

SACRED MYTHS OF THE CEREKANG INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY: LOCAL WISDOM STRATEGIES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the sacred myths upheld by the Cerekang Indigenous Community, conceptualized through ideas of "prohibition" and "necessity" regarding actions in specific natural locations. These myths function not only as local normative systems but also as expressions of ecological wisdom that guide the community in protecting the natural environment from damage. The Cerekang community continues to preserve these ancestral beliefs, which are deeply integrated into their cultural identity and daily practices. A descriptive-qualitative method was employed to explore the traditional myths in the Cerekang Customary Area, Malili District, East Luwu Regency. Data were collected through

direct observation and interviews with local community members, and then analyzed by drawing connections with literary references, particularly *I La Galigo* volume 1 (ms NBG 188), featuring Batara Guru as the central figure. Findings reveal that the core of the myth centers on Pengsimaoni Hill, believed to be the site where Batara Guru descended from the upper world (*botillangi*). This sacred narrative forms the basis for protecting ten natural toponyms within the Cerekang area. These toponyms, each linked to Batara Guru's journey, shape local norms that define what is allowed and prohibited in daily conduct. The myths serve as moral guidelines, fostering respect for nature and reinforcing social cohesion. By embedding ecological values in cultural narratives, the myths act as a local wisdom system that protects the environment and uphold communal identity. In essence, these sacred myths reflect a deeply rooted environmental ethic that continues to guide the lives of the Cerekang people.

Keywords: Cerekang Indigenous Community, East Luwu, Malili, Myths, Pengsimaoni

INTRODUCTION

The Cerekang Indigenous Community, an ethnic Bugis group in East Luwu, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, has preserved its ancestral traditions across generations. These traditions are maintained and adopted as guiding principles for social conduct, particularly in the community's interaction with the natural environment. Members of the Cerekang community believe that their ancestor is Batara Guru, a *tomanurung* figure from ancient Luwu traditions (Sherira, 2023).

According to local oral traditions, Batara Guru descended from the upper world (*botillangi*) to the middle world (*allelino*) at a hill known as Punsimèwuni, currently called Pengsimaoni. This hill is believed to have been the site of Batara Guru's palace during the time of the ancient Luwu Kingdom (Pelras, 2021). Pengsimaoni Hill is regarded as a sacred forest by the community, along with nine other sacred areas near the Cerekang settlements. These include Padang Ennungnge, Beroe, Bulu Mangkulili, Tomba, Ujung Tanaè, Kasosoe, Lengkong, Aggattungeng Ancè'è, and Turungeng Appancangeng. All of these sacred sites are situated along the Cerekang River.

In line with the *I La Galigo* epic, the people of Cerekang recognize two ancestral figures: Batara Guru, who descended from the sky (*botillangi*), and We Nyili'timo, who emerged (*totompo*) from the waters (*uriliu*). These figures are regarded as the originators of Cerekang traditions. The narrative recounts their encounter with Patotoe (the God of Destiny) and their mission to ensure harmony in the middle world. This belief forms the

cultural foundation of the Cerekang Indigenous Community (Akhmar, 2021).

One of the most distinctive features of the Cerekang people is their enduring belief in sacred environmental myths. These myths are perceived as profound cultural values, although they are often dismissed by outsiders as irrational. In discussing myth, Barthes (1983) describes it as a message or narrative accepted as truth, even if it cannot be empirically proven.

The sacredness of the Cerekang customary territory stems from its historical and spiritual significance as the ancestral dwelling place. More importantly, these myths serve as tools for transmitting moral values and local wisdom. They shape behavior, particularly through their function as moral and ethical guidelines within the community.

Myths foster abstract ideas that are deeply embedded in collective consciousness, which eventually manifest in individual and communal actions. As shared beliefs, myths evolve into social norms or unwritten laws that help define what is valuable and meaningful. According to Cassirer (1990), myths become integral to cultural systems, offering individuals a framework for understanding life.

The importance of myths in the daily lives of society is explained by Stephanes and Eisen (in Movva, 2000), who state that myths are stories told to comprehensively explain the essence of reality. Myths are constructed from certain parts of attitudes and beliefs, becoming our own and serving as a touchstone for what is real and essential, including the most fundamental thoughts and actions. Myths represent truths that guide our decisions about how to live, what to do, and how to think and

feel. Therefore, the significance of myths, which are built from existing realities and bind society together, is particularly evident in the Cerekang Indigenous community.

