

# From Rituals towards Social Burdens: The Portrait of Weeding Ritual Shift in Gorontalo City

**Yowan Tamu,<sup>1,2</sup> Zulaiha Laisa<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Social Science,  
State University of Gorontalo,  
Gorontalo, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Social Science,  
State University of Gorontalo,  
Gorontalo, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Email:  
yowan.tamu@ung.ac.id

## ABSTRACT

Since culture has had a strong relationship with religions and their rituals, the existence of human beings and their cycle of life where culture and rituals as parts of them has been discussed for over decades. One of the rituals is wedding ritual where this ritual is interesting to explore due to its huge numbers of cultural and religious philosophy particularly the wedding ritual in Islamic society such as people in Gorontalo City – an Islamic based city in Sulawesi, eastern Indonesia. The wedding ritual in Gorontalo is thought-provoking because this ritual is the longest ritual which consists of several phases, Mopoloduwo Rahasia, Tolobalango, Depito Dutu, Mopotilandahu, Saronde Dance, and Akaji. Each and every phase of this ritual has its religious, cultural and moral values in it. Despite the importance of its values, traditional marriage customs in Gorontalo city that used to be a symbol of the viscosity of cultural elements in social life has shifted due to some reasons – rational, practical, fashionable and modernist way of thinking and way of life. Another thing is the length of wedding ritual costs more money that has been the trigger of the shift even this has been a social burden for certain groups of people. Regarding the crucial problem of wedding ritual shift in Gorontalo, this research was conducted through ethnography method to reveal the current condition of wedding rituals in Gorontalo and the perception of Gorontalo people towards the meaning of wedding rituals.

**Keywords:** *culture, ritual, religion, shift, wedding,*

## INTRODUCTION

Gorontalo is one of the ethnic groups in this archipelago. In Gorontalo, for example, the combination of the custom and culture of the people is visibly compelling. This is reflected in an expression found in 1637 AD and written in the Gorontalo language, which says “Aadati hulo-hulo’a to sara’a, sara’a hulo-hulo’a to kitabullah”. In the Indonesian language, such expression means “Adat bertumpu pada Syara, Syara Bertumpu pada Kitabullah” or culture relies on religious teaching, religious teaching relies on the holy Qur’an”.

The characteristics of the culture in Gorontalo is found in various ceremonies, such as in marriages,

seven-month ritual for pregnant women experiencing the first pregnancy (refers to Molonthalo in the Gorontalo language), birth, pembeatan or a specific cultural ceremony for welcoming grown up children, funeral, celebrations of Islamic days, cultural titles, reception of domestic and international state guests, and so forth. The marriage ceremony, in particular, has a lot of procedures, such as Mopoloduwo Rahasia, Tolobalango, Depito Dutu, Mopotilandahu, Saronde dance, and Covenant of Marriage. In the past, the symbol of cultural elements of the people in Gorontalo was seen in the marriage rituals. However, nowadays, there has been a shift in the cultural elements of the marriage because of the rational, practical and modern way of thinking of the people.

The shift in the marriage rituals is also influenced by financial factors, i.e., the allocated budget for celebrating marriages. Marriage is not only defined as part of the cultural values to be performed and preserved but also economically-related ritual activities and social burden for a particular group of people in Gorontalo. Many individuals in Gorontalo, to date, have no longer performed all the procedures in marriage rituals because of the expensive cost these may incur.

The existence of meaning shifts in marriage rituals in Gorontalo has encouraged the researcher to conduct the research reported in the study. The topic of the research is "From ritual procedures to social burden: Taking pictures of a shift in marriage rituals in Gorontalo".

## **THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE**

Koentjaraningrat (1986:200-201) defines culture as the whole system of ideas, actions, and the work of human beings in the framework of the life of society that is obtained by learning. This definition affirms that the culture of human being has at least three dimensions, namely, 1) the complex of ideas, values, norms, rules, minds, which are also called the cultural system; 2) the complex of human-centered activity in the society, which is referred to as the social system; and 3) the form of culture, which is known as the physical culture.

All forms of culture in the world (universal culture) comprises of seven universal elements, i.e., language, the system of technology, the system of livelihood and economics, social organisation, the system of knowledge, religious teachings, and arts. This order of universal elements of culture corresponds to a particular theory saying that language is the first emerging cultural element in the human culture. The universal culture consists of the system of values that symbolise culture as a system of ideas.

In the context of the research reported in this article, marriage rituals are defined as part of the element of religious-related culture. Rituals cannot be separated from culture, for instance, the ritual of the life cycle, from the time when one is born until one passes away. Such culture can be found amidst society in many parts of the world.

