

## The Ritual Values of *Puro Ae* as a Model for Marine Conservation Based on the Local Wisdom of the Lamaojan Community

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### Abstract

Puro Ae represents the local wisdom of the Lamaojan community in East Flores Regency, which is highly relevant in efforts to conserve the marine environment. This research aims to describe the implementation of the Puro Ae tradition, and the values embedded within it as a medium for marine conservation grounded in the local wisdom of the Lamaojan community. The data source for this research is the Puro Ae tradition. The study employed a qualitative methodology with a focus on interpretive descriptive analysis. The data consists of utterances containing marine conservation values. Data collection methods included observation and interviews with traditional elders in Lamaojan. The collected data were then reduced and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's framework. The findings reveal that: 1) Puro Ae is interpreted as the closure of the sea or the designation of a restricted marine area. There are two stages in this tradition: the "elo krowi" stage (conveying intentions and seeking blessings) and the peak ritual stage of Puro Ae; 2) the values embedded in the Puro Ae tradition include harmony, ecological awareness, life preservation, and cooperation. These values can serve as a learning model for efforts to conserve the marine environment based on local wisdom.

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## INTRODUCTION

Culture refers to traditions passed down from generation to generation within a specific region. Nahak (in Priventia & Noor, 2020) emphasizes that culture and society are inseparable. Culture exists because of society, and conversely, society thrives in harmony because of the culture that binds it together. Talking about culture also means discussing how society connects the mystical world, which serves as a source of strength for them, with the natural environment believed to have eyes, ears, and a mouth. One culture that heavily relies on nature as a determinant of its community's survival is the Lamaholot culture, specifically the Puro Ae tradition. Puro Ae is a tradition in one of the villages in the Tanjung Bunga sub-district, namely the village of Lamaojan. Puro Ae is an annual tradition or custom that the Lamaojan community must perform. The Puro Ae tradition involves closing and opening the sea. This ceremony is conducted during the rice planting season. The ritual takes place in the mountains and at sea over three days, during which the community is prohibited from engaging in any activities at the sea. The community believes in the connection between seawater and life in the mountains, which can bring life and well-being to the local population. This ceremony is performed to seek permission from the sea's ruler for safety on land, such as the protection of rice and corn crops, the welfare of fishermen, the balance of sea and land conditions, and the preservation of water purity and marine life.

The Lamaojan community has implemented a marine conservation system. Marine conservation, also known as the establishment of marine protected areas categorized as sanctuaries, aims to protect, preserve, and utilize biodiversity and/or fishery resources. Local wisdom related to water conservation can be defined as various forms of knowledge, values, norms, or specific rules that are still practiced, obeyed, and preserved by a community to maintain water resource sustainability and regulate the use of water resources in their environment (Ammas, 2020).

Local wisdom concerning water conservation can be shown as values in ritual practices, traditional ceremonies, or norms in the form of recommendations or prohibitions against excessive water resource usage (Kristiyanto, 2017). These noble values originate from the shared principles agreed upon by the people of a specific region. Given this context, the Lamaojan community has long recognized the Puro Ae ritual—specifically the opening and closing of the sea—as a medium and means of safeguarding their community. This ritual demonstrates the community's knowledge of seawater conservation, utilizing the sea as a medium to connect with Lera Wulan Tanah Ekan (the Almighty God). The community believes that when they provide sustenance for the sea's ruler/Rera Wulan Tanah Ekan, it will significantly impact the growth of rice crops on land.

A crucial aspect of this ceremony is the involvement of all close relatives, neighbors, and members of the clans involved, namely Koten, Kelen, Hurit, and Maran. This demonstrates the spirit of togetherness and kinship as a form of unity, both physically and spiritually, among the people. Preserving this local wisdom can add value to the refinement of character and attitudes of the younger generation, who are increasingly exposed to the influence of individualism and hedonism.