Literature Review

Several previous studies have examined the Cerekang Indigenous Community from various disciplinary perspectives. However, none have specifically addressed the role of myths as socio-cultural concepts and normative systems within this community. Studies relevant to the concept of local wisdom from a humanities perspective, particularly through Roland Barthes' semiotic paradigm, are discussed below.

Enre (1999) emphasized the strong connection between the people of Luwu and the myths found in the I La Galigo epic. The myths and traditions preserved by the Cerekang Indigenous Community are culturally linked to the narratives in I La Galigo. According to Enre, the central locations in the epic include the Luwu Kingdom and surrounding areas, as well as mythical realms such as Langi', Peretiwi, and the spirit world. Cerekang is considered the site where Batara Guru descended from the sky and We Nyili'timo emerged from Peretiwi.

Akhmar et al. (2022) explored the "Ecological History of Traditional Knowledge in Cerekang Forest Conservation." Their study emphasized the cosmological perspectives of the Cerekang people in relation to forest preservation.

Al-Bustomi (2018) conducted a study titled 'Case Study of the Sumpah Pati in Kedondong Village' through Roland Barthes' mythological theory. His qualitative research reveals that Kedondong residents strongly believe in the Sumpah Pati, which they do not violate due to its mythological influence. Interestingly, modern society continues to uphold this belief, making this research aim to uncover the truth behind the Sumpah Pati.

Susanti (2018) examined the Matu myth in the belief system of coastal communities in Lampung. Her study focused on community responses to the designation of Gua Matu, believed to be the dwelling place of the mythical Matu figure, as a religious tourism site.

Faizah (2015) analyzed the mythological structure and culture of the Bubakan Mijen community in Semarang using Barthes' framework. Her study explored how the connotative meanings of names influence cultural ideology and contribute to cultural reconstruction.

Conceptual Framework

The Cerekang Indigenous Community represents a socio-cultural entity shaped by a belief system that manifests through language and functions as a normative framework. This system defines prohibitions and obligations that guide acceptable and unacceptable behavior. The language used in living myths carries binding force, reinforcing community solidarity, protecting customary rights, and supporting environmental conservation, particularly in the management of land and water resources.

The study of myths in the Cerekang Indigenous Community from a normative perspective, within the framework of local wisdom, highlights how these belief systems operate as customary law. Customary law sustains and organizes community life, extending beyond mere physical residence. Each customary law community maintains a legal system that regulates all aspects of life within its jurisdiction (Hadikusuma, 2003).

The concept of customary law communities was initially introduced by Cornelius van Vollenhoven and later expanded by Ter Haar, who conducted comprehensive studies on indigenous societies. Ter Haar described a customary law community as an organized group inhabiting a specific territory with its own authority and control over communal resources, both material and immaterial. This system reflects the natural environment and is considered inseparable from community members' identities (Alting, 2010).

Pujosewojo shared a similar view, describing customary law communities as spontaneously formed societies that emerge in specific regions without formal establishment by higher authorities. These communities demonstrate strong internal solidarity, and their resources are collectively owned and used exclusively by members (Simarta, 2006).

RESEARCH METHOD

This article is based on field research conducted in 2024 in the core area of the Cerekang Indigenous Community, located in Manurung Village, Malili District, East Luwu Regency. Primary data consists of local legends related to sacred toponyms, including Pengsimaoni, Ujung Tanae, Tomba, Kasosoe, Birue, Mangkulili, Lengkong, Padang Annungnge, Aggatung'ngeng, and Turungeng Appancangengnge. These locations are regarded as sacred by the Cerekang Indigenous Community. Data collection involved interviews and was supported by literature analysis. Secondary data were obtained from scientific sources, such as academic journals, books, reports, articles, and other relevant references.

This study primarily employs a library research method, drawing on a wide range of sources, including the literary manuscript I La Galigo (NBG 188), academic literature, scholarly works, and articles that address the beliefs and traditions of the Cerekang Indigenous Community.

