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Sus Oef as the Theology of Indonesian Ethnic Marriage Dowry

Halim Wiryadinata^{1,*}, Fonny Natalia Joseph²

¹Universitas Kristen Indonesia, DKI Jakarta, Indonesia

²Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Blessing Makassar, Sulawesi Selatan, Indonesia

*Email: halimwiryadinata@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: This research aims to show that the ethnic theology of wedding dowry builds the relationship between two prominent families as the foundation of society. The main issue from the previous research is economic instability for a household in marriage life. The original value of the wedding dowry in the Bone village, NTT, is to exhibit the reflection of the teaching from the forefathers to bond up the relative. The acknowledgment of the wedding dowry is the acceptance of the stranger into the big family as the expression of the building relative's value. Therefore, *Sus Oef* – called – is the way of expressing the idea of reflecting on the ritual of the people in the Bone village among the society. Through the sociological religion method, this research is conducted to reveal the perspective emic of the issue. The sociological analysis helps this research to see how the anatomy of *Sus Oef* works in the light of the Biblical narrative. The result of this study is that religion leads to extensive family bonding in the wedding ceremony. Finally, the conclusion presents how religion legitimates the family's bonding as the ethnic theological wedding dowry. The result of this study applies to church human resources education to understand the ethnic theology of wedding dowry as a part of cultural existence to recognize the extensive family bonding through the wedding dowry.

Keywords: Theological Dowry, Ethnic Theological Dowry, Ethnic Theological Wedding, Bonding of Family, *Sus Oef*.

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INTRODUCTION

Sus Oef is a marriage dowry for the people of Bone village, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), which emphasizes the cultural value paid by the man to the woman as a kinship bond between the two prominent families (Steven & Yunanto, 2019). This marriage dowry is an agreement between two parties to symbolize unification and make women's position equal to men in the social perspective of the people of Bone village. Cultural values have made *Sus Oef* a currency in marriage (Apu, 2021). Therefore, in wedding ceremonies, *Sus Oef* has become a cultural attribute of the Bone village community. The practice of *Sus Oef's* dowry was carried out by the villagers of Bone based on two elements, namely culture, and religion. The concept of culture is seen as the existence of self-respect and

upholding the traditional values within the framework of religion. In contrast, the concept of religion shows that *Sus Oef's* dowry upholds the sacredness of traditional values in responding to how big the dowry is.

Sus Oef, as a cultural value, is the giving of gifts by the man to the woman to respect the social presence of women at weddings. Delivery of gifts is carried out based on an agreement by both parties so that the existence of a family is valuable in the eyes of the community in the form of goods or animals (Laudasi et al., 2020). The transactional concept is understood as bargaining for the amount of dowry to reach a consensus, has made customs a cultural value in respecting the existence of a woman's family who has raised her daughter, and gives respect to a woman's honor to marry a man and live together.

However, the surrender of goods or animals has been replaced by some money in modern times. Rodliyah et al. (2017) examine that cultural values create a capitalist economic system by criticizing the commercial concept of cultural values. Rodliyah et al. (2017) sees that the shift in the essence of cultural values has resulted in developing economic values and creating accounts payable for both parties. Lakamau and Wibowo (2021) emphasized that this shift was one of the causes of domestic violence due to the commercialization of *Sus Oef* for men. Even though the economic value of *Sus Oef* has played an active role at this time, the Alor people still carry out the ancestral culture as an expression of the sacredness of marriage.

Kamuri and Toumeluk (2021) emphasized that *Sus Oef* did not conflict with religious values regarding the role of culture and did not even harm humanity. Although the practice of *Sus Oef* determines the economic value of the wedding ceremony, this is a tribute to the social status of both parties in the Alor community. Tukan and Sarwojuwono (2020) explained that *Sus Oef* has four meanings 1) the value of the award, 2) bond form; 3) thanks; 4) transactional in proposing women. These meanings place *Sus Oef* in self-respect and carry out the ancestral mandate in the Alor community. Neonnub and Habsari (2018) explored that the determination of the price value of *Sus Oef* is different in accounting financial determinations because the meaning of respect for sacredness for the two extended families is the basis for the determination. Therefore, the meaning of marriage in the Bone village community carries *Sus Oef* as a family tribute to the ancestors, not declaring economic value as a dowry when a proposal or marriage occurs.

Based on the facts mentioned above, several questions arise: how does *Sus Oef* cement the kinship values of the two parties in marriage? How does religion support the concept of kinship in marriage? Therefore, the purpose of this study is to answer how the role of religion in *Sus Oef*'s cultural values as an adhesive for kinship values in the

wedding ceremony of the people of Bone village through some analysis and discussion. In line with the facts above, this research is expected to fill in the gaps in the research gap on *Sus Oef*'s wedding dowry for the people of Bone village, NTT, by demonstrating that the concept of religion plays an essential role in dowry marriages and impacts the role of religion in traditional marriages.

