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Latent Social Capital in the Marpege-Pege Wedding Tradition

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Abstract

This research explores the Marpege – pege tradition in traditional Angkola Batak weddings as a social mechanism that addresses the high costs of marriage, especially the bridewealth obligation (*tuhor*). Conducted in Sialogo Village, West Angkola District, South Tapanuli Regency, the study focuses on (1) how the Marpege – pege tradition is practiced and (2) its role in the community. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach and Robert K. Merton's structural functionalism framework, data were gathered through observations, in – depth interviews, and documentation with community members. Results reveal that Marpege – pege is a coordinated collective effort of monetary contributions organized by the groom's family, involving stages: *Manyapai Boru*, *Marpege-pege*, and *Pataru Tuhor*. From a functionalist view, this tradition has an obvious role in easing wedding expenses. Additionally, it fosters latent functions like enhanced social solidarity, stronger community bonds, and the preservation of cultural values across generations. These latent functions bolster social capital by supporting reciprocal relationships and collective responsibility within the community. The study concludes that Marpege – pege is more than just an economic tactic; it is a culturally embedded tradition that sustains social cohesion and cultural continuity in Angkola Batak society.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is an archipelagic country characterized by a diverse mix of ethnicities, languages, customs, and religions, creating a pluralistic society where local traditions coexist with religious beliefs. This rich cultural diversity greatly influences social identities and community practices, especially as local groups adapt to social changes while striving to preserve their cultural heritage. In many Indonesian societies, culture encompasses moral values, belief systems, and norms related to respecting the Creator and managing social relations, passed down through generations via traditions. These traditions often develop through historical continuity and collective practice rather than formal laws, making them essential for understanding how communities shape social meaning and unity (Widiarnita 2024).

Traditions influence social life in various ways. They are transmitted orally, through rituals, and as part of community customs, often serving social and religious roles. While modernization and rapid societal changes can diminish some traditions, many Indonesian communities still maintain ancestral practices, especially during life – cycle events such as weddings. Marriage rituals are particularly significant sociologically because they shape and mirror social bonds, kinship ties, and community standards. For instance, in West Java, the *Gintingan* tradition illustrates how collective participation and reciprocal exchanges foster social capital via mutual trust, norms, and networks, thus strengthening community unity (Bunihayu Village Cooperative Office 2023; Khairul Anwar et al., 2023).

Within North Sumatra's rich cultural mosaic, the Batak Angkola people uphold a diverse array of wedding traditions that blend religious beliefs and social structures. As an ethnic subgroup, they are characterized by patrilineal kinship systems and strict customary



norms, including distinctive marriage practices in which men marry outside their clans (*exogamy*) and pay a culturally significant dowry called *tuhor* (Manalu et al. 2024; Simamora & Madina, 2023). Their wedding customs typically integrate *adat* (custom) and *ibadat* (religious devotion), as expressed in the local phrase "*hombar do adat dohot ibadat*," which emphasizes that tradition and worship are interconnected and must coexist harmoniously.

Traditional Batak Angkola wedding costs, especially the *tuhor*, often create financial strain for families in rural areas. In response, communities have developed collective practices to share these expenses and strengthen social bonds. The *Marpege-Pege* tradition is a key example, functioning as a communal effort to support wedding costs through community contributions. While research has explored *Marpege-Pege* from cultural and semiotic viewpoints (Hasibuan et al. 2024) and noted changes in its practice elsewhere (Siregar 2024), there is a lack of sociological analysis of its social roles, especially regarding social capital within modern communities.

Social capital in sociology describes the networks of relationships, reciprocal norms, and shared values that promote cooperation and collective action within a community. Researchers like Putnam and Bourdieu highlight its role in maintaining community resilience, trust, and cooperation. In rural Indonesia, traditions serve as channels for building trust, fostering reciprocity, and strengthening social networks that help communities pursue common objectives. Studies on Indonesian traditions, such as West Java's *Gintingan*, show how collective practices uphold trust and cooperative norms among members, creating strong social capital that helps prevent social fragmentation (Bunihayu Village Cooperative Office, 2023; Khairul Anwar et al. 2023).

While broader literature addresses the topic, the specific connection between the *Marpege-Pege* tradition and the development or reinforcement of social capital in Batak Angkola wedding settings remains insufficiently examined. Traditional wedding rituals in Batak communities are well-known for their symbolic and social importance. For example, studies on Batak wedding ceremonies, such as *margondang*, emphasize the moral values and community involvement embedded in these practices, suggesting that rites and customs serve as meaningful social spaces (Pertiwi et al. 2025). Nonetheless, most research to date has focused on symbolic, linguistic, or legal aspects rather than on how these traditions structurally promote community cohesion and mutual support.

