

COMPROMISE IN TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES: A CASE STUDY OF THE *RAMBU SOLO*' CEREMONY IN *TORAJA* REGENCY

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The *rambu solo*' ceremony is a traditional death ceremony of the *Tana Toraja* regency with roots in local beliefs. However, over time, the tradition has become associated with social status and economic motives. These changes have led to many issues. This article analyses the motivations that drive the compromises that families must accept when selecting a form of *rambu solo*'.

Methodology: This was a case study conducted in the village of *Lemo* in the regency of *Tana Toraja*. Primary data collected through in-depth interviews and observation. Informants consisted of cultural figures, religious figures, and indigenous locals with experience performing *rambu solo*' — secondary data taken from existing literature about *Toraja* Regency.

Main Findings: Results showed that compromises taken for motives of social status were irrational but comprised the most common reasoning behind *rambu solo*' ceremony selection. For those families motivated by social status, choice of *rambu solo*' ceremony form performed for one of two reasons: preserving their social status ascribed to them from birth (attributed status)

Applications of this study: The selection of non-*rapasanrambu solo*' ceremonies based on economic motives were rationally-sound but relatively rare. Avoiding wastefulness in the performing of *rambu solo*' is done through simplifying the procession through shortening the storage period of the remains of the deceased before the *rambu solo*' reducing the number of days of the *rambu solo*' ceremony.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This shows that irrational decision-making, in the context of traditional ceremonies, cannot be considered irrational; even irrational decisions can be justified and explained based on individual interpretations of rationality based on local culture. Interestingly, social status was the most common motive form selection based on economic motives were rational but less popular among the people sound choice theory

Keywords: *Compromise, Social status motives, Economic motives, Rambu solo', Indonesia.*

INTRODUCTION

Every ethnic group in the world has its ceremonies for death. These traditions represent firmly-held values, and cultural identities manifested into a ritual. As an example, many African ethnicities consider death a uniting event for family and friends separated by vast distances. They believe that failing to attend and participate in a funeral will lead to the ancestors cursing them with lousy fortune and malady (Baloyi, 2014). Keening, an old tradition from Ireland and Gaelic Scotland, is a traditional form of mourning constituted of open weeping and vocal lament over the deceased before burial. Open mourning before the keen is looked down upon (Newton & Huges, 2008).

Rambu solo' is a unique death ceremony found in the region of *Tana Toraja* in Indonesia. *Rambu solo*' is considered a manifestation of the life philosophy of the *Toraja* people (Kobong, 2008). According to Mohammad Natsir Sitonda (2007), the *aluk todolo* faith, the traditional religion of the *Toraja* people, considers the *rambu solo*' ceremony a form of honoring the deceased. It is a procession for escorting the spirit of the dead to the spirit realm where they will unite with their ancestors. *Rambu solo*' is a perfection ritual; one has only indeed died when the procession has reached completion, at which point the deceased has achieved to-*membalipuang* status. Those who have become to *membalipuang* will then become a *deata* (guardian god) who delivers blessings to their descendants.

As described above, *rambu solo*' was originally a ceremony based in *aluk todolo* faith. However, over time, these religious motives were replaced by social status and economic purposes. This transformation is suspected to be a result of the spreading of Christianity and improved education in the area. This phenomenon is explained by social, cultural change theory as diffusion (McLeish, 1969). Social and cultural changes can lead to the transformation of ritual motives. In the case of *rambu solo*', social and cultural causes necessitate compromise between members of the family of the deceased.

Several previous studies have conducted on *rambu solo*'. That *Toraja* society assigns greater prestige to those that sacrifice large numbers of buffaloes during *rambu solo*' (Warren, 1985) — discovered that social position and individual wealth determined the ceremony form of *rambu solo*' (Nooy-Palm, 1986). The people of *Toraja* perform *rambu solo*' as a form of adherence and honouring local tradition (Kabanga, 2002). Noted a significant shift in the meaning of the *rambu solo*' ceremony from a purely religious ritual to one that mostly conducted for social and cultural motives (Ranteallo, 2007) — observed that modern *Toraja* tends to perform *rambu solo*' in the interest of social status. Contemporary *rambu solo*' can

be excessive and wasteful and no longer under cultural tradition (Kobong, 2008). Discovered that basic personal needs such as survival, love, belonging, power, and freedom were the primary driving factors underlying *rambu solo*'. However, the economic burden of performing *rambu solo*' is a significant pressure that they must face in doing so (Marwing, 2011). Found that the number of buffaloes sacrificed for the *Toraja rambutuka*' and *rambu solo*' ceremonies were no longer dictated by the mourning family's social caste, as strictly defined by rules of local tradition (Sirajuddin, Baba & Andilolo, 2013). They observed that *rambu solo*' has significant potential for sparking conflict but also serves as a uniting event in *Toraja* society, in part due to the local value of *Tongkonan*, which strongly disapproves of familial conflict (Panggara, 2014).

