

## **THE MEANING OF TINGKA RITUALS IN SHIFTING CULTIVATION OF MUNA COMMUNITY SOUTHEAST SULAWESI, INDONESIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Most of the Muna community are shifting cultivators who are very dependent on their natural environment, so they always adapt and interact with nature. One of the media used to adapt and interact with nature is ritual *tingka*. In practice, the ritual *tingka* contains symbolic messages for nature conservation and a form of human appreciation for nature, flora, and fauna as a whole. The objective of this study was to study and analyze the ecological wisdom of shifting cultivation related to land conservation and the form of human appreciation for nature through farming rituals. This study used a normative survey method which was carried out in seven villages in Muna regency, Southeast Sulawesi. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observation, and focus group discussions. The collected data were analyzed using flow analysis techniques. The results showed that symbolically the *tingka* ritual was the institutionalization of knowledge of land conservation through agro forestry patterns, namely by combining the planting of trees such as bamboo, areca nut, kapok with food and secondary crops. Ritual *tingka* is a form of respect for nature to create a harmonious relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm, so that farmers are protected from various disasters.

**Keywords:** *Shifting cultivation; rituals ltingka; ethnoecology; and Muna community*

### **INTRODUCTIONS**

Forest fires is still one of the crucial environmental issues in Indonesia today. Forest and land fires usually occur during the dry season. Whenever forest fires occur, indigenous people who are generally farmers/shifting cultivators are always accused of being one of the sources of forest and land fires, through land clearing activities using slash-slash and burn techniques as the cause the onset of fire (Rasyid, 2014; Edorita, 2011; Aryadi et al., 2017).

Based on the mythology of the cultivators as well as the activity patterns of exploiting forest resources, the cultivators in conducting agricultural activities clearly reflect that they are an inseparable element of the flora and fauna life in the forest area (Lahajir, 2001). Traditionally, cultivators have been accustomed to slash-and-burn techniques, which are adapted to local natural conditions so as not to cause a wide impact on forest and land fires (Syaufina and Tambunan, 2013). According to Suhartini (2009), that in adapting to the environment, cultivators develop wisdom in the form of knowledge or ideas, customary norms, cultural values, activities, and tools that are used as guidelines in developing life in their neighborhood. In farming, they strictly adhere to cultural traditions, namely always paying attention to natural phenomena and structural patterns that occur in the surrounding natural environment and utilizing the forest to fulfill their daily needs. Even to avoid negative reactions and to maintain balance with the surrounding environment, cultivators always carry out farming rituals (Mulyoutami et al., 2010).

This farming practice has become a pattern for every farming community, including the farming community in Muna, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. Clearing and cultivating land in rotation (better known as shifting cultivation) are the cultural elements of the Muna community. Shifting cultivation activity begins with the selection of forest land cultivation, clearing (*de wei*) of cultivated land, logging (*de tughori*) of cultivated land, burning (*de sula*) of cultivated land, and clearing the remains of burning (*de lulu* and *de totawu*) then planting crops. In the process of clearing the land, the cultivators cut all the small trees, but not all the big trees are cut down. The cultivators deliberately let several large trees remain in the fields, apart from serving as plant protection and *kaumbela* (field huts) from exposure to strong winds, it is also intended as a residence for *Kodasano* (supernatural beings who inhabit the area). After the land has been cleared of both large and small timber, grass, and dry leaves have been burned and turned into ashes, the land is ready to be planted.

In the view of the cultivating community in Muna, the shifting cultivation system is part of an adaptation strategy to survive because their lives depend a lot on this agricultural system. As a subsistence farmer, farming activities depend a lot on weather conditions, so farmers are very careful about the uncertainty of climate conditions. In fact, they are always overshadowed by fear about the uncertainty of agricultural production, personal and family safety and the safety of their livestock. So that before planting on each newly cultivated land, the cultivators first carry out the ritual practice of *tingka* or commonly called *katingka*, namely the ritual of giving offerings to

*Kodasano* to maintain good relations between humans (cultivators), the surrounding environment and *Kodasano*. In the cosmology of Muna cultivators it is stated that if the relationship between humans, the surrounding nature and *Kodasano* is well-established, the cultivators will get a lot of yields, the safety of themselves, their families and livestock will be maintained both in the field and outside or around cultivated area.

