MULTI DISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Forum Kajian Pendidikan Keagamaan NTT
Jalan Elt Tari, KM 9, Desa Naiola, Kecamatan Bikomi Selatan, Kefamenanu
Home Page: https://multidisciplinaryjournal.ejurnal.org/index.php/mdj

OPEN ACCESS

The Meaning of the Sekaf Rite in the Tradition of the Haumen Tribe in Relation to the Sacrament of Marriage

Maria Jeniana Haumen[1)], Elmagondulfa Habu Lelo [2)] Wilibrordus Cornelis Usboko [3)]
Sekolah Tinggi Pastoral St. Petrus Keuskupan Atambua[1,2,3)]
marlindahaumen@gmail.com[1)] , Sr.elma50@gmail.com [2)] wilcousboko@gmail.com [3)]

Abstract

This study aims to understand the meaning of the values embodied in the Sekaf rite within the tradition of the Haumen Tribe, as well as to examine its relationship with the Sacrament of Marriage. The Sekaf tradition, a ritual of honoring a mother, is understood as a form of harmony between the families of the bride and groom. Through a qualitative descriptive approach employing interviews, observation, and documentation, this study found that the tradition functions not only as an inherited customary practice but also embodies strong values in fostering close familial relationships between men and women. In the context of the Sacrament of Marriage, the Sekaf tradition reflects Christian values of family harmony, in which prayer, faith, and culture complement one another in addressing marital challenges. The findings indicate that this tradition has the potential to strengthen relationships and express respect toward a mother when practiced properly according to customary norms; however, it may also hinder family harmony if implemented inappropriately. Overall, the Sekaf tradition serves as an inculturative medium that helps families understand the meaning of harmony, strengthen family relationships, and honor the mother's family, making it important to preserve and pass on to future generations.

Keywords: Sekaf Rite, Haumen Tribe Tradition, Sacrament of Marriage, Family Harmony

Introduction

Culture can be understood as the entirety of ways of life that develop and are collectively shared by a community. It encompasses various elements, including values, beliefs, customs, language, arts, and knowledge transmitted from one generation to another (A. Rachaman, 1973, p. 45). Culture is closely related to society as a group of individuals living together and forming the identity of a particular community or nation. In its development, culture continuously interacts with the surrounding environment and serves as a means for communities to address life's challenges through various forms of expression, such as art, music, dance, literature, and specific rituals.

According to Koentjaraningrat, custom (adat) constitutes a system of cultural values containing norms, rules, and practices that are accepted and preserved across generations within a society. Custom encompasses not only traditions and cultural values but also behavioral guidelines that regulate social relationships within the community. The relationship between society and custom is

deeply interconnected, as custom reflects the character of a social group and represents a collective expression that has been maintained across generations (Syaifuddin, 2018, pp. 135–140). Society itself may be understood as a group of individuals who live together within a particular territory and interact through systems of norms, values, culture, and shared objectives. Such interactions occur across various dimensions of life, including social, economic, and cultural aspects.

Tradition is a series of customs, norms, and values that are inherited from generation to generation within a particular tradition or community, reflecting the way of life of local culture. Customary traditions also encompass several aspects, including ritual ceremonies, celebrations, and rules governing social relationships, and play an important role in maintaining cultural identity within a group (Koentjaraningrat, 2005). The diversity of ethnic groups within society can form communities with distinct characteristics, such as tribes. A tribe is a social group that can be distinguished from other groups based on its culture and identity, particularly language. In other words, a tribe is a group of people bound by shared awareness and identity, which is usually reinforced by the use of a common language (Koentjaraningrat, 2021).

In Insana Induk District, Susulaku Village, there are various tribes, one of which is the Haumen tribe. Each tribe possesses distinct traditions or rituals. One of the traditions practiced by the Haumen tribe is Sekaf. The term *Sekaf* originates from the Dawan language, namely *"sekal,"* meaning "substitute" or "replacement"; therefore, *Sekaf* refers to replacing the role of the mother. The Sekaf tradition is carried out as a form of respect by the Haumen tribe toward ancestral customs inherited from their forebears. The Sekaf ritual tradition is exclusively performed by the first biological daughter, who is designated as the *Sekaf*. If this obligation is neglected, it is believed that misfortune may befall the family members.

