

AN ANALYSIS OF CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS IN KUPANG, NTT: TRADITIONS AND MEANINGS

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Abstract: This study aims to reveal the tradition and meaning in Christmas celebrations in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), with an ethnographic approach. Christmas in Kupang is not only celebrated as a religious event, but also as an important moment that reflects the fusion of Christian teachings and local culture. In this study, the authors used participatory observation methods and in-depth interviews to identify the cultural elements involved in Christmas celebrations, as well as the social and cultural meanings contained within them. The findings of the study show that Christmas celebrations in Kupang not only include religious rituals, but are also complemented by local cultural symbols, such as traditional dances, traditional songs, and special foods that create an interaction between religion and culture. Christmas celebrations in Kupang reflect the social identity of its people who value cultural and religious diversity in their daily lives.

Keyword: Culture, Christmas, Kupang, NTT, Ethnography, Tradition, Religious Meaning

INTRODUCTION

Kupang, as the capital of East Nusa Tenggara Province (NTT), has a unique historical and social background, with the majority of the population being Christian. Christmas celebrations in Kupang have a very deep meaning, both from a religious and cultural perspective. Christmas is not only seen as a commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ, but also as an important moment to celebrate the distinctive social and cultural identity of the Kupang people.

NTT, which is made up of various tribes, such as Timor, Rote, Sabu, and Alor, has strong customary traditions, which are often combined with Christian teachings in Christmas celebrations. In Kupang, Christmas celebrations become an arena where local religions and cultures meet, forming religious practices rich in symbolism and cultural values. This makes Christmas in Kupang different from Christmas celebrations in other regions of Indonesia that may be more focused on religious rituals only.

Social Media and Culture, Social media has become an important arena for cultural exchange, including in terms of religious celebrations. Several studies state that social media not only functions as a communication platform, but also as a space to maintain and transmit culture (Agarwal et al., 2013). In the context of Indonesia, especially in NTT, social media is a forum for people to share stories and images that show how they celebrate their traditions and religion, including Christmas.

Social Media Ethnography, Social media ethnography is a method to study social and cultural practices that exist in virtual spaces through observation of interactions, shared content, and discourse that develops on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Hine, 2015). Ethnographic research on social media provides a deeper understanding of how cultural and religious identities are maintained and practiced in cyberspace.

Christmas Celebrations in Indonesia, Christmas in Indonesia, especially in areas with a majority of Christians such as in NTT, always has distinctive local cultural elements. According to research by R. O'Neil (2003), Christmas celebrations in Indonesia are often influenced by local customs, which include the use of traditional music, dance, and regional symbols. These traditions can vary between regions, but similarities emerge in the importance of family and community togetherness in celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.

Christmas Culture in Kupang, NTT, Kupang, as a city rich in traditional traditions and Christianity, offers an interesting example of how local culture influences Christmas celebrations. Previous research by A. Soekanto (2010) showed that Christmas celebrations in Kupang involve various elements of local culture, such as the use of traditional clothing, dances, and regional songs, mixed with Christian religious processions. In this context, Christmas is not only a religious celebration, but also a celebration of the cultural identity of the Kupang people.

METHOD

The quantitative method in this study is used to measure and analyze the spread of Christmas celebrations on social media. Researchers used data from social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to count the number of posts containing Christmas-related hashtags, such as #NatalKupang, #NatalNTT, and others. In addition, interactions such as the number of likes, comments, and shares are also counted to see how far this Christmas celebration has received attention on social media.

The ethnographic approach of social media was used to analyze the visual and narrative content shared by social media users in Kupang related to Christmas celebrations. Researchers identified various elements of local culture in images, videos, and texts shared by users, such as traditional clothing, typical foods, and traditional activities that emerged during Christmas celebrations.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Religious Rituals and Local Culture

The Christmas celebration in Kupang begins with a service in the church, where Christians gather to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. After that, many families and communities hold celebrations at home or in their neighborhoods. In this celebration, traditional dances such as *the maumere dance* and *the dolom dance* are often performed as an expression of gratitude. In addition, special foods such as *grilled fish* and *sago* are also part of the celebration, which shows the influence of local culture in Christmas celebrations.

Christmas Symbolism and Meaning

Symbols such as Christmas trees, candles, and stars that symbolize light and hope are often adorned with elements of local culture, such as traditional wood carvings. The people of Kupang consider Christmas as a moment to strengthen family and community relationships. The tradition of giving gifts to each other and sharing food is also an important part of the celebration.

Integration of Local Religion and Culture

The Christmas celebration in Kupang reflects a harmonious blend of Christian teachings and local culture. Cultural elements such as dances, songs, and traditional foods are a means to convey religious messages in a more familiar and relevant way for the people of Kupang. This reflects the concept of "religion in culture" where religious teachings are adapted and practiced in the context of local culture.

Social Dynamics in Christmas Celebrations

Christmas in Kupang is not only about religious rituals, but also about strengthening social bonds. Family, friends, and neighbors gather to celebrate Christmas together. This shows that Christmas celebrations also serve as a medium to maintain and strengthen social relationships in the midst of a pluralistic society.

CONCLUSION

The Christmas celebration in Kupang, NTT, is an interesting example of how local culture can interact with religious practices. The tradition and meaning of Christmas celebrations in Kupang not only reflect the religious aspect, but also display the rich local culture that lives in the community. This research shows that Christmas celebrations in Kupang have a double meaning: as a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ and as a cultural celebration that strengthens the social and cultural identity of the Kupang people.

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