As evident from the above, anthropological scholarship has directed much of its effort towards observing the transformation of *Toraja* culture and values, with no lack of focus on how such changes have affected *rambu solo*'. However, there is a notable lack of academic study on the motives that underlay the compromises that families must consider when selecting a form of *rambu solo*' to perform in honoring the deceased. This study aims to provide a foundation for understanding the social and economic compromises that motivate the selecting of *rambu solo*' ceremony form.

METHODOLOGY

A case study (Neuman, 2011) conducted in the village of *Lemo* regency of *TanaToraja*. Primary data collected through in-depth interviews and observation (Spadley, 1980). Informants consisted of cultural figures, religious figures, and indigenous locals with experience performing *rambu solo*'. Secondary data are taken from existing literature about *Toraja*. The two motives that drive the selection of *rambu solo*' ceremony selected for this research are: social status and economic health. These were the two primary motives that steered the ceremony form selection process among *Toraja* families and determined the compromises *Toraja* families must accept in successfully conducting *rambu solo*'. Compromise is a sociological concept and is a form of accommodation in which involved parties must agree, reducing their demands in the interest of achieving a solution (Soekanto, 1998). *Rambu solo*' ceremony forms can be divided into two distinct categories: *rapasan* and non-*rapasan*. Non-*rapasan* ceremony forms include *diallungbongi* (sacrifice of 3-5 buffaloes), *dilimangbongi* (6-11 buffaloes), and *dipitungbongi* (12-17 buffaloes). *Rapasan* ceremony forms include: *rapasanlayu-layu* (sacrifice 18-23 buffaloes), *rapasansundun* (24-50 buffaloes), and *rapasansapurandanan* (51 or more buffaloes) the motives underlying selection of *rambu solo*' ceremony form will be analyzed using rational choice theory (Coleman, 1994).

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

Social Status and *Rambu solo*' Ceremony Form

Informant (AK.M) told the writer of the 16 times they performed *rambu solo*' the *rapasansapuarndanan* and *rapasansundun* forms. In total, solely responsible for paying for the sacrifice of 102 buffaloes and around 300 pigs. Based on social caste, it can say that their choice to perform *rapasan* was a most emotional one. Both parents were of the *tana' bulaan* caste (high noble). A hat is an identity for men as a crown of honor. In addition to reflecting one's prowess, caps are also often used as a symbol of the traditional and cultural identity of a region (Yusriadi, Tahir, Farida, Sakkir, & Akbar, 2019)

According to the informant (K.M), as a member of *Toraja* society, their actions and behavior should follow traditional rules, so long as such laws don't conflict with one's religion. Informant (K.M), when asked to recount the story of when they performed *rambu solo*' for their deceased father, explained:

"I performed the rambu solo' ceremony for my mother and father as fitting for high nobles. I chose to perform the rapasansapurandanan for my father and rapasansundun for my mother as befitting their social status as puang. As their child, despite the significant economic burden, labored to perform these ceremonies as my obligation and form of reverence to my two parents".

In the case of the informant (K.M) parents, the selection of ceremony form was motivated by social status based on ascribed status informant and the family accepted heavy economic burden as a compromise in the interest of performing *sapurandanan* and *rapasansundun*, a choice they deemed a necessity based on tradition and their social status as high nobles.

The informant (S.P) explained their experience performing *rambu solo*' for their deceased mother in 2004 in the region of *Tambolang* (a community of nobles in *Lemo* village): As a non-noble commoner, informant (S.P) went to great efforts to be able to perform *rapasansundun*, involving the sacrifice of 25 buffaloes and 300 pigs. Informant (S.P) explained their reason for selecting the *rapasansundun* ceremony form:

"I performed rapasansundun to showcase my love for my deceased mother. Also, I did it for all the good it does and for the honor, which in the Toraja language known as "nalliankikameloankaleta sola taruksiosso'ta, nadipopa'dokkomelotutoma'parentsia to ma'lalanada' (striving to do good for oneself and one's descendants, reverence to the government and community figures)."