Farmers believe that *Kodasano*, which previously lived freely and comfortably in the forest-land area for cultivation, which was then processed for farming by humans, could be a threat to the survival of the cultivators. If *Kodasano* feels disturbed by the presence of humans, then *Kodasano* can destroy crops, causing crop failure, kill livestock and even threaten the safety of field owners. In the viewpoint of plant pests, it could be *Kodasano* that transformed into pigs, rats, snakes, birds that destroy crops, strong winds, heavy rain, and floods and so on. Even *Kodasano* can disturb health through various types of non-medical diseases suffered by the cultivators. It is this belief that makes *tingka* rituals always practiced in the shifting cultivation tradition of the Muna community in Southeast Sulawesi, to this day.

This ritual is interesting to research because it can provide a number of new information, not only about the practice of religious ceremonies in the traditional agricultural system, but also this ritual contains the ecological wisdom of the shifting cultivation entity which has tended to be identified with forest destroyer community groups. The *tingka* ritual implies that humans (cultivators), the natural surroundings and *Kodasano* (as the personification of supernatural powers) are a unit that is interrelated with one another.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study used a normative survey method which assumes that a phenomenon usually follows a general pattern that is common (Yunus, 2010). This assumption is in line with the ritual practice of *tingka* which has become a patterned activity or carried out from generation to generation by traditional Muna farmers. The approach used in this research was a qualitative approach, which is an approach that views social reality as occurring holistically, inter-linkage relationships are interactive and meaningful (Sugiyono, 2018). In this context, ritual *tingka* is one of the socio-cultural realities in the practice of shifting cultivation in the Muna community, which in its implementation contains a lot of meanings.

## **Research Sample**

This research was carried out in shifting farmer communities spread across to seven villages in Muna regency, namely Wali, Labaha, Bangkali, Masalili, Lakapodo, Wakadia, Lapodidi Villages, which lasted for three months. There were 30 informants in this study consisting of traditional leaders, village elders, ritual leaders, field owners, and other community members who were considered to have knowledge related to farming rituals. Informants were determined by purposive sampling based on preliminary information from the village heads.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection was carried out through in depth interviews and observation methods. In conducting interviews and observations, recording activities of the information conveyed by the speakers were also carried out. Data collection through in-depth interviews was ended, after the data obtained was deemed sufficient or equate (Sugiyono, 2018). Observations were made to clarify as well as validate field data related to the focus of the study or the subject matter of the study. Data collection was also carried out through focus group discussions with cultivators, traditional healers and other community members.

The data that had been collected was processed and analyzed using interactive analysis techniques which include data reduction, data presentation and verification or drawing conclusions (Emzir, 2010).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Message of Land Conservation In Materials of *Tingka* Ritual**

In the cosmology of cultivators in Muna, a tree is sacred place and is blessed because it is the home of the *Kodasano* (supernatural being). Farmers also believe that trees occupied by supernatural beings can protect their crops from exposure to strong winds, and soil erosion or flooding. This is in accordance with the statement of one informant that “*ane de tingka mokesahano do rabue we ghowano sau bhalano. Rampahano wite kaegaluha liwundo andoa, dadihanomo do tingkae deki, kodasano de tusu anda sau bhalano mbali kaelatehando dadihanomo ofalia dositugho-tugho hae sau mbabhala-bhlahino welo galu, tabea de runsa anda mahingga sepughu rapughu mbali kaelatehando*” (The ritual of *tingka* should be carried out under a tree, because the tree is the dwelling place for the spirit who controls the agricultural land. Therefore, it is not allowed to cut down all the large trees that are in the area of the cultivated land).

Farmers in Muna also believe that trees not only serve as a medium for implementing rituals of *tingka*, but trees also have a traditional disaster mitigation function. One of *parika* (the figure leading the ritual / traditional healer) stated that “*ane nofiu kawea moghosa notompalo deki ne roo hino sau, dadihanomo kawea rumatono ne kantisa minamo siaghe naoghosa. Ane okawea moghosa notompalo wawo nekantisa, okantisa peda kahitela atawa opae nokopula-pula siga nokompare-mpare. Pedamo dua nekantibha kaumbela, siga okaumbela noko dai-dai*” (Trees protect plants and garden huts from exposure to strong winds, because before strong winds hit the plants or garden huts, the wind is first held back on the tree leaves. Usually strong winds cause many plants to fall and suffer damage).