In Sialogo Village, West Angkola District, South Tapanuli Regency, the *Marpege-Pege* tradition remains a key part of wedding ceremonies, practiced whenever community members marry. This custom usually involves the groom's family hosting a communal event where village residents contribute to help cover wedding costs, symbolizing mutual aid and shared responsibility. Participation in *Marpege-Pege* varies depending on individual involvement and social status, and although contributions are not mandatory, they are generally seen as a sign of respect and reciprocal duty within the community. These practices suggest that *Marpege-Pege* may play a significant role in maintaining both economic support systems and social networks that sustain community life (Hasibuan & Setia 2023).

This study aims to explore how the *Marpege-Pege* tradition influences the development and strengthening of social capital in Sialogo Village. It specifically examines (1) the practices and social interactions involved in the *Marpege-Pege* during traditional Batak Angkola weddings, and (2) how this tradition fosters social bonds among community members. Using a qualitative methodology rooted in Robert K. Merton's structural functionalism theory, the research views *Marpege-Pege* not just as a cultural heritage but

as a social activity with important roles in promoting community unity, reciprocity, and shared identity. Structural functionalism helps analyze both explicit functions—like economic aid—and implicit functions—such as building trust and social networks—that traditions serve within a social system.

In summary, this research contributes to sociological understandings of how localized wedding traditions serve as mechanisms for social integration and capital formation within Indonesian ethnic communities. In doing so, it builds on existing literature concerning the social functions of traditional practices (e.g., *Gintingan*, *margondang*) by offering insight into how the Marpege—Pege tradition continues to shape social relations and community resilience in contemporary Batak Angkola society.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive—interpretative methodology to explore the role of the Marpege—pege tradition in fostering social capital within Angkola Batak wedding ceremonies in Sialogo Village, West Angkola District, South Tapanuli Regency. A qualitative approach was chosen because the goal is to understand social meanings, cultural practices, and community views embedded in traditional rituals, rather than to statistically measure variables. Qualitative research prioritizes an in-depth understanding of social reality from participants' perspectives. It examines how and why social phenomena happen within their natural contexts (Creswell & Poth 2018). Accordingly, this approach emphasizes interpretation, context, and meaning, capturing the complexity of social and cultural practices as experienced by community members.

Grounded in the anthropological and sociological traditions of qualitative research as described by Koentjaraningrat, who views it as a humanitarian inquiry that systematically gathers and analyzes empirical social and cultural data to understand social patterns and cultural meanings (Koentjaraningrat 2009). In this paradigm, humans serve as the primary research instrument, allowing flexibility in capturing subtle social interactions and symbolic meanings that are not rigidly predetermined at the start.

Research Site and Informants

The study was conducted in Sialogo Village, where the Marpege—pege tradition is actively practiced during Angkola Batak wedding ceremonies. Informants were purposively selected based on their knowledge and experience with the tradition, including traditional leaders, community elders, couples who recently held weddings, and residents involved in Marpege—pege activities. Selection focused on those able to provide detailed, relevant, and contextual insights into the social functions and meanings of Marpege—pege. This aligns with qualitative principles prioritizing information-rich cases over representativeness (Patton, 2015).

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection involved participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participant observation directly enabled witnessing Marpege—pege's implementation, participation patterns, and social interactions during ceremonies. Interviews explored perceptions, motivations, and interpretations related to social cohesion, reciprocity, and networks. Documentation, including photographs, community records, and notes, complemented observational and interview data, capturing visual, historical, and contextual information about wedding practices. Multiple methods enriched the analysis by capturing both observable behaviors and deeper social meanings (Denzin & Lincoln 2018).

Data Analysis

Analysis was performed using an interactive model comprising data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, as described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaca (2014). Data reduction involved selecting and categorizing relevant field data to identify key themes about the social roles of Marpege—pege. Data display used thematic organization and narratives to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions identified patterns and linked findings to Robert K. Merton's structural functionalism framework, focusing on manifest and latent functions.

Data Validity and Trustworthiness

Credibility was maintained through data source and method triangulation and prolonged engagement in the research setting. Comparing data from observations, interviews, and records minimized bias and increased reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Efforts also included ensuring consistency in interpretation and transparency in analysis.

DISCUSSIONS

Marpege-pege Tradition in Batak Angkola Traditional Weddings in Sialogo Village

Sialogo Village is located in the West Angkola District, South Tapanuli Regency, North Sumatra Province. Sialogo Village is located within the West Angkola District, South Tapanuli Regency, North Sumatra Province. Sialogo Village borders: to the north, Labu Layan Village, to the east, Aek Nabara Village, to the south, Panobasan Village, and to the west, Sitinjak Village. There are 208 families in Sialogo Village. Sialogo residents prioritize their children's future. This is evident in the large number of school—age students who have successfully completed high school and then pursued undergraduate degrees. The majority of the village's population is Muslim.