METHOD

To answer the research question above, regarding the role of religion as an adhesive for kinship values in marriage through *Sus Oef*'s dowry, this research was conducted using the sociology of religion method to bring up an emic perspective (Okutan, 2020; Zaluchu, 2021). The data used in this research rests on theoretical, conceptual, and scientific studies found in journals, scientific reports, and credible sources that discuss *Sus Oef*. Analysis and discussion of the data through a qualitative descriptive concept within the framework of the sociology of religion method (Kennedy, 2019; Revez, 2018). Therefore, this study has systematic writing in four parts. First, explain *Sus Oef* as a tradition in Bone, NTT. This paper discusses *Sus Oef*'s traditional cultural values as respect for ancestors. Second, explaining the cultural teachings of marriage in the village of Bone from the perspective of *Sus Oef* and the traditional meaning of *Sus Oef* in the community. Third, collecting biblical narratives about Abraham asking his servant to bring offerings to find a partner for his son, Isaac, as a tribute to customs to unite the extended family. Fourth, religion's role in *Sus Oef* as the bond between the two large families through marriage as the theology of Indonesian ethnic dowry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Marriage: *Sus Oef* and Its Teaching in the Bone Village

The philosophy of *Sus Oef*'s practice for the people of Bone village, East Nusa Tenggara, is to seek compatibility between spiritual and social

relationships in marriage. Spiritual relations build requests to the ancestral spirit, Bintiu, as the community's religion, as well as guidance on the nominal *Sus Oef* through family deliberations. Bintiu is a symbol of the incarnation of God through the concept of dynamism and is a place for dialogue for the people of Bone village. Rosdiani et al., (2021) express that religion influences culture in daily life and worships ancestral spirits as respect and guidance for major societal events. Therefore, *Sus Oef's* spiritual relationship with Bintiu is sacred in achieving cosmic balance in the patrilineal system. The people of Bone village believe in this balance as a form of gratitude to God in the present and the future (Lede et al., 2018). The concept of balance creates rites and rituals in the marriages of the people of Bone village and is expressed in religious concepts. *Sus Oef's* practice of social values influences religious life to elevate a woman's social status and her extended family.

Sus Oef, in the ritual concept, has four steps as marriage teachings for the people of Bone (Sardari, 2019). First, opening the discussion on the traditional ceremony of *Sus Oef* through prayer and remarks from both sides of the family to convey the purpose of traditional marriage. Second, there is a response from the woman through her uncle with a request submitted. The man must approve the request, resulting in a transfer of clans. Third, there is a transaction between the woman's request for the big clan to the man following the economic conditions of the man so that the marriage of the two brides and groom takes place. Finally, the marriage dowry is paid by the man to the woman through the mother of the bride. It is also a gift from the woman to the man as a sign of the occurrence of the traditional wedding rites after the payment of *Sus Oef*. Therefore, the social exchange in marriage through the giving and payment of *Sus Oef* influences the welfare of the two extended families and the bride and groom.

In terms of rites, *Sus Oef* influences and determines the way of life and teaching of marriage in the Bone village community to honor ancestors

(Kleden, 2017). Respect for ancestral spirits is an expression of belief in the existence of supernatural powers in realizing human needs through security, protection, and tranquility in the *Sus Oef* ceremony. Therefore, they offer symbols such as chickens, pigs, and crops for protection (Susanti, 2016). The concept of this belief builds an understanding of harmony with ancestral spirits in a reciprocal way that what is done in a traditional wedding ceremony is the will of their ancestors to determine *Sus Oef* as a symbol of marriage for the people of Bone village. Wejak reveals that the wedding rite through the payment of *Sus Oef* serves as the legitimacy of legal marriage relations and strengthens social relations within the clan to create harmony between the worlds of the living and the dead (Wejak, 2020).

Anatomy *Sus Oef*

Marriage for the people of Bone village is a sacred ceremony that upholds ancestral values by handing the marriage dowry (*Sus oef*) from the man to the woman. Steven and Yunanto (2019) explained that handing over the marriage dowry to the woman's family, in the form of masculine objects, such as buffalo, horses, machetes, spears, and jewelry, is a must. Meanwhile, the woman handing over woven cloth, sarongs, or traditional clothing. It is according to the ancestral culture of the Alor people (Steven & Yunanto, 2019). The handover of the marriage dowry upholds the value of balance between the man and the woman through negotiations between families according to social status and agreement. The women's family meeting determines the amount of *Sus Oef* the men must pay. Kamuri (2020) emphasized that *Sus Oef* was a tribute to prospective brides and grooms between two large families for their wedding preparations. The handover of *Sus Oef* determines the legitimacy of the marriage and the social appreciation of the bride and groom in the eyes of the extended family and society. Vice versa.