DISCUSSION

A Brief Historical Overview of the Cerekang Indigenous Community

Understanding the sacred myths of the Cerekang Indigenous Community requires a brief overview of their historical background as part of South Sulawesi. Linguistically, the term "*Cerekang*" is believed to derive from the Bugis word *cerre*, meaning "to break" or "broken." This term refers to the arrival of La Tonge'langi, also known as Bataraguru, who was sent to Pengsimaoni. He is regarded as the first human in Pengsimewuni and the first earthly king (*alekawa*), ruling the Kingdom of Luwu from its center in Ware'. Bataraguru agreed to descend to earth under the condition that he would marry the eldest daughter of the underworld ruler (*Toddang Toja*), named Guru Riselleng. He eventually became the ruler of the middle world (*Alekawa*), establishing the Luwu Kingdom.

According to oral narratives, La Tonge'langi descended from the sky through a giant bamboo stalk (*awo lagading*) and landed in Ussu. He was accompanied by nursemaids, concubines, and followers. Upon his arrival, he began organizing life in the middle world,

initiating the creation of plants, animals, cultivated land, forests, and rivers (Aci, 2014).

Cerekang is recognized as the ancestral land of the Luwu Kingdom (Hakim & Irfan in Fadilla & Sumantri, 2006). The legend of Tomanurung Simpursiang, which signifies the origin of the Luwu Kingdom, also traces back to Bataraguru and Sawerigading, who are considered ancestors of humankind in the middle world. A widely held belief within the community holds that all current generations are descendants of Sawerigading. Consequently, Luwu society remains deeply rooted in customary traditions and cultural practices (Syamsuddin et al., 2023).

1) Customary Territory of the Cerekang Indigenous Community

According to oral tradition, the ancestral territory of the Cerekang people once extended across parts of Tampina, Manurung, Atue, and Ussu. Based on spiritual significance, however, their customary territory currently includes ten sacred sites across three villages in Malili Subdistrict: Manurung, Atue, and Ussu. The central hub of customary activities is located in Cerekang Hamlet, Manurung Village, near the Cerekang River. The ten sacred sites, which are restricted to outsiders and off-limits for certain activities, include Pengsimaoni Hill, Padang Ennungnge, Beroe, Bulu Mangkulili, Tomba, Ujung Tanae, Kasosoe, Lengkong, Aggatungeng Ance'e, and Turungeng Appancangengnge.

The Cerekang Indigenous Community holds the belief that they are descendants of *Tomanurung*, also known as Bataraguru, who is regarded as the first human sent to Earth according to the Epic of I La Galigo. The myth surrounding the existence of Bataraguru serves as the mythological foundation for the Cerekang people concerning the origin of the terrestrial realm, or the middle world, which subsequently disseminated throughout the land.

The customary forest of the Cerekang community spans 6,698.47 hectares, falling under the administrative domain of Manurung Village. These ten sacred sites have been designated by the East Luwu Regency government as local wisdom areas, collectively covering 679,407 hectares. However, data from the Wallacea Association

reports a different total, indicating that the Cerekang customary forest encompasses 544.11 hectares across the ten sacred sites: Pengsimaoni Hill (375.7 ha), Tomba (4 ha), Ujung Tanae (91.12 ha), Bulu Mangkuli (1.75 ha), Kasosoe (1.4 ha), Padang Ennunge (11 ha), Beroe (6.05 ha), Lengkong (142 ha), Turungeng Appancangengnge (0.4 ha), and Aggattungeng Anceqe (0.55 ha).

2) *Social Structure of the Cerekang Indigenous Community*

According to demographic data from 2019, Manurung Village has a population of 4,175 people across 1,019 households. The majority work as fishermen (60%), followed by farmers (35%). The remaining population includes civil servants, teachers, employees, and members of social organizations.

The Cerekang settlement is geographically accessible, located along the Wotu–Malili main road. This accessibility has made the Cerekang Indigenous Community more receptive to external influences, unlike other indigenous groups in Indonesia, such as the Kajang or Badui, who tend to resist globalization and technological change. The Cerekang people embrace technological advancements, as reflected in their clothing styles, communication devices, and transportation methods that align with modern society.