Several studies share similarities with this research, including *The Role of Local Wisdom in the Sasi System for Managing Marine Resources in Indonesia*, conducted by Nurfani Indah Putri et al. (Putri, 2020). This study aimed to understand the role of the sasi system in managing marine resources based on local wisdom in coastal areas of Indonesia. Another relevant study is by Maridi, titled *Uplifting Culture and Local Wisdom in Soil and Water Conservation Systems*. This research revealed that good synergy between the government, environmentalists, and the local culture and wisdom long preserved by the community could become an effective strategy for soil and water conservation (Maridi, 2015).

This research is urgent because it aligns with central and regional government programs to preserve the values of local culture, recognized as a medium for national character education, particularly in marine conservation. In this research, the intended values are those embedded within the Puro Ae ritual. Through this ritual, researchers can introduce cultural values and meanings that utilize seawater as a medium for well-being and protection.

## METHODOLOGY

The method used in this study is qualitative descriptive. The purpose of this research is to describe the Puro Ae ritual and the values embedded within it. The data source for this research is from the Puro Ae tradition. The data in this study consist of utterances within the Puro Ae tradition that contain values and meanings related to marine conservation. The data were collected through observation and interviews with traditional elders in Lamaoan. Traditional elders were chosen because of their deep knowledge and understanding of the Puro Ae ritual. There were two stages in this research: the description of data and in-depth analysis of the meanings and values contained within the Puro Ae tradition.

This research was conducted in Lamaoan Village, Tanjung Bunga Sub-district, East Flores Regency. The subjects of this study are traditional leaders and participants of the Puro Ae ritual. To achieve this, the researcher conducted an initial exploration of the Puro Ae ritual through a survey. Subsequently, the researcher carried out field observations to directly witness and experience the Puro Ae ritual performed by the Lamaoan community. The data collected were then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman analysis model, which consists of four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 2007).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Implementation of the *Puro Ae* Tradition

The term Puro Ae consists of two base words: Puro and Ae. The word Puro means a traditional prohibition, while Ae is understood as the beach. Therefore, literally, Puro Ae means "beach prohibition" or "restricted beach" (Koten, 2024). The implementation of the Puro Ae tradition or ritual is fundamentally determined by the Kebelen Lewo (landlords). There are two main clans categorized as Kebelen Lewo: the Koten Clan and the Maran Clan. Thus, these two clans hold a central role in determining the timing of the Puro Ae ritual. The implementation of this ritual is specifically associated with the restoration of the traditional house in Lamaoan Village. This means that if a traditional house restoration occurs, it is mandatory to perform the Puro Ae ritual as well. According to the beliefs of the Lamaoan community, this is done to ensure that the continuity of human life (the Lamaoan community) is protected by Tu'a Raja Bala Bulok and Tu'a Gelaka Nara (The Lord of the Sea/Guardian of Human Life). The Lamaoan community believes that Tu'a Raja Bala Bulok and Tu'a Gelaka Nara reside along the coastline and are enthroned in a specific sacred place called kera or kenera nara. This kera or kenera nara serves as the primary location for conducting the Puro Ae ritual. Furthermore, according to the beliefs of the Lamaoan community, the restoration of the traditional house is interconnected with the Puro Ae ritual because life does not only exist on land but also in the sea. Therefore, the performance of rituals at these two locations (land and sea) is intended to maintain the balance of life between the marine and land (Doro Maran, 2024).

The Puro Ae ritual generally lasts for eight (8) days and is divided into two stages: the first four days and the second four days. The first stage (the first four days) is called *elo krowi* (the delivery of the ritual's purpose), and the second stage is the performance of the Puro Ae ritual itself. In the *elo krowi* stage, the Kebelen Lewo from the Koten and Maran clans play a central role. During this stage, they bring rice, which are later used as sacrificial items. These are used to convey the purpose of the Puro Ae ritual to the grandeur of the universe or the ruler of the sea,

seeking their blessings for the ritual to proceed. Additionally, the purpose of *elo krowi* is to request all divine powers, including the universe, to follow and listen to the requests (Bera Maran & Doro Maran, 2024). During this stage, one of the traditional mantras or phrases recited is: *kame hewo pi ae wato, kame tao elu mihi ere buto* (We have come to this place to convey that the ritual will take place on the eighth day). After the *elo krowi* stage, preparations are made for the items required during the peak of the *Puro Ae* ritual. These items include one male goat, one piece of bamboo, *lontar* palms (*koli*) (*Borassus flabellifer* Linn), and a small boat (*sampan*). Regarding the goat, it is mandatory that it must have red fur, as per tradition. Meanwhile, the bamboo must remain intact, meaning the branches and leaves should not be cut off. Similarly, the *lontar* palms used must be the fresh tips of the leaves (Sogen, 2024).