The meaning of the *tingka* ritual in accordance with the opinion that in traditional farming communities, there are many magical rituals associated with agricultural activities, these rituals are not only a powerful means of controlling nature, but magical rituals have relevance to nature conservation and the spread of good social practices in the lives of peasant communities, (Jossie and Sudhir, 2012; Falvey, 2005; Ola, 2017; Iskandar and Iskandar, 2017). This can be seen, among others, in the ritual of giving meat in the farming tradition in Africa, the practice of farming rituals through the use of conservation plants in the Naxi community in Southwest China, the ritual of greeting the land in the traditional Mangindanawn rice farming in the Southern Philippines, the ritual of *samara pangumpuhunan* (mixing 50 species of plants) in the Baduy tribe in Banten, the ritual of *mendag toya* (picking water) in Balinese people, and so on, (Geng et al., 2017; Iskandar and Iskandar, 2017; Sartini, 2017; Mantikayan and Abas, 2015).

In addition to using trees as a medium, the rituals of *tingka* also use media made of various types of food, such as boiled eggs, diamond made from corn or rice, and various types of tubers. In addition, it is also equipped with a betel nut and areca palm, as well as bamboo stalks.

The ritual material symbolizes staple food and cultivated livestock, the symbol of conservation plants, namely bamboo, kapok, and areca nut, and trees that are deliberately allowed to grow in the area of cultivation land. According to the farmers, the various types of food that are used as ritual material, apart from being served in honor of *Kodasano*, are also intended so that their crops can be blessed, so what if the seeds are planted in an intercropping pattern on agricultural land does not interfere with each other. This is in accordance with the statement of one informant that “*kaneamanimo insaidi megaluno, tabea ko dasano do adhatida dua, do waanda do fuma, do foroghu, minamo da fodidiu ane. Pedamo dua wineno kantisa mani ta tingkae deki, rampahano welo*

*tulatulando kamokulahi ndo dhamani oghoti atau okantisa maitu tantigho dopogira-gira dua sania andoa*" (It has become a habit for farmers, *kodasano* must be treated well, food and drinks are served so as not to disturb the farmers. Likewise, plant seeds to be planted must undergo a ritual procession first so that the plants do not interfere with each other).

Apart from that, cultivators also planted trees, either along with seasonal crops or not with annual crops in their cultivation area. One of the informants stated that the trees that are commonly planted include kapok, areca nut and bamboo. Kapok and areca nut are generally planted following the fence of the field/garden and some are planted in the middle of an agricultural area. According to farmers in Muna, the kapok and areca trees are types of trees that do not have hot temperatures so they do not interfere with the growth of other plants. Meanwhile, bamboo is usually planted in *sikua* (in the corner) of the field because bamboo has long fibrous roots and develops rapidly, which has the potential to interfere with the growth and development of other agricultural crops. This is in line with the statement of one informant that "*ane o bhea bhe kadhawa mina nako hondoa rampahano do hende mina na lumewa. O kadhawa sa aruno no tantamo roono, dadi hanomo mina nae lai-lai kantisa sigahano, nopohala bhe patu/koo, ane o patu/koo ne wantahi parakano, roono no lewa, dadihanomo do tisae we sikuano galu rampano ne lai-lai kantisa sigahano*" (The areca tree doesn't have dense leaves and the kapok tree often sheds its leaves periodically so that the two trees are relatively unobtrusive to the surrounding agricultural plants, in contrast to bamboo which has long fibrous roots and lush leaves. Bamboo is held to disturb other plants around it, so that bamboo is planted in the corners of the fields).

Trees such as areca nut, kapok and bamboo are planted intercroppingly in agricultural areas, apart from being seen as not disturbing other agricultural crops, these trees also have a function in maintaining plant safety, both from exposure to strong winds and from the threat of flooding. This is in accordance with the informant's statement that "*o kadhawa, o bhea, o patu/koo do tisae mina ta dawunomo kaawu do tisae, tamaka bhe ghuluno, sandataano norato nobhalahi nembali me tawerino kawea atau metaami no mawa minamo na kompula-mpula atawa na lumepae mawa kantisa*" (One of the functions of kapok for agricultural crops is to protect plants from exposure to strong winds so that the plants do not break or fall easily, while areca and bamboo are used to absorb rainwater so that the plants are not flooded).