Informant (S.P) case is an example of a ceremony form selection motivated by social status motives. Though informant

(S.P) does not come from a noble family, they and their family agreed to compromise their economic health to perform *rapasansundun*. Informant (S.P) and their family made a deliberate effort to attain achieved status through this. Tradition strictly disallows this, but modern development of social and cultural values has made such means of achieving social status a possibility within specified limits. Shows that social caste in modern *Toraja* culture is no longer rigidly assigned from birth based on generational inheritance, but may also achieve through manual effort.

Another case provided by an informant (D.S), a retired teacher from *Tambolang*. Informant (D.S) and their family performed *rambu solo*' for her deceased husband in 2010 in the sub-district of *Lemo*. As a person of *Tambolang* descent, informant (D.S) made efforts to implement *rapasan*, involving the sacrifice of 18 buffaloes and 80 pigs. Informant (D.S)' reason for doing so was her husband's status as to *parengnge* in the region of Pay. To *parengnge* are considered prominent local customary figures, traditional leaders who are essential decision-makers in cultural rituals, responsible for upholding the ordinary laws of *Toraja* society. To *parengnge* are entitled to *bukuleso* (a distributed portion of meat) from cultural ceremonies performed in their region.

Informant (D.S)' children initially requested a simple *rambu solo*' ceremony for informant (D.S)' deceased husband, *dilimangbongi* (9 buffaloes sacrificed). Informant (D.S), as the widow of the dead, did not agree with such plans. Informant (D.S) demanded *rapasan* for her deceased husband. This caused her to go to great lengths to convince her children and other family members to gain support for her demands. These efforts were ultimately successful, as informant (D.S) explained:

"I reminded my children that their father cared for them and paid for their education from childhood to adulthood. He left a sufficiently large inheritance for them, and they must make an effort to show their love and reverence to him through the performing of rambusolo'rapasan. After all, this ceremony will only be performed once for him. Ultimately, my children and other family members agreed to perform rapasanlayu-layu by sacrificing 18 buffaloes".

Informant (D.S)' story described a successful compromise between D.S. and their family in selecting the *rapasanlayu-layu* ceremony form of *rambu solo*'. Her wish to perform a *rapasan* for her deceased husband achieved. It can conclude that the motives for the *rambu solo*' were a personal wish to display the social status of informant (D.S)' family as *tana'bassi* (mid-level nobles). The three informants above all performed *rambusolo'rapasan* at a high financial cost to preserve social status. According to rational choice theory, this is not a sensible choice. Society changes from a single society ([Gani, Arsyad, Hadi, & Yusriadi, 2019](#))

Economic Motives and *Rambu solo*' Ceremony Form Selection

For this study, motives of financial health are those that result in frugal actions; in other words, a commercial reason, as defined here, is a motive that leads to avoidance of economically reckless conflicts ([Gilarso, 2014](#)). Avoiding wastefulness in the performing of *rambu solo*' is done through simplifying the procession through: shortening the storage period of the remains of the deceased before the *rambu solo*', reducing the number of days of the *rambu solo*' ceremony, reducing the number of *lantang* (ceremonial huts) built for accommodating guests during the service, reducing the number of buffaloes sacrificed (through selecting a lower form of *rambu solo*'), and completely ignoring the prestige factor associated with *rambu solo*'. Only possible if a family can agree to a ceremony form of smaller scale and make the conscious effort to cut down on wastefulness.

Informant (Y.P), a member of the *tana' bassi* caste from the area of *Tambolang* (a region of nobles in *Lemo*) explained that they were financially capable of affording *rapasan*. Informant (Y.P) performed *rambu solo*' for their deceased husband, informant (S.P), in the village of *Lemo* on February 13, 2014. Informant (S.P) was a former headmaster of the senior secondary school of business and commerce in Makale and former head of the Department of Education and Culture of the Regency of *TanaToraja*. Having attained such high positions in society, the deceased categorized as *tomakaka* from the social caste of *tana' bassi* (mid-level noble).