The ritual elements, such as *lontar* palms (*daun koli*) and bamboo, are inseparable from the lives of the Lamaojan community, reflecting their local beliefs and traditions. The use of *daun koli* as part of the *Puro Ae* ritual is significant because these leaves come from the palm tree (*aren*), which the Lamaojan community believes to be a sacred tree (*Tuak Lera Wulan*). Similarly, bamboo is considered the origin of the Lamaojan people's existence (Doro Maran, Kelengkapan Ritus *Puro Ae*, 2024).

During the second stage (the second four days), which is the implementation of the *Puro Ae* ritual, several clans participate, including the *Koten*, *Maran*, *Hurit*, *Sogen*, *Niran*, and *Hokon* clans. At this stage, the sea is officially closed, and the community is prohibited from engaging in activities such as fishing or any other marine-related activities. Violating this prohibition is believed to result in disaster, including death, as evidenced by past occurrences. The climax of the *Puro Ae* ritual takes place on the eighth day, which the Lamaojan community interprets as the fourth day. The peak of the ritual includes the recitation of mantras or traditional expressions, which are mandatory. One such mantra is: *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan, rero pi' tao pasa mua pi' gere gera, kame tobo pe'epuh pi ete keneki*.

At the peak of this ritual, a goat is slaughtered, and its blood is smeared on the bamboo and *lontar* palms that were prepared beforehand. The slaughtered goat is divided into two parts and used as an offering or sacrificial item (*sesajen*). One part of the goat is offered to *Tu'a Raja Bala Bulok* and *Tu'a Gelaka Nara*, while the other part is offered to the universe. The offering for the universe is placed in a small boat (*sampan*) and then released into the sea. It is believed that this offering will reach the destination (*lali wera wutu, keleka watu/sina puke jawa nimu*). One sign that the offering has been accepted is when the *sesajen* is no longer found in the vicinity of the beach or the sea where the *Puro Ae* ritual was performed. Conversely, a sign that the offering has been rejected is when the *sesajen* remains in the area where the ritual took place. The verification of the offering's presence is carried out the day after the *Puro Ae* ritual. If, upon inspection, the offering is still in the same place, it is believed that a mistake was made during the ritual, which results in the offering not being accepted. In this case, the *Puro Ae* ritual must be repeated. However, during the repeat ritual, a goat is not sacrificed as an offering (Maran, *Koten*, Bera Maran, Sogen, & Doro Maran, 2024).

Furthermore, in relation to the *lontar* palms (*koli*) that have been smeared with goat blood, some of the leaf strands are tied to the hands of each person as a symbol that they have participated in the ritual. Meanwhile, other portions of the *lontar* palms are taken home by each individual and kept in their houses as a symbol of protection for themselves and their families against evil forces (Bera Maran & Doro Maran, 2024).

### **Values Embedded in the *Puro Ae* Tradition as a Model for Marine Conservation Based on Local Wisdom**

#### a. The Value of Harmonization

The Lamaojan community holds a holistic belief about maintaining a harmonious relationship between life on land and life at sea. This belief is reflected in the rituals for restoring

traditional houses and the Puro Ae ritual. The actions taken by the Lamaojan community demonstrate that every aspect of life, both on land and at sea, must be preserved and cared for to ensure the safety and well-being of human life.

b. The Ecological Value

The ecological value is reflected in the form of respect for life on land and at sea. The implementation of the Puro Ae ritual, which involves prohibiting all forms of marine activity (neutralizing the sea environment), provides an opportunity for marine life to grow and thrive. Additionally, the act of closing off the sea is part of an effort to maintain the purity of seawater. The ecological value is also evident in the use of environmentally friendly materials, such as *koli* (lontar palms), bamboo, and wood, as media for constructing the small boat (*sampan*). According to the beliefs of the Lamaojan community, these actions impact the safety and well-being of the environment and its people.