In daily life, members of the Cerekang community engage in various occupations similar to those of the general population of East Luwu. They work in offices, teach, farm, cultivate fish, or run small businesses such as motorcycle repair shops. Despite this modern integration, the community operates within a traditional institutional framework in which each member holds specific roles and responsibilities. The customary structure includes the following positions:

- a. *Puak* (customary leader): Holds the highest authority and is responsible for spiritual and customary affairs. There are both male and female *Puak*, each serving distinct roles. The male *Puak* acts as a mediator between humans and deities and leads forest rituals, while the female *Puak* manages interpersonal relations within the community (Iriani, 2019).

- b. *Ulu* (head): Represents the *Puak* in external affairs, particularly in relations with the government.
- c. *Pangulu* (subgroup head): Oversees community matters such as land management and ritual organization.
- d. *Salangka* (shoulders): Assists the *Pangulu* in fulfilling duties.
- e. *Aje* (feet): Handles general tasks such as fundraising.

The Cerekang customary institution plays a vital role in preserving ancestral traditions and protecting sacred forests. The community enforces customary rules, including prohibitions against entering sacred forests without permission, removing objects from sacred areas, and harming or killing crocodiles. Violations are subject to customary sanctions.

Customary Norms of the Cerekang Indigenous Community

The Cerekang Indigenous Community adheres to customary laws as guiding principles for everyday life. These norms, which have evolved into binding regulations, aim to ensure a way of life that aligns with sacred and virtuous values. Rooted in ancestral teachings, the norms emphasize harmonious relationships among people and between humans and nature.

The community believes in a reciprocal relationship with nature. Any damage inflicted upon the environment will result in negative consequences, while respectful treatment will bring favorable outcomes. This belief is embodied in an ancestral saying (*papaseng*): “*Jagai Pangngale’ Ade’mu, Saja’ Mujamai, Akko Mujamai Makasolangngi ri wanuammu*”, which translates to: “Protect your customary forest, do not destroy it; if you damage it, disaster will befall your land.” This ancestral message highlights the community’s spiritual and ecological commitment to preserving their customary forest.

The sacred areas within the forest are closely tied to historical and mythological episodes from the I La Galigo epic. Each of the ten sacred sites carries ecological, historical, and spiritual significance:

- a. Pengsimaoni Hill: Believed to be the site where Batara Guru descended from the heavens and established his royal palace.

- Considered the “origin of the land,” it remains a location for the *Maggawe* ritual, a prayer ceremony for prosperity and safety. It serves as a source of holy water for Luwu royal rituals.
- b. Padang Ennungnge: Known as the “place of sunrise” (*Tompo'tikka*), it is associated with Batara Guru's meeting with We Nyili'timo, his bride, as recounted in I La Galigo (Hadrawi, 2019). The site is linked to early rice and sago cultivation and serves as a site for agricultural rituals.
 - c. Beroe: A village near the ancient tomb of La Massagoni, known as *To Barani* (the brave one), a war leader during the time of Sawerigading and La Pananrangi. The surrounding mangrove forest serves as a ritual site for invoking bravery and is considered an ancient settlement.
 - d. Bulu Mangkulili: Thought to be where Sawerigading felled the sacred Welenrengnge tree to build his ship for a voyage to China. This tree is regarded as the *positana*, or the “navel of the earth” (Enre, 1999).
 - e. Tomba: Associated with Sangiang Seri, the granddaughter of Batara Guru, who transformed into a rice plant. Her story underlies the myth of divine food provision for humans. Tomba is a site for agricultural rituals.
 - f. Ujung Tanaè: A hilly region connected to the ancestors of the Cerekang people. It functions as a water retention area that helps prevent flooding in the Cerekang River.
 - g. Kasosoe: An ancestral residential area and ancient burial site. It is a place for rituals aimed at enhancing spiritual understanding. Burial grounds are divided into sections for customary leaders (*Puak*), their descendants (*Wija Puak*), and the general population. Wooden grave markers for *Puak* members are left to decay naturally, symbolizing the belief that the deceased will reunite with their divine ancestors (*malajang*).
 - h. Lengkong: The burial site of the ancestors of the Cerekang Indigenous Community. Lengkong is an area of mangrove forest and serves as a ritual space related to the beach.
 - i. Aggatungeng Acè'è: Former dwelling site of the Cerekang ancestors, consisting of mangrove and nipa forests used for sea-related rituals.
 - j. Turungeng Appancang-engengè: Ancestral settlement composed of mangrove and nipa forests. The area functions as a site for coastal rituals.