The implementation of *Sekaf* begins with seeking blessings from the mother's brothers, followed by the offering of one pig symbolized as *faif ob metan* or a substitute for the mother's breast milk, which is presented to the *atoen amaf* in front of the traditional house. Subsequently, the ritual of *kaus nono tasaeb nono tusi* is conducted, during which the male lineage transfers its clan name to the female party and the children. For the mother, the transfer is symbolically performed from the head down to the shoulders, while for the children, they fully inherit the clan identity of the father's lineage. This ceremony involves the *atoen amaf* from both the female and male sides, who exchange coins and sprinkle water as a sign of the mother and children being released and transferred to the father's clan. Prior to the *kaus nono* and *tasaeb nono tusi* rituals, discussions regarding the *Sekaf* obligation are conducted. Once the matter has been determined, the *atoen amaf* from the woman's side grants permission for the woman and her children to be brought into the male lineage's clan.

The first daughter is appointed as the *Sekaf* for her mother, meaning that she remains within her mother's clan.

The *Sekaf* ritual tradition is not only practiced by the Haumen tribe but is also found in various other regions. One example can be found in West Sumatra, where a tradition involving the replacement of a mother's role or the continuation of maternal lineage exists, although its meaning differs. In West Sumatra, this tradition is known as *"Batagak Anak Dara,"* which refers to a substitute for a mother or a successor to the maternal lineage. The *Batagak Anak Dara* tradition is performed when a daughter reaches adulthood, generally between the ages of 15 and 20. However, there is no fixed age limit, and the ritual may be conducted once the daughter is considered ready to be introduced to society as a future mother and successor of the lineage. During the ceremony, the child is paraded and adorned with beautiful ornaments, circling the traditional house accompanied by traditional music and dance (Aprilliano, 2024).

The *Sekaf* ritual tradition is not only found in West Sumatra but also in the province of East Nusa Tenggara. The distinction lies in the social diversity of communities across the region, particularly among rural populations who strongly uphold traditions inherited from their ancestors, such as customary marriage rituals. In the community of Kuluan Village, Biboki Feotleu District, *Sekaf* or its equivalent is represented by a middle son (between the eldest and the youngest child). The selected *Sekaf* is typically male, with the consideration that when he eventually marries, he will continue to carry and pass down the mother's clan lineage (Nataliani Ketmoen, 2024, pp. 186–196).

The *Sekaf* tradition is closely connected to the sacrament of marriage because this tradition is not merely a customary practice but also reflects fidelity, responsibility, and mutual respect between husband and wife, as well as between both families, mediated through ancestral intercession in the ritual. Within the Catholic Church tradition, the sacrament of marriage teaches that marriage is a covenant in which both spouses mutually give and receive one another, sealed by God Himself. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that marriage is a sacred covenant between a man and a woman to live together for life. It is a sacrament that grants God's grace so that couples may love one another faithfully and remain open to children. The document of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, emphasizes that marriage and family are of utmost importance in society. Husbands and wives are called to love one another and educate their children in faith. Both partners are expected to support one another so that, through the values of marriage, married individuals may attain happiness and mutual respect. In this context, the *Sekaf* ritual tradition affirms that family bonds likewise reflect commitment and fidelity through marital values for the well-being and happiness of the family itself (C. Groenen, 1993).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* further teaches that the sacrament of marriage is a sacred covenant between a man and a woman, established by God and marked by an inseparable bond. Marriage, as a sacrament, is a holy union that unites spouses in enduring love, fidelity, and openness to new life. Although grieving families may experience sorrow, they do not grieve without hope. The values of unity, fidelity, fruitfulness, and holiness serve as the primary foundations for living a sacramental married life.

The sacrament of marriage not only establishes a family in an outward sense but also builds a strong and holy faith community. The *Sekaf* ritual represents participation in ancestral rites passed down through generations to strengthen and maintain close family relationships through prayers offered by traditional elders, seeking blessings from the ancestors for husband, wife, and children. The *Sekaf* ceremony becomes an experience that helps families understand the meaning of sacred marital vows, both in ecclesiastical life and in everyday living. It also strengthens relationships between husband and wife, as well as between both extended families, while reminding individuals of the importance of fidelity, commitment, responsibility, and family happiness.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. This method was used to describe and understand the meaning of the *Sekaf* ritual tradition among the Haumen tribe. The research was conducted from March to May 2025. The study took place in Susulaku A Village, Insana Induk District. The research subjects included traditional leaders, government officials, community leaders, and religious leaders.