c. The Value of Life Preservation

Another core value of the Puro Ae tradition is the preservation of human life. This value is closely connected to the values of harmonization and ecology. All the activities and actions embodied in the Puro Ae ritual are ultimately aimed at preserving human life, according to the beliefs of the Lamaojan community. Disobedience to the prohibitions and taboos during the ritual process can result in danger to human life. This was revealed during an interview in which it was mentioned that a community member once violated these prohibitions and, as a result, died. Therefore, the Lamaojan community believes that the Puro Ae ritual holds significant meaning in maintaining harmonious relationships with the Divine, the universe, and humanity itself.

d. The Value of Cooperation

The final core value of the Puro Ae ritual is cooperation. This value is demonstrated in activities from the initial planning stages, *elo krowi*, and the peak ceremony of the Puro Ae ritual. The interconnectedness of clans within the Lamaojan community — such as the *Koten Clan*, *Maran Clan*, *Hurit Clan*, *Sogen Clan*, *Niran Clan*, and *Hokon Clan* — clearly reflects the spirit

of cooperation established for the successful implementation of the Puro Ae tradition. This value of cooperation signifies that the Lamaojan community possesses strong solidarity in preserving and maintaining the integrity of life with the Divine and the universe (marine life).

Local wisdom is one of the manifestations of human thought, feeling, and will, which arises as a result of social interaction processes. Every community undoubtedly has its own local wisdom, which is believed to provide values and benefits to community life. According to Soeleman (Maemunah et al., 2022), society can be understood as a group of people who live and interact based on specific customs and are bound by a shared sense of identity. Local wisdom can be understood as local knowledge or indigenous knowledge (Amin, 2017). This local knowledge or indigenous intelligence serves as both a unifying force and a binding agent that guides the way of life within the community that upholds it. For example, the *Kesepuhan Sinar Resmi* community possesses local wisdom that can be generalized as part of a life philosophy known as *pancer pangawinan*. *Pancer pangawinan* is interpreted as "uniting humans with their humanity." The essence of this life philosophy is to engage in self-reflection (*ngaji diri*), which then becomes a guide for fostering good relationships with other people (Mawaddahni, 2017).

Local wisdom within a community is generally interconnected with the Divine, the universe, and humanity itself. The implementation of these three elements must be in harmony to achieve a balanced and harmonious life. If any of these elements are ignored or neglected, it will result in disruption.

Various efforts have been made by external parties to protect the environment, but these efforts often do not involve or even disregard the local wisdom of a community (Anwar, 2021). This has a significant impact on the integrity of the environment, which has been carefully maintained in harmony by the local community. Therefore, a wise and thoughtful collaboration between external parties and the local community is essential for preserving the living environment. For local communities, three elements must not

be ignored in environmental care: the Divine, humanity, and the universe itself. For local communities, the harmonization of these three elements must be aligned and cannot be neglected.

In general, within the cultural practices of Indonesian society, especially the Lamaholot community, these three elements cannot be separated from any form of local cultural activity. The interconnection of these three elements is reflected in the cultural practices of the community that sustains them. These cultural practices give rise to local wisdom, which is believed to provide value and meaning for the integrity of life. The implementation of local cultural practices is carried out by the local community based on the belief that these practices contain *ike kewaat* (power or truth) that is manifested in the presence of the Divine (Bebe, 2018).

Building on the concept of cultural practices as part of local wisdom, the Lamaojan community also practices and upholds a cultural tradition known as *Puro Ae*. The primary purpose of this tradition is to maintain harmony between the Divine (*Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*), the universe, and humanity. The *Puro Ae* ritual, which is practiced and sustained by the Lamaojan community, has given rise to several core values, including the value of harmony, ecological value, the value of cooperation, and the value of life preservation. These values, born from the *Puro Ae* ritual, have shaped the character and identity of the Lamaojan people. In their daily lives, the Lamaojan community strives to maintain the order of life inherited from their ancestors. As a result, during the implementation of the *Puro Ae* ritual, all prohibitions and taboos are strictly observed and adhered to. Failure to comply with these rules results in the non-acceptance of the offering or request, which is the primary objective of the *Puro Ae* ritual. The worst consequence of violating these prohibitions for an individual is death, and according to the accounts of informants, such an incident has occurred before.