These ten customary areas are treated with great reverence and are governed by traditional regulations established by the customary council. These rules are based on ancestral teachings and emphasize the sites' ecological and historical significance. The Cerekang people view these sacred forests as a living legacy from their ancestors, deserving preservation and respect in daily life.

Myths in the Cerekang Indigenous Community

The Cerekang Indigenous Community adheres to customary rules that guide their daily lives. These norms are passed down across generations through oral traditions and established customary practices. A number of prohibitions and obligations shape community behavior.

1) Obligation to Wear a Sarong in the Kasosoe Area

Members of the Cerekang community are required to wear a sarong when entering Kasosoe, the customary burial site. This practice carries symbolic significance, transforming the sarong from a simple garment into a cultural symbol of unity and equality. In this context, the sarong signifies the egalitarian nature of the community, where individuals present themselves without markers of social or economic status.

The sarong is considered an appropriate garment for entry into the traditional burial grounds of the Kasosoe. It is closely associated with the Bugis community's custom of donning the sarong (*lipa'*) during significant occasions such as weddings, as it symbolizes the Bugis people's identity.

The function of this myth is to serve as a manifestation of respect and simplicity, which is evenly distributed. This concept is closely associated with Barthes' semiotic understanding that material culture can be interpreted in its meaning. It represents a culture that symbolizes the respect the Cerekang Indigenous Community demonstrated when entering the Kasosoe customary burial ground. According to the

beliefs of the Cerekang people, Kasosoe is considered the 'abode of the spirits' of their ancestors. Furthermore, Kasosoe also functions as a site for customary rituals to cultivate knowledge and intelligence.

The myth surrounding using a sarong as a symbol of respect and simplicity is articulated through this garment, honoring the relatives and ancestors interred in Kasosoe. Individuals don the sarong, presenting an appearance of equality, thus refraining from displaying any differences in social status through their attire, which is uniformly enveloped in sarong fabric.

2) *The Necessity to Remove Footwear and Head Covering*

In addition to wearing a sarong, individuals must also remove footwear and head covering before entering Kasosoe. Connotatively, the prohibition on wearing footwear signifies a form of 'respect' from the Cerekang indigenous community toward their ancestors. According to them, there is no barrier between humans and the earth, as depicted in the concept of the world in the epic *I La Galigo*, which describes the upper world (*botillangi*), the lower world (*buriliu*), and the earth we walk on and inhabit as the middle world (*alekawa*).

Kasosoe is one of ten sacred forest zones and a spiritually significant space. Accordingly, specific behavioral norms apply, including removing footwear and head coverings as acts of veneration. These practices have evolved into sacred traditions embraced by the community. The removal of the head covering also carries cosmological meaning. The head is seen as a symbol of the upper world (*botillangi*), the realm of the divine, and the origin of the first human, Bataraguru, who was sent to establish early civilization. As the seat of thought and consciousness, the head is considered the most honorable part of the human body.

Removing footwear is viewed as both a form of etiquette and a means of preserving the sanctity of the burial grounds. The practice stems from the understanding that entering a sacred space should be done with purity, free from external impurities. As with entering someone's home, shoes must be removed to avoid bringing dirt inside. The same logic

applies to the Kasosoe burial area, which is perceived not merely as a cemetery but as a sacred territory within the customary forest.

Furthermore, the community believes that as descendants of Bataraguru, they will ultimately return to the earth and reunite with their ancestors (*malajang*). This perspective illustrates how the myth is not centered on physical objects themselves but on the symbolic meanings attributed to them by the community, which regards these meanings as essential moral guidelines (Hadrawi, 1993).

3) *Prohibition on Selling Fruits and Water Sourced from Cerekang Land*

This myth reflects the spirit of generosity embedded in the cultural teachings of the Cerekang Indigenous Community. It prohibits the sale of natural resources such as fruits and water, which are regarded as gifts from nature. Ancestral teachings emphasize the importance of sharing and mutual assistance, upholding the belief that no one should experience hunger or hardship. Community members are encouraged to distribute produce from their gardens to those in need, rather than seeking personal profit. The values instilled within the community do not promote materialistic pursuits.