The data sources used in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from informants through interviews and observations, while secondary data served as supplementary sources that did not directly provide data during the data collection process. The data were then analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

Results and Discussion

- The Meaning of the Sekaf Ritual among the Haumen Tribe Community

  The meaning of the *Sekaf* ritual, as expressed by traditional leaders interviewed by the researcher, encompasses several interpretations.

  First, the *Sekaf* ritual is understood as a form of respect for a mother who has left her family to join her husband. It serves as an important symbol in the process of transitioning the social status of a woman entering a new life within her husband's family. However, her role is symbolically

replaced by the eldest daughter, represented by *ike suti apian paku a hoe tai*. According to informants BFH and YAK, this ritual is not merely an act of honoring a mother, but also functions as a bond that strengthens relationships between both families.

Second, the ritual serves as a means of strengthening family ties. The *Sekaf* ritual is interpreted as a unifying mechanism so that, when both parents have passed away, the designated daughter assumes the maternal role for her siblings. One informant, FN, defined the meaning of the *Sekaf* ritual as a bond between the woman's and the man's families. Likewise, FM stated that the *Sekaf* ritual represents an expression of gratitude to a mother, recognizing that only women bear, give birth to, and nurture children. Through the meaning of the *Sekaf* ritual, it becomes evident that this practice is not merely a ritual but also embodies cultural values embedded in everyday life. The ritual involves all members of both the male and female families, clearly functioning as a means of strengthening kinship relations.

- The Purpose of the Sekaf Ritual among the Haumen Tribe Community

  The purpose of the *Sekaf* ritual within the Haumen tribe community is to maintain harmony. LK and BFH stated that the ritual serves as a bond of kinship between the woman's and man's families so that familial ties remain intact. AO defined the purpose of the *Sekaf* ritual as maintaining balance within the household when the maternal role must be relinquished, while also reinforcing the social identity of the daughter entrusted to continue the values of responsibility and maternal affection. Furthermore, FM explained that the purpose of the *Sekaf* ritual is to complete the kinship structure so that no maternal role is left vacant within the customary lineage.

- Values Embedded in the Sekaf Ritual among the Haumen Tribe Community

  EH stated that the values embodied in the *Sekaf* ritual include affection, kinship, and responsibility. BFH further explained that one of the primary values embedded in the ritual is a mother's love and affection. AO emphasized that the existence of the *Sekaf* ritual ensures that customary relationships remain preserved, even after a mother has left her original clan.

- The Meaning of Women in the Sekaf Tradition among the Haumen Tribe Community

  ALO stated that women are regarded as the guardians of the household, while BFH explained that, within the Haumen tribal tradition, women play a role in continuing family traditions. AO further stated that women are symbolically represented as *eba rumah untuk pulang*—a home to which one may always return.

The meaning of the *Sekaf* ritual within the Haumen tribe community, based on interview findings, reflects noble social and cultural values of significant importance. The *Sekaf* ritual was generally practiced in earlier times. Its implementation involves a series of ceremonial stages. First, the husband, wife, and children enter the traditional house of the woman's family to seek blessings from the ancestors through prayers delivered by the traditional elder. The eldest daughter remains in the woman's traditional house as the *Sekaf*, while the husband, wife, and other children receive blessings from the *atoen amaf*. In addition, the husband's family gives a symbolic amount of money to the *atoen amaf* as a sign that the woman will leave her clan. Nevertheless, family ties are not severed but continue to be maintained. Based on observation, this tradition is carried out properly, and only the *atoen amaf* holds the authority to perform the ritual.

According to the scholar Claude Lévi-Strauss, marriage is not merely a personal relationship but also establishes formal social bonds between the families of both men and women. He further argued that marriage represents a form of social exchange between two family groups. In his perspective, human society is built upon systems of exchange, with women becoming one of the central elements because they are considered connectors who strengthen networks among social groups (Rahayu S. Hidayat, 2006).