The habit of cultivators in Muna to plant trees combined with food crops in an area of cultivated land, from the perspective of agriculture and forestry, can be said to be one of the agro forestry models in shifting cultivation as developed by farmers both in tropical

and subtropical climates for centuries (Rianse and Abdi, 2010; McNeely and Schroth, 2006; Nath et al., 2015). The findings of this study are also in line with the results of a study by Cairns (2015) that "shifting cultivation appears as a variety of agro forestry".

According to Rianse and Abdi, (2010) that "agroforestry is useful for preventing the expansion of degraded land, conserving forest resources, improving agricultural quality and perfecting silvicultural intensification and diversification". Intensification and diversification efforts can also be found in the shifting cultivation activities of the Muna community through optimal processing and land use by varying various food crops such as maize, rice, tubers and other types of secondary crops planted in one area of cultivation land. Likewise, environmental protection efforts can also be found in the efforts of cultivators to conserve land by planting conservation plants that can absorb water so as to prevent soil erosion due to flooding, and also prevent landslides and improve soil fertility, such as bamboo, areca nut and kapok. Bamboo has fibrous roots that can absorb water and bind the soil, this is in line with the opinion that bamboo has a tight, long and strong root system and it has a lot of litter accumulation so that it can strengthen the soil structure and maintain soil moisture, and prevent erosion, (Ben-zhi et al., 2005; Mentari et al., 2018).

Likewise, only with kapok which has a cycle of shedding leaves periodically, the leaves that have rot become a natural fertilizer that functions to improve nutrients and soil fertility. Meanwhile, areca nut has a strong root structure so that it can bind soil movement to prevent landslides. In addition, areca nut is a source of water catchment so that agricultural land is protected. This is in line with the opinion that shifting cultivators have experience in using environmental resources at the right scale. Farmers maintain very useful tree species such as palms and fruit trees (Cairns, 2015). Such a conservation model is a conservation model based on traditional knowledge of the community, (Basri, 2021); (Popova, 2014; Basri at al., 2017), or conservation that articulates the interests of local communities according to the prevailing social, cultural, and norms systems (Vlibeigi et al., 2020). The ritual practice of *tingka*, apart from showing the ecological awareness of shifting cultivation, also emphasizes that farmers are the guardians of nature, just like the Maori people in New Zealand. For Maori people, peasants are defined as *tangata whenua*, which literally means guardians of the earth (Leach, 2015).

### ***Tingka* Ritual As Appreciation For Macrocosm**

The cultivators believe that the ritual of *tingka* is an attempt to unite the macrocosmic and microcosmic forces, because the unity between humans and nature is

a source of livelihood. Farmers see cultivated land as part of the macrocosm, trees as the place of *Kodasano*, while farmers (humans) as an element of the microcosm must treat macrocosm well. Therefore, the cultivators always maintain good relations with the macrocosm through the ritual practice of *tingka*. One of the informants stated that “*ane ko alamu mina da madhatida, nembali do mamara ane, barangka kamamarano do fope ne kantisa noko dai-dai, no mate, no haropaane kawea, no owae mawa kantisa, no manuso galu, sabhara hulano panaki. Barangka no angka ne mie bhe ne kadadi, dosaki siga bhe do matehi ane*” (if we don’t treat macrocosm well, then *Kodasano* can get angry, and if his anger is vented at the plants, the plants experience crop failure, what if *Kodasano’s* anger is taken out on humans and livestock, then humans and livestock will suffer illness and even die).

Another informant stated that “based on the stories of their ancestors, in ancient times many cultivators experienced crop failure or disease because they carried out farming activities on cultivated land that had not been given ritual *tingka*. Their crops were eaten by pests such as pigs, rats, caterpillars, many cultivators were often sick and even many livestock died without cause”. Farmers understand such incidents as a form of disharmony in the relationship between cultivators, *kodasano* and cultivated land. Another informant stated that “*ane ogalu no manuso, okantisa mina nahumende, no bhari kale-lei welo liwu, anagha katandaino tabea dae taghomi bhe datumingkae deki galu*” (if the plants in the field are always attacked by pests, the cultivated land is barren so that the plants are also less fertile, there is an epidemic that attacks farmers and livestock, this is a sign that residents must carry out farming rituals).