Initially, the signs associated with this practice possess a literal or denotative meaning. Over time, as described in Barthes' theory, they evolve into connotative meanings and eventually transform into cultural myths. This prohibition serves multiple purposes, including food security, social solidarity, and environmental conservation.

As a mechanism for food security, the prohibition ensures availability, safety, and equitable distribution of food resources. Fruits harvested within the community or around sacred forest areas are not sold but are freely shared, reinforcing collective welfare. The second function relates to social solidarity. The myth encourages mutual care and cooperation, fostering a mindset in which personal resources are shared with others as if they were family, without expectation of material return.

In addition, the prohibition discourages materialistic behavior and prevents the development of greed. It fosters a perspective that values nature for its intrinsic worth rather than its commercial potential. Community

members avoid exploiting natural resources for economic gain, such as deforestation or land conversion. This myth is a strategy for environmental preservation, maintaining a sustainable relationship between humans and the natural world.

4) *Prohibition on Disposing of Food Waste and Human Waste in the Cerekang River*

This myth takes the form of a natural rule within the community, forbidding the disposal of food remnants or human waste into the Cerekang River. It serves as an environmental protection measure by preventing pollution. The river holds symbolic meaning as a vital and sacred source of life for the Cerekang Indigenous People. The prohibition against discarding food waste also serves a practical purpose, as it helps prevent pollution and deters crocodiles from approaching human settlements.

Over time, this practice has become a normative rule within the community. The people of Cerekang believe the river is a sacred entity essential to survival. Ancestral teachings consistently emphasize the need to keep the river clean and uncontaminated. The community has embraced this belief as a form of respect for nature and the environment.

The myth contributes to efforts aimed at environmental hygiene and river conservation. Flowing near residential areas, the Cerekang River plays a central role in the community's daily life. It supports a diverse ecosystem of plants and animals, including estuarine crocodiles. Preventing the river's contamination helps preserve its ecological function, which is vital for biodiversity and public health. Polluting the river with food waste or human excrement would disrupt the ecosystem and pose direct risks to the community.

Beyond its environmental significance, the river holds ceremonial value. Water from the Cerekang River is used in traditional rituals conducted by the Kedatuan Luwu. A sacred vessel is kept in the Langkana (Palace) of Luwu specifically for storing water from this river, which is believed to possess healing properties. The water collection process is conducted through rituals led by traditional leaders of the Cerekang community. This sacred role further reinforces the belief that the

river must remain pure, as it holds ecological and spiritual significance for the Cerekang people and the broader cultural heritage of Kedatuan Luwu.

5) *Prohibition on Entering the Customary Forest Without Permission*

The Cerekang Indigenous Community adheres to strict customary norms embedded in a myth regulating forest access. Public members are not allowed to enter the customary forest without prior approval from traditional leaders. Access is only granted after permission is formally obtained. On a literal level, this myth portrays the forest as a sacred space. On a symbolic level, it represents a natural shield that protects the settlement.

The Cerekang settlement is located at the center of ten toponymic zones, and the surrounding forest functions as a buffer zone during heavy rainfall, serving as a water catchment area. Therefore, the community and government share the responsibility for preserving the forest ecosystem (Hakis et al., 2024).

This myth underscores the importance of environmental protection by emphasizing the forest's protective role and its sacredness. The forest is crucial to the survival and well-being of the Cerekang people. Rooted in ancestral practices, the myth promotes the conservation of specific forest areas considered sacred due to their historical association with Bataraguru. Ten sacred forest zones are strictly protected and cannot be accessed or exploited without permission from the Puak and the To Cerekang customary institution. These areas include: a) Bukit Pengsimaoni, believed to be the palace of Bataraguru;

b) Padang Ennungngè, the meeting place of Bataraguru and his wife, We Nyili'timo; c) Beroe, the residence of La Massagoni, a heroic figure from the Sawerigading era; d) Bulu Mangkulili, the location of the Welenrengnge tree used by Sawerigading to build a boat to reach We Cuudai in China; e) Tomba, where Dewi Sangiang Seri's rice transformed into plants; f) Ujung Tanaè, linked to the ancestors of the Cerekang community; g) Lengkong, the ancestral burial site; h) Aggatungeng Ance'è, the ancestral residence of the Cerekang people;

i) Kasosoe, an ancient graveyard believed to be a place for spiritual offerings; and j) Turungeng Appancangengge, another ancestral settlement.