Considering his social status and personal accomplishments, tradition says that informant S.P. would have been deserving of a *rapasan*. However, the informant (S.P)'s wife and children agreed to perform a non-*rapasan*. Their reasoning for selecting a non-*rapasan* for informant (S.P) as explained by an informant (Y.P):

"At the start, our extended family insisted on a rapasan, considering the social status and position in society during his lifetime, but my children and I chose to perform dipitungbongi involving the sacrificing of 1-3 buffaloes. When he was still with us, he requested a simple ceremony upon his death".

Informant (Y.P)'s story describes economically motivated decision-making. Shows that Y.P. and her family had to come to a compromise before agreeing upon a non-*rapasan* ceremony form for her deceased husband. Informant (Y.P) and her family prioritized economic health over social status. Another compelling case is that of informant (P.P), the democratically-elected Head of the Institution of Culture of the sub-district of Lion *TondokIring*. Informant (P.P)'s position meant they had achieved the status of *makaka* and could categorized as *tana' bassi*. Informant (P.P) has performed *rambu solo*' four times, each time opting for a non-*rapasan* ceremony form. The number of animals sacrificed was also relatively low, seven buffaloes, and less than 30 pigs. Considering informant (P.P)'s status as a civil servant and their

father's condition as *siambe'*, tradition dictates informant (P.P) should have performed *rapasan* for both his mother and father upon their passing. However, informant (P.P) and their extended family agreed to a compromise that resulted in them performing non-*rapasan*.

further explained by an informant (P.P):

"My family and I have performed rambu solo' four times: dilimangbongi for my father in 1983, dilimangbongi for my mother in 1995, dilimangbongi for my father-in-law in 1998, and dilimangbongi for my mother-in-law in 2009. If we consider the social status of my father as siambe', both my parents would have been deserving of a rapasan, but my family and I agreed not to do so. We prioritized the financial needs of our children's education and other household needs".

Informant (P.P)'s explanation above describes an economically-motivated action. Shows that P.P. and their extended family agreed to a compromise resulting in non-*rapasan* ceremony form, *dilimangbongi* (two levels below *rapasan*). Informant (P.P) and their family prioritized economic health over social status. Informant (F.D) is a former village head. Informant (F.D)'s father held the state of *parengnge* in the area of *Mariali* in the region of *Bungin*. As the village head, informant (F.D) could categorize as *tana' bassi*. Informant (F.D) performed *rambu solo'* twice; both ceremonies were non-*rapasan*. According to tradition, F.D.'s father status as *parengnge* would call for *rapasan* services for both informant (F.D)'s father and mother. However, informant (F.D) opted not to do so informant (F.D) explains:

"Considering my father's status as parengnge, naturally, I wanted to perform rambusolo'rapasan for my mother and father; however, our economic situation made that impossible. With my income as a farmer and the financial needs of six children, it would not be enough".

Informant (F.D)'s story is an example of a reality that is unavoidable for many Toraja families. For this reason, tradition allows concessions for selecting a lower *rambu solo'* ceremony that is affordable to the family of the deceased. Listed the types of *rambu solo'* that may be performed with considerations for the economic capability of a mourning family are:

1. *Aluk sang bongi* (1-2 buffaloes sacrificed) for all *tana'*.
2. *Aluktallungbongi* involving the sacrifice of 3-5 buffaloes for *tana' karurung* or 4-5 buffaloes for *tana' bassi*.
3. *Aluklimangbongi* (6-11 buffaloes) for *tana' bassi* and *tana' bulaan*.

Informant (F.D) selected a secondary form of *rambu solo'* ceremony, one that was affordable considering the financial situation of their family. Choosing a secondary form of *rambu solo'* is also a compromise accepted by an informant (F.D) and their family. Informant (F.D) and their family could have forced a *rapasan* considering the social status of the deceased but opted not to do so due to an inability to afford it informant (F.D) explains:

"If my family and I had forced ourselves to perform rapasan for my mother and father, we could have done so by selling our assets or taking out a loan from the bank. We did not do so. We agreed that dilimangbongi for my father and mother was all that we could afford. We are proud that we did not have to resort to selling our assets or borrowing money."