Sus Oef's way of working starts with preparation for marriage through two processes. First, when the family or representatives of the male

candidates show their intention to propose to the female candidates, they bring the pre-agreed marriage dowry. Both parties handed goods to each other according to the agreement, symbolizing *Sus Oef* to build kinship. In the second process, if the woman accepts the application, then the marriage preparations are immediately carried out through the roles of each family. Apu (2021) views that the *Sus Oef* exchange agreement determines and is determined through the social status of men and women through deliberation. The *Sus Oef* transaction depends on the request and request of the woman to the man's family by looking at the social status and education of the bride in determining the number of goods delivered as a dowry. The ability to hand over the marriage dowry in the custom of the Alor people makes the man serious about marrying and proves that the groom can meet his wife's needs for life. Therefore, *Sus Oef* becomes meaningful for the Alor people's belief in marriage customs.

The handing over of the marriage dowry to the woman's family traditionally expresses a substitute value for lowering the bride's surname and raising the man's surname on the woman's behalf. Lakamu and Wibowo (2021) emphasized that if the men did not surrender *Sus Oef*, then they had no right to the name of his tribe for his wife. The failure of *Sus Oef*'s payment obligations become a debt for the man to the woman until the next offspring. If her husband dies, her son must pay the mother's side. Instead, the daughter replaces her mother's position to receive the dowry given to her mother's family. *Sus Oef* showed and maintained the value of the status of women in the family of his husband and children to continue his father's work amid his clan. Deke, Bahari, and Salim (2020) revealed that *Sus Oef* is a substitute for the cosmic imbalance due to the transfer of the wife's surname to the husband's surname. The void in the cosmos, for the people of Bone village, is called *Kaos Nono* and needs to be filled with the value of *Sus Oef* for women's families. Therefore, this belief has become a concept of marriage for the people of Bone village

in understanding *Sus Oef* as a counterweight to spiritual and social relations.

Narrative Story: Bible and Wedding Dowry

The book of Genesis 24 records the handing over of the marriage dowry between Abraham's bachelor and Rebekah's family at Isaac's marriage request. In finding a potential wife for his son, Isaac, Abraham appointed his bachelor as the representative. Hamilton (1995, pp. 144–145) explains that his servant brought ten camels and valuables to propose a woman to Isaac out of respect for social status in the community. Bringing animals and valuables is the concept of dowry for Isaac's proposal to his future wife, Rebekah. Waltke and Fredericks (2001, pp. 328–329) assert that the gift of valuables is not only to Rebekah but also to her siblings and family in Genesis 24:53. Therefore, the concept of marriage dowry is stated in the biblical narrative as a form of respect for the social status in that place (Kamuri & Toumeluk, 2021). The handing over of the dowry from the Abraham family to the Nahor family is an attribute of appreciation to the woman's family, who has allowed them to open up about their goals and intentions to propose to Rebekah as Isaac's wife.

The concept of dowry for marriage is theologically seen not as a concept of economic value but as an award for social status in society. Waltke and Fredericks (2001, p. 328) emphasized that giving a wedding dowry to Rebekah's family was a form of appeasement and gave a positive impression of respecting local culture. Therefore, the dowry in Genesis 24 is a tribute to the woman and the family of the woman who will lose her child. The concept of marriage in the book of Genesis describes the marriage dowry as the maximum reward for the status of the bride and groom. Packers et al. reveal that the cultural perspective of Genesis 24 is respect for women, so the economic value is not a major part of Isaac's concept of dowry to Rebekah (Packer et al., 2009). The focus of the wedding dowry is a symbol of respecting local culture and placing culture in its place.

Westermann (1985, p. 395) explains that Genesis 24 is a concept of prayer as a response to events in the request and thanksgiving through Eliezer's success in finding a bride for Isaac. Eliezer prayed to God, and not only did he succeed in carrying out his task, but he had trust in God that led him to success. The concept of prayer is implemented in gratitude for the protection and success of her task through an attitude of appreciation to the family of the woman who has allowed Rebekah to go to Abraham's family by giving jewelry to her relatives. This sense of appreciation provides a cultural place, socially, side by side with religious concepts that respect local culture (Wejak, 2020). Juanda (2019) assesses that the concept of dowry is socially equal in degree between men and women but not seen in economic value. Giving a wedding dowry can also be seen as a form of harmony between a man and a woman with a sign of appreciation through giving objects or animals for the gratitude the bride and groom meet.

