultural shift in Lombok can be seen as an adaptation of cultural

activities to the temporary situation. In fact, after the COVID-19 pandemic disappeared, the community gradually resumed the cultural activities they had before the pandemic. However, a few community groups continue to practice *Begibung* in the way when it was still pandemic, by packing the food and dishes for guests to take home because they consider it more effective and efficient.

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