## **SHIFTS IN THE SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

Globalisation in the present century has far-reaching implications. Such implications are broad and complex as they are influenced by advanced communication and information technology. For example, a person can easily connect with another person from any parts of the world. Also, various items and pieces of information with a different level of quality are

available for consumption. As a result, humans' mindset, attitude, and behaviour may change. This may lead to changes in other aspects of life, such as relationships within family, society, and nation, or impact on the system of culture (Marzali, 2005: 198-199)

Changes may bring positive or negative influences, and this can be seen in the marriage rituals in Gorontalo. Changes in such rituals, which is affected by the social and economic situations of the people in Gorontalo, shows that the people, particularly from economically middle-class society, have not fully practised all procedures of the rituals. Nowadays, many marriage rituals are no longer held at home, but in specific wedding venues, which might cause social jealousy among the people.

Today's phenomenon suggests that there are differences of views in terms of interpreting the marriage rituals in Gorontalo. The people in Gorontalo is experiencing a cultural shift or a gap in defining the meaning of marriage rituals, which can be seen in how the young and old generation of the people think and behave. The gap lies in the differences in perception between these two generations, which are influenced by such factors as a system of belief, values and attitudes, views of life, family and the local community. These factors affect both generations in perceiving the marriage rituals in Gorontalo.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The culture of marriage in each region has always been a fascinating topic to discuss from the perspectives of the cultural background and its complexity. This is due to the fact that marriage unifies two persons and their different values and norms, such as social status, economics, and cultural values of their families.

According to Wantjik, marriage is the emotional bond between a man and a woman as husband and wife, aiming to form a happy family in the guidance of God. From the sociology perspective, a marriage can be defined as a social phenomenon that changes a person's status, for example, as a bachelor or a young girl into a new legally social status as a husband for the bachelor and wife for the young girl.

This sacred ritual ceremony is one of the cultural richness of a region which entails strong ethical values. A traditional marriage ritual is the most important and decisive moment because it is a transitional period from one stage to the next. The marriage ritual is a rite crises and passage that has a social function of declaring to a broad audience the new level of living that the married individuals have attained (Koentjaraningrat 1981:90).

## The tradition and marriage rituals in Gorontalo

The people in Gorontalo has a long history of thinking about efforts to find the truth in life. This is reflected in the various forms of traditional ceremonies of the people. The ceremony is a long picture of the history of human thoughts in art and religion, which also dates back to prehistoric times (Lubis, 2007: 13).

The people in Gorontalo have a culture of the marriage ceremony. Marriage is a sacred and important thing to regulate the life and the society. Marriage is an attempt of two sexually different individuals to obtain descendants for the sake of preserving their classes.

In the tradition of Gorontalo, marriage is a duty that two sexually different individuals must perform. In a marriage, there are a set of stages that must be accomplished. Marriage is considered to be sacred, glorious, pleasant, and memorable. That is why the two married persons must be able to feel these meanings. They should not assume that marriage is easy, and therefore, they can easily get a divorce. In the view of tradition, the marriage ends when one passes away. A married couple is expected by tradition to be able to live peacefully and harmoniously, as is told by the palebohu or advice for them when they were sitting on their seats during their marriage ceremony rituals.

Marriage ritual is not a one time process, but it has to undergo a set of procedures, which is called marriage process or *lenggota lo nika* in the Gorontalo language. The procedures are not for slowing down or causing difficulties to marriage process, but for helping the husband and wife to experience the meaning of their marriage which indicates struggle and hard work.

In the culture of Gorontalo, a marriage ceremony is defined as a sacred process and consists of a set of procedures. That is why such ceremony often has to go through a long process. The procedures for marriage in Gorontalo include *mongilalo*, *mohabari*, *momatata u pilo'otawa*, *motolobalango*, *monga'ata dalalo*, *molinelo*, *momu'o ngango*, *modepita maharu*, *modepita dilonggato*, and *moponika*. Each of these procedures has different rules and costumes.

### The shift of concepts in marriage

There are concerns of the people in Gorontalo associated with the implementation of cultural ceremonies. The way these people perceive the meaning of cultural ceremony has shifted dramatically. The people also feel that holding a wedding reception is economically difficult for them.

The process of marriage, for parents and young people, do not involve the actual cultural procedures. The ignorance of the young people also contributes to the implementation of the cultural process which is not like as it should be held. For a young married couple, they think that they no longer deal with the technical aspects of the culture of their marriage. They believe that this is the responsibility of their parents that they

cannot interfere. As Danni puts it:

*“untuk masalah pernikahan dengan depe adat, torang so serahkan sama orang tua yang lebe tau itu. Torang tidak baku urus dengan yang begitu karena so orang tua pe urusan itu”*<sup>1</sup>

“For the cultural affairs related to marriage, we leave it to our parents who know about it very well. We do not deal with that because that is our parents' concern” (English translation)

The interviews transcript of the research shows that the young married people in Gorontalo do not have adequate knowledge about the right culture and procedures of marriage. For these individuals and their family, because they no longer inherit sufficient knowledge of marriage culture in Gorontalo, a more important thing than the knowledge is to hold the wedding reception.