Informant (F.D)'s story is an example of choice-making with an economic motive. Informant (F.D) and their family made a compromise to perform a non-*rapasan* (*ditallungbongi*) in the interest of financial health. Informant (F.D) presented a simple *rambu solo'*, ignoring social status, to conduct an affordable ceremony. Informant (F.D) and their family prioritized economic health over social status. The three informants above performed non-*rapasan* forms of *rambu solo'* for economic motives; they all wanted to reduce costs. In rational choice theory, this constitutes a sensible choice.

Conciliation of Social Status and Economic Health in Ceremony Form Selection

Informant (J.P) wanted traditional rules that regulate *rambu solo'* procedure to adjust for current circumstances. At the time of writing, the informant (J.P) was the Head of the Institution for Culture in the District of North *Makale*. According to the informant (J.P), he performed *rambu solo'* four times informant (J.P) was personally responsible for the costs of 21 buffaloes and more than 42 pigs. Informant (J.P) found this situation somewhat burdensome and asked for a compromise involving the loosening of traditional rules with regards to *rambu solo'*. Informant (J.P) explains:

"Rambu solo' is quite a heavyweight to bear as it revolves around a large-scale event that is quite costly. For example, for tana' bulaan, the cost is 24 or more buffaloes, tana' bassi must sacrifice 12-18 buffaloes, tana' karurung must sacrifice 5-11 buffaloes, tana' kua-kuamuset sacrifice 1-4 buffaloes. For this reason, there should be a negotiation of tradition with the possibility of reducing the cost of this tradition through a community forum known as kombongankalua."

Informant (J.P)'s a description of *rambu solo'* as a burdensome due to its high cost is an example of the demand for compromise with regards to tradition. Compromise in the context of this particular case is defined as the lowering of traditional applications with consideration for other needs for livelihood. These additional needs include costs of education, health, and recreation. According to the informant (J.P):

"*Rambu solo*' should be preserved as it is a cultural phenomenon that is representative of the *Toraja* spirit of togetherness. Spirit of affection is evident in the *rambu solo*' procession. Family and friends all pitch in to share the financial burden of providing animals for sacrifice, ceremonial huts (*lantang*) are built to accommodate guests, and all present at the ceremony escort the remains of the deceased to their final resting place. However, the social aspect of *rambu solo*' is not reason enough to sacrifice the economic well-being of the mourning family. Thus, the unwritten laws that state that *rambu solo*' should be performed as befitting one's 'ability' should be reconsidered in favor of a form of *rambu solo*' ceremony that favors 'simplicity' by removing *rapasan* entirely and specifying a minimum number of animals for sacrifice."

Informant (J.P) describes demand for conciliation between social status and economic health. Informant (J.P), as head of the Institution for Culture, has attempted to outline a potential compromise that would result in a simplified version of *rambu solo*' without sacrificing the values the ceremony represents. *Rambu solo*' is a form of expressing reverence to the deceased and showing appreciation to the community and government. According to rational choice theory, this would categorize as a sensible choice. An effective must have advanced planning for human resource (Yusriadi, 2018)

CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of this study showed that families must accept some compromises in order to conduct *rambu solo* successfully'. For those families motivated by social status, selection of *rambu solo*' ceremony form performed for one of two reasons: preserving their social status ascribed to them from birth (ascribed status) or a desire to be accepted into a higher social caste through deliberate effort (achieved status). Meanwhile, families motivated by economic health made their selections for at least one of the following reasons: a conscious effort to reduce the financial burden of *rambu solo*', or an inability to afford more expensive forms of *rambu solo*' (typically mid- to low-income families). In such cases, these families accept the compromise of reducing the social glory they stand to reap from performing a *rapasan* ceremony for a non-*rapasan* service that is much more affordable. According to rational choice theory, social status motives underlying the selection of *rambu solo*' ceremony form are not reflective of logical choice. Trade is the activity of exchanging goods or services or both which based on an agreement, not coercion (Ansar, Farida, Yahya, & Yusriadi, 2019).

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

Interestingly, social status was a the most common motive behind *rambu solo*' ceremony form selection in *Toraja*. *Rambu solo*' ceremony form selections based on commercial purposes were rational but less popular among the *Toraja* people. Sound choice theory may explain why social action is ration or irrational independent of social and cultural context but is not particularly useful in describing reasoning when such factors are taken into consideration because of the requirements of a rational choice theory based on absolute measurements.

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