The validity of the findings was strengthened through data triangulation involving interviews, observations, and documentation. Informants' statements regarding the meaning of the *Sekaf* ritual demonstrate its significance in reinforcing family bonds within marriage. Observations further revealed that this tradition is performed in accordance with customary law and cannot be conducted by just anyone; rather, only the *atoen amaf* possesses the authority to carry it out. Therefore, the authority of the *atoen amaf* in conducting the *Sekaf* ritual cannot be replaced by any other party. Consequently, those entrusted with performing this tradition must bear responsibility so that its continuity may be preserved without negatively affecting future generations who will inherit and continue the practice.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This study is limited to the *Sekaf* tradition of the Haumen tribe in relation to the sacrament of marriage within the teachings of the Catholic Church; therefore, its findings cannot be generalized to other ethnic groups. Accordingly, future research may examine traditions related to the sacrament of marriage among other tribes. In addition, subsequent studies may explore the educational values

embedded in the *Sekaf* tradition as a form of learning for tribal members and, more broadly, for society in general.

Conclusion

This tradition is primarily carried out with the aim of honoring a mother and maintaining familial relationships between the male and female parties. The implementation of this tradition also serves as a means of fostering unity among families and the community, as they collectively participate in other customary activities. Thus, the Sekaf rite is not merely a customary ritual but also possesses profound spiritual values that are relevant to the teachings of the Church. This tradition can serve as a bridge between local culture and Church teachings, enabling believers to preserve their cultural identity.

Furthermore, the Sekaf rite may be interpreted as a form of instruction concerning the values embodied in the sacrament of marriage, particularly for younger generations. Through this tradition, they may learn that the values inherent in the teachings of the sacrament of marriage and cultural practices are not contradictory but rather complementary and mutually reinforcing. Therefore, it is important for the Church and pastoral companions to explore, discern, and guide the positive values embedded in this tradition so that it may increasingly lead the faithful closer to the Church's teachings on the sacrament of marriage.

Acknowledgment

The researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to all parties, especially the informants, who provided valuable support throughout this study in the form of their time, efforts, information, suggestions, and constructive feedback, which greatly assisted in the completion of this research. The researcher is also deeply grateful for the guidance and support of all relevant parties, from the initial stage of the research design to the publication phase of this study.

Disclosure Statement

The researcher affirms that no conflicts of interest, whether personal, academic, financial, or institutional, were involved at any stage of the research, from the initial study design to the completion of the research.

Funding

The researcher received no internal or external financial support for the completion of this study. All stages of the research, including the initial design, implementation, and publication process, were undertaken independently and remained the sole responsibility of the researcher.

References

Benyamin, Y. B. (2004). *Pastoral perkawinan Gereja Katolik*. Kanisius.

Geertz, C. (1973). *Penafsiran budaya*. Pustaka Pelajar.

Koentjaraningrat. (1990). *Beberapa pokok antropologi sosial*. Djambatan.

Koentjaraningrat. (2005). *Pengantar ilmu antropologi*. Djambatan.

Konigsmann, J. (1987). *Pedoman perkawinan Gereja Katolik.* Nusa Indah.

Moerdan, L. J. (1995). *Hukum adat Indonesia*. Bumi Aksara.

Koesoema, N. A. (1991). *Budaya adat Indonesia*. Graffiti.

Rachman, A. (1973). *Penafsiran budaya dasar-dasar*. Pustaka Pelajar.

Sindhunata. (1983). *Kitab hukum kanonik tentang pastoral perkawinan Gereja Katolik*. Kanisius.

Soekanto, R. (2001). *Perkawinan dalam perspektif hukum adat*. PT Citra Aditya Bakti.

Suharyo. (2015). *Tradisi pernikahan Sunda*. Universitas Padjadjaran.

Syaifuddin, dkk. (2018). *Pengantar sosiologi*. Erlangga.

Tylor, E. B. (2008). *Budaya primitif: Penelitian tentang perkembangan mitologi, filsafat, agama, seni, dan adat istiadat*. Pustaka Pelajar. (Karya asli diterbitkan tahun 1871)