It is also found that there remains a shift of process that is not regulated by culture, although a complete implementation of the cultural process of a marriage nowadays is not present. Even though a cultural marriage ceremony is done in an ordinary condition, the wedding reception is often held luxuriously. This causes social gaps among the society. The financially stable family might be able to hold complete procedures of marriage in terms of the existing culture and the social demands.

### Social burden of marriage

Lifestyle changes nowadays have influenced how people organise marriages. Wedding reception, for instance, is now experiencing the addition of 'standard' implementation. The implementation of marriage rituals dominated by luxury is a demand of the present time.

This very long process of wedding reception takes time and money. The process has a strong cultural significance but begins to shift with the 'contemporary' ritual of a weak cultural value. What improves is the luxury of wedding reception and social class recognition for those who perform the ceremony.

The implementation of marriage rituals that have undergone a shift from a technical and implementation perspective is a reality for many generations now. This is caused by several factors, such as ignorance and the application of a more modern and luxurious marriage style.

The role of parents is very dominant in this condition. Pragmatic practical-minded parents encourage the process of marriage as described above. The most important thing for parents is that

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Danni Saputra Marwan

their children have been categorised as “maa silamati” or have survived. In other words, they have practised the Sunna of the Messenger, which is to marry.

On the other hand, a marriage that is carried out in accordance with the terms of the existing culture and the value of culture is not a requirement. The most important thing is the ‘publication value’ which states that the family is ready to carry out complete and luxurious process (party) of the marriage,

*“Adat itu tetap ada torang mo bekeng, tapi so tidak lagi full karena memang mo bekeng itu samua mo makan waktu. Yang penting depe inti-inti tetap ada, deng torang pe anak so slamat. Baru tinggal ba pikir mo ba undang orang-orang yang torang kanal”<sup>2</sup>*

“We still want to keep the cultural traditions, but we may not be able to keep the whole things because it takes time. The most important things are that we maintain the core traditions, and our children have now been saved. Then, all we have to do is to think about the people that we want to invite”<sup>2</sup>

Remarks from Ibu Rukiyah as the bride’s parents illustrate, as seen above that the implementation of the culturally-related marriage process is still carried out, although the process undertaken seemed concise. For parents like Ibu Rukiyah, she has saved her child, and the wedding reception has been held by inviting some guests. This has been an ideal impression compared to the stage-by-stage of time-consuming marriage rituals. However, the execution of such a wedding reception can be a social burden. This means that the implementation of the reception that uses old equipment will be a burden when not implemented.

The marriage ritual as mentioned above has also become a substitution for another unaddressed traditional ritual. Related to this, the publication aspect of the ceremony is more visible than the aspect of cultural fulfilment. On the other hand, the wedding reception is another form of social burden. A wedding reception is usually held at night and consists of several things that must be met, such as printing invitations, evening entertainment, wedding dress and meals.

A commonly accepted rationale is that a wedding reception is part of the family’s wishes to share happiness with colleagues, friends and

neighbors. As Silvani puts it,

*“itu kan Cuma untuk mo kase lengkap ini pesta, yang mana ada mo undang akan teman-teman. Karena biasa, kalo dorang so tau, amper samua minta undangan deng mau tidak mau harus mo bekeng pesta atau resepsi. Karena biasa di akad yang hadir itu kebanyakan bo orang tua, baru di malam resepsi itu torang juga mo ba undang torang pe teman”<sup>3</sup>*

“This is just for the completeness of the wedding reception, just for inviting friends. You know, if they know we have a wedding reception, they will all ask for an invitation, so we have no choices but to organise the reception. Those who usually come to the covenant of marriage session are elderly people, so on the wedding reception night we also invite our friends”.

Silvani describes that there is a kind of ‘demands’ when the wedding is held. Because they have to invite friends, the bride family finally performs the wedding reception at night. This condition certainly requires strategies from the family, for example, to find the ideal location for the wedding reception venue. Today, using the building as a wedding venue is a common practice, although it incurs additional fees.

Using a venue has become one of the alternatives in organising a wedding reception. A particular building is purposely chosen for the practical and easy reasons in terms of supply and other wedding-related preparation, such as meals. The impact of this is the emergence of other social burdens, such as a wedding reception that is organised in a building can cost a lot of money. Yet, the cost will be replaced with pride and satisfaction when the demands of the times and lifestyles in a standard wedding reception have been fulfilled.

Marriage in this era is experiencing a change in the ‘standard’ implementation caused by the current advancement. This standard change affects the fulfilment of some aspects that must be met. This aspect is fulfilled because marriages that initially contain cultural values become a new lifestyle that seems to be necessarily implemented.

## CONCLUSION

The use of cultural procedures of Gorontalo remains available in the implementation of marriage rituals in the region, although there are efforts to shorten the procedures because of the time, energy and cost issues. The process of marriage in Gorontalo has

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Rukiyah Airmas.

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Sivani Hamzah

undergone technical changes of implementation because there are elements of implementation that are now necessary to implement. The change occurs because of the social burden for the family when the fulfilment of the new standard elements in the marriage is not met.

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