The concept of a wedding dowry for the Bible is to build the unity of the bride and groom by conforming to local culture. Waltke and Fredricks (2001) revealed that religion and culture have no contradictions but unite the bride and groom as a top priority. The concept of Christian marriage is to unite the bride and groom before God and hold fast to the union of the two humans following the norms and teachings of the Bible. Meanwhile, culture gives the meaning of social acceptance of the bride and groom according to norms, customs, and teachings. Therefore, the dowry of marriage builds the meaning of the union of the two people to be accepted in society without reproach. The principle of wholeness and acceptance of the bride and groom is the main goal of marriage and the development of a harmonious family. Family integrity is a priority for Christian education to not create hatred resulting from a marriage dowry.

Religion and *Sus Oef*: The Bonding of Family

Kafi (2020) explained that the marriage dowry upholds the love of the prospective husband

for the prospective wife through the fulfillment of the marriage dowry. Sincerity in giving a marriage dowry means protecting and glorifying women as a framework for love to build a family. The form and value of the marriage dowry to the prospective wife are determined based on the agreement of both parties, which puts forward the concept of sincerity and love. Ridwan (2020) supports the concept of love as a form of respect, protection, and respect for women in reciprocal interactions in expressing love. Reciprocal interaction provides a way for the position of men as the head of the household to protect, respect, and fulfilling married life. Therefore, the marriage dowry is a picture of sincerity based on a sense of love to get the meaning of marriage itself.

The meaning of marriage is not determined by the form and value of *Sus Oef*, but rather by the value of religion as a contribution to understanding family ties. Religious values influence the couple's understanding of forming a family and relations with the extended family. Walean and Walean (2022) describe that the Christian value of marriage is love, like Christ loves the congregation. The concept of love provides an understanding that *Sus Oef*, as a marriage dowry, is the man's love for the woman and helps the family respect their ancestral culture. Paath et al., (2020) emphasized that marriage based on love is a sacred agreement to form a family without cultural barriers. Therefore, *Sus Oef's* culture is a way to rectify that the marriage of Bone villagers builds family ties in the form of friendship between the two extended families. Family bonding is a goal built by a prospective husband and wife based on religious values and obtaining legitimacy from the surrounding environment through the *Sus Oef* cultural process for the people of Bone village.

Religion and *Sus Oef* determine the sacredness of marriage for the bride and groom in a social community. Religion and *Sus Oef* are symbols that strengthen the bride and groom's acceptance in society through their respective roles (Kamuri & Toumeluk, 2021). Religion gives sacred

meaning to service to the Highest and determines its proper place in the earth's social life and life after death. The presence of *Sus Oef* is the improvement of humans individually and socially so that the social meaning of marriage cannot be separated from understanding the sacred dimensions of marriage. Belief in individual and social perfection is derived from religion, which strengthens social strata in cosmic-harmonious relations in achieving prosperity. Therefore, religion gives meaning to the union of the bride and groom and extended family in social status. This unification places them in a legal position both religiously and socially through the surrender of *Sus Oef*. Religion and *Sus Oef* have complementary roles in seeking the legality of social life and life afterward.

Steven and Yunanto (2019) view the value of self-efficacy as a strong motivation to see the power of religion and *Sus Oef* building the unity and prosperity of the bride and groom and their extended family. The image of religion unites each and places a sense of respect for the instructions and teachings of the people of Bone village regarding customs through the handover of *Sus Oef*. Therefore, religion and *Sus Oef* are not opposed to one another, but religion and *Sus Oef* place individuals in a social community according to their functions and roles. Religion respects culture and shows appreciation through marriage dowries and respecting women as valuable human beings to unite the family.

The implications of the concept of dowry above provide an understanding in the formation of Church members that the existence of a dowry in a culture is an expression for women to be equal to men. The wedding dowry is also a form of respect for women and upholds local cultural values.

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Therefore, the concept of dowry for marriage expresses cultural values in placing women on an equal footing with men. It has practical implications that religion fights for respect for women through narrative stories in the Book of Genesis that follow local culture. Religion and culture complement and legitimize the marriage dowry as the unification of the two extended families into one unit.

CONCLUSION

The role of *Sus Oef* as a marriage dowry for the people of Bone village is a concept of marriage that unites both parties into a concept of kinship. Religion has a big role as a legitimator in strengthening objection relations as a whole family in society. In answering the research question, this conclusion is divided into two parts. First, religion has a role in valuing marriage as an effort to strengthen family relationships and make couples whole in society. The Scriptures show that religion provides space for the concept of respect for local culture in strengthening and strengthening family ties with one another so as not to build hindrances towards culture and customs.

Second, religion equips and crystallizes the marriage bond through local culture. Religion places itself in culture as a force that influences and gives meaning to traditional marriages in Bone village. Religion and culture complement each other to provide legitimacy for the union of two human beings in engagement or marriage ceremonies through the delivery of dowries. Therefore, the marriage dowry (*Sus Oef*) proves that religion builds communication with culture as a learning for coaching church members in understanding the dowry of marriage in a certain area.

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