Prohibitions or taboos exist in almost every culture's rituals, and the way sanctions are enforced varies across cultures. For example, in

the *sasi* tradition of the Maluku community, those who violate the prohibitions are subjected to several types of sanctions, including fines, social sanctions, and ancestral sanctions. The fines may include ancient cannons (*lela*) or 3 *tahils* of gold, bearing the cost of litigation, and other forms of punishment that have been agreed upon (Putri, Nurfani Indah; Chandrika, Ni Luh; Pangestu, Gia Laras; Suryanda, 2020). The fines or sanctions imposed on cultural violators aim to correct or atone for the mistakes that have been made. Therefore, if the violator atones for their mistakes by fulfilling the required fines and sanctions, the relationship with the Divine, the universe, and the community can be restored.

Prohibitions or taboos can also be found in the *meulaot* tradition practiced by the community of *Gampong Lampulo*, *Kuta Alam* Sub-district, *Banda Aceh*. The prohibitions enforced include a ban on engaging in marine activities on Fridays, a restriction on women going to sea, and a prohibition on fishermen going to sea during *kenduri* (a three-day ceremonial event). The sanctions for those who violate these prohibitions include the confiscation of their entire catch and a ban on fishing for 3 to 7 days (Apriana, 2015).

Furthermore, in the implementation of a ritual, the Lamaholot community generally uses various media or tools (Tokan, 2023). These media or tools are essential requirements that must be fulfilled for the ritual to take place. Therefore, it is undeniable that the *Puro Ae* ritual utilizes several media or ritual elements, such as goats, bamboo, *koli* leaves, and a small boat or *sampan*. According to the researcher, the use of these media or tools not only facilitates the smooth execution of the ritual but also holds specific meanings and significance for the community. These media or tools are believed to have a transcendent connection to the historical life of the community in ancient times. One example that can be used for comparison regarding the use of media or tools in a ritual, aside from the *Puro Ae* ritual, is the *ore'* ritual practiced by the Lamaholot community (specifically in *Adonara*). The *ore'* ritual is a naming ceremony for a baby, during which ancestral names are given. The essential media or

tools required for this ritual include: ika burak (a type of fish), manuk (chicken), kenoe and padu (traditional candles), tuak (palm wine), and wua malu, apu, and kebako (betel nut/siri pinang, lime, and tobacco) (Muda, 2023).

Every society has its own way of expressing its beliefs and faith through culture. These beliefs and values are specifically passed down from one generation to the next, carrying meaning and significance for the continuity of human life. Therefore, preserving and continuing to uphold these traditions becomes a positive endeavor for the current generation. The younger generation must adopt an exocentric perspective, as described by Sudjoko et al., which emphasizes the wise management of nature to achieve ecological balance (Mare, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

Puro Ae can be understood as a ritual for closing the sea or designating the sea as a restricted area. There are two key stages in the implementation of this tradition: 1. The Elo Krowi Stage — This stage involves conveying the purpose of the ritual and seeking blessings. 2. The Peak Stage of the Puro Ae Ritual — This is the culmination of the ritual process. The essential elements required for carrying out this tradition include: a red-haired male goat, whole bamboo from the base to its branches (au), lontar palms (*Borassus flabellifer*) (koli), and a small boat (sampan). The Puro Ae tradition embodies several key values, including: the value of Harmonization, the Ecological Value, the Value of Life Preservation, and the Value of Cooperation. These values serve as a learning model for marine conservation efforts based on local wisdom. Ideally, these values should become guiding principles in the implementation of marine conservation efforts rooted in local wisdom. This tradition should be preserved so that future generations continue to protect marine ecosystems by following the local wisdom of their region.

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