This belief of traditional Muna cultivators is in line with that view traditional farmers depend a lot on weather conditions, so they are very careful with uncertain climatic conditions. To reconcile these feelings of fear, farmers practice many ceremonies, rituals and prayers that are offered to gods and goddesses to protect crops and livestock and provide blessings to get a lot of results, (Jossie and Sudhir, 2012). To help gain self-confidence and mental peace, cultivators perform ritual *tingka* before planting crops. Through this ritual, farmers get the suggestion and belief that they are protected from crop failure, and the safety of themselves and their livestock is protected. This understanding of the Muna cultivators is also in line with the findings of Hastuti (2018) that “the Banjar tribal farming community always performs rituals in *bahuma* to ask God for abundant harvests and avoid crop failure”. In addition, it is also in line with the findings of Naganag (2013) that “farmers in Kalinga, North Philippines perform *sissawa* rituals to ask God to make farmers strong, there is no disease for the family, the harvest will be

good or the planted rice will flourish".

Farmers make the events experienced by previous generations in the past as *tubho* (lessons) to be conveyed to the next generation so that the practice of farming rituals, including the content of ecological wisdom related to nature conservation, tabo culture or abstinence from illegal logging, remains institutionalized in farming activities of cultivators in Muna through the rituals of *tingka*. There is no resistance from the farmers not to carry out the ritual, because they realize and believe that the farming ritual is part of the farmers' adaptation strategy to nature and the new natural rulers. Farmers also believe that with this adaptation strategy they can avoid crop failure, and protect their lives and their livestock.

The *tingka* ritual is carried out under the tree because the tree is the residence of *Kodasano*, the land which is covered by trees and the area for farming is part of the macrocosm, while humans (cultivators) as the ritual performer are part of the microcosm. Therefore, the microcosm must respect the macrocosm in order to create a harmonious relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm. This is in accordance with the findings of Purbadi and Foni (2015) that "every ritual has a tendency to establish and maintain a harmonious relationship or communication between humans and forces outside of themselves, who are holier, bigger and higher than themselves".

Farmers in Muna are always worried about not obtaining agricultural products outside their collective capacity, thus building communication with forces outside of themselves through *tingka* rituals. If the harmonious relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosms is well established, the farmers will get abundant harvests. This conception is in line with the view that the agricultural tradition relies heavily on the people's (farmers') expectation of abundant crops on various forms of rituals that they must perform. The expectation of a good harvest is also very dependent on the obedience of the farming community to the advice and regulations that have been carried out from generation to generation (Somba et al., 2019).

*Tingka* ritual has become a patterned activity in the life of a cultivator that is passed down from generation to generation, from one generation to the next through an enculturation process. The process of inheriting *tingka* ritual knowledge without going through the formal education system is in line with the views of Shambulingappa and Mansur (2019) that "traditionally knowledge is transferred from one generation to another, through activities such as seeing, hearing and doing. Traditional knowledge is woven into myths, proverbs, rites and is passed on to the next generation through oral means".

That is the process of the *tingka* ritual inheritance until it finally becomes the

mentality and one of the core cultures of shifting cultivation in the Muna community. Farmers consider it a *falia* (taboo) if they do not carry out *tingka* rituals in farming activities. At the level of praxis, *tingka* ritual has become a social prohibition in the collective life of the farming community to create social order and harmony. Such ritual practice is in line with the view that rituals reduce risk beyond human control and respect the culture that has been passed on by ancestors, a reflection of the uniqueness and characteristics of each society, as well as a system of inheriting values, history and the characteristics of a socio-cultural life community, (Suryaalim et al., 2019; Taena at al., 2016; Basri et al., 2017).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In modern times, the practice of farming rituals seems irrational, but its philosophical nature and meaning need to be analyzed based on scientific principles because it contains the wisdom of traditional culture. Ritual *tingka* has significance with the ecological niche in which farmers carry out agricultural activities. Although subjectively the cultivators carry out the *tingka* ritual intended to respect *Kodasano* as the ruler of agricultural land in order to provide bountiful harvests, keep farmers away from various disasters, but rationally the practice of *tingka* ritual teaches humans to preserve nature through the agro forestry system in shifting cultivation. Implicitly, *tingka* ritual conveys a message to mankind to treat nature properly and fairly because basically humans, nature and the flora and fauna in it constitute one unit. *Tingka* ritual may seem old-fashioned, but it has the benefit of bonding social bonds and strengthening social solidarity in the relationship between humans and nature.

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