These sites' historical and spiritual significance has shaped normative beliefs and behaviors that treat the forest with deep reverence. As a result, unauthorized entry or resource extraction is strictly prohibited. This reflects the community's belief in the sacredness of the forest, guided by ancestral teachings known as *papaseng*.

The customary forest is preserved through this myth, thereby creating an ideal ecosystem. The forest continues to function as a support system and a vital space for the Cerekang Indigenous Community to cultivate their livelihoods. The integrity of the forest, which remains intact, serves as a critical water catchment area and plays a significant role in stabilizing the soil, thereby assisting the Cerekang Indigenous Community in averting natural disasters such as floods and landslides. Essentially, this 'prohibition' myth serves as a protective barrier to preserve the customary forest, encapsulated in a verbal tradition transmitted from one generation to the next.

6) Prohibition Against Consuming the Utti Manurung

The *utti manurung* is a special variety of banana in the Cerekang Indigenous Community that holds deep cultural and spiritual significance. This myth manifests through a prohibition against consuming the *utti manurung*, which is symbolically linked to the *Tomanurung* tradition, referring to the descent of sacred beings from the heavens.

The Cerekang people believe that once planted, the *utti manurung* is endowed with a soul and spirit. This belief originally existed independently of Islamic teachings. However, when viewed through the perspective of Islam, the dominant religion in the community, it aligns with the theological concept of Prophet Adam, who was created from clay and given a soul by God.

The comprehension of the Cerekang Indigenous Community regarding the prohibition on consuming *utti manurung* represents a manifestation of the ultimate value myth that is collectively acknowledged and transmitted across generations. This belief

posits that *utti manurung* constitutes food that the Cerekang Indigenous Community should not ingest. The purpose of this myth regards *utti manurung* as a sacred object, believed to be intrinsically connected to the ancestors of the Cerekang Indigenous Community. The notion is that consuming *utti manurung* is equivalent to consuming oneself. Conversely, another perspective offered by Rusdianto (2012) articulates that the prohibition against eating *utti manurung* arises from the belief within the Women's Clan, which equates *utti manurung* with the '*khuldi fruit*' associated with Adam's expulsion from paradise.

This myth fundamentally serves to convey the message from our ancestors that the *utti manurung* is considered forbidden food, which the community diligently follows. The prohibition against consuming this food arises not only from the perception of the food as unhealthy but also from the meanings intertwined with its history and the messages the messenger communicates. Through this analogy, it can be concluded that the issue is not centered on the object being categorized as wrong or undesirable; rather, it is about how the community, as the creators of meaning, shapes the perception of the object.

The symbols present within the myths of the Cerekang Indigenous Community encompass: sarongs, the removal of footwear and head coverings, customary forests, manurung bananas, prohibitions on the sale of water and fruits, as well as the restriction against disposing of chillies and human waste into the river. These symbols convey meanings associated with equality, respect, protection, sacredness, solidarity, and cleanliness.

CLOSING

Myths, in the form of exhortations and prohibitions, within the Cerekang Indigenous Community serve as guiding principles for daily life, encompassing interpersonal relationships and the human-nature connection. These prohibitions reflect the community's approach to environmental stewardship and social order. The rules and beliefs illustrate how the Cerekang people live according to values regarded as noble and essential.

Prohibitions and regulations in Cerekang customary law develop naturally

through denotative and connotative interpretations of cultural symbols. What begins as a simple sign evolves into meaningful rules governing interactions with nature and social conduct. These symbols are deeply internalized and highly valued by the community. In their interactions with outsiders, the Cerekang people remain open while upholding the values of *sipakatau* (treating others with humanity), *sipakainge* (mutual reminders), and *sipakaraja* (mutual assistance) (Maria, 2020).

The myths embedded in the Cerekang community promote an ideal way of life, emphasizing simplicity, mutual support, respect for ancestral teachings, and profound reverence for nature as the source of life. These myths reflect cosmological understandings of creation embodied in the heavens and earth characteristics, aiming to foster an ideal, safe, peaceful, and harmonious existence.

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This article is based on field research conducted in East Luwu, particularly among the Cerekang Indigenous Community. Sincere appreciation is extended to the Cerekang community and all local government officials in East Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi Province.

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