The majority of Sialogo Village residents are from the Angkola Batak tribe, with the remainder being from the Mandailing and Nias tribes. Most of the residents of Sialogo Village are unemployed. The majority of Sialogo Village residents work as farmers, most commonly snake fruit farmers, as the village is surrounded by numerous snake fruit plantations, often located near residents' homes. The Marpege—pege tradition is still practiced by the people of South Tapanuli during almost every wedding ceremony at the groom's home. The Marpege—pege tradition is primarily practiced because it continues to play a vital role in the lives of the people of Sialogo Village, especially during the lead—up to a wedding. The term Marpege—pege comes from the word pege. Pege is a type of finger—shaped rhizome plant with swollen mid—joints used as a spice and medicinal ingredient, or more commonly known as "ginger." The Batak Angkola community associates the "spicy flavor" of ginger with hardship. Creating a happy atmosphere by helping others during difficult times is part of religious teachings and customary norms.

The Marpege—pege tradition embodies social cooperation through structured interactions to address life's challenges within the Batak Angkola community. The Marpege—pege tradition is still practiced by the people of South Tapanuli during almost every wedding ceremony at the groom's home. This aligns with Kurniawan's statement that Marpege—pege is a collection of funds by the groom's family to support the wedding process. In Sialogo Village, the Marpege—pege tradition has endured from ancient times to the present day. This tradition is an important part of the local cultural heritage. Despite its many years of existence, Marpege—pege remains preserved and performed with respect and adherence to traditional customs. Interview with a traditional leader from Sialogo Village:

"The Marpege—pege tradition is still practiced by the people of South Tapanuli during almost every wedding ceremony at the groom's home. The Marpege—pege tradition is held by the prospective groom and invites all relatives, friends, and close community members before the ceremony. This tradition has been carried out since ancient times when the groom gets married in Sialogo Village. This tradition has been passed down from generation to generation since the village was founded. This tradition aims to help ease the financial burden of the groom's marriage."

The Marpege—pege tradition has existed in Sialogo Village since ancient times for grooms getting married. The exact year is unknown. However, the Marpege—pege tradition has existed since the village of Sialogo. The Marpege—pege tradition involves several stages. Each stage has a meaning and purpose that relates to the others. The following are the stages in the Marpege—pege tradition:

(1) Manyapai Boru

Before the Marpege—pege tradition, there is a stage called "manyapai boru," during which the groom's family visits the bride's family to ask for their consent to the groom's proposal. They then agree on the amount of money the bride will request. Before the ceremony, residents are invited to their homes to announce the Marpege—pege event, the location, and the date. If the person is not home, an invitation letter will be left. The women, especially the mothers, prepare the food for the guests. The women work together to cook. The dishes, including rendang, stir—fried vegetables, soto (a type of soup), rice, and drinking water, are all prepared the following afternoon.

(2) Marpege—pege

The Marpege—pege ceremony is the core of the Marpege—pege tradition. The Marpege—pege tradition involves several stages. The Marpege—pege tradition takes place two weeks before the wedding. On the night of the ceremony, the Marpege—pege ceremony takes place at the groom's house. The invited guests arrived after Isha prayers, with approximately 30—50 people arriving. The number of guests depends on the host. Factors influencing this include whether they frequently attend traditional village events or rarely do. A second factor is how often the host attends other people's Marpege—pege (gatherings). If an individual is diligent about socializing and attending others' traditional events, many guests will also attend their own, and vice versa. Every tradition has its own stages. Likewise, the Marpege—pege tradition has stages in its implementation, including the mangan (gathering), mangkobar (gathering), and mangumpulkon hepeng (gathering).

(3) Pataru Tuhor

Pataru Tuhor is a tradition practiced by the Batak Angkola people after the Marpege—pege procession, during which the dowry is delivered to the bride during their traditional wedding ceremony. The Pataru Tuhor ceremony is a crucial moment in the wedding journey, rich in meaning and symbolism for the Batak Angkola people. The Marpege—pege tradition plays a crucial role in increasing social capital at Batak Angkola traditional weddings in Sialogo Village. As part of a series of traditional ceremonies, this tradition not only strengthens family and community ties but also reinforces the values of togetherness and solidarity within the community.

The Role of the Marpege-pege Tradition in Increasing Social Capital at Batak Angkola Traditional Weddings in Sialogo Village

The Marpege—pege tradition plays a crucial role in increasing social capital at Batak Angkola traditional weddings in Sialogo Village. As part of a series of traditional

ceremonies, this tradition not only strengthens family and community ties but also reinforces the values of togetherness and solidarity within the community.

(1) Increasing Social Capital

The Marpege – pege tradition plays a role in society. Simply put, social capital is the relationship between individuals and community groups that positively impacts both parties. According to him, the relationship between individuals and society is not merely visible (given), but rather the result of conscious and unconscious interactions between individuals within the group, and is the result of long – term relationships. The Marpege – pege tradition is still maintained by the Sialogo village community whenever a groom marries. The Marpege – pege tradition certainly serves a function in society. One of its functions is increasing social capital. This Marpege – pege tradition fosters social capital by fostering solidarity and community cohesion through mutual assistance. During the Marpege – pege tradition, attendees gather at the home of the event host (the person holding the event) to discuss the matter. Each invited resident contributes money. This money is given to the Anakboru (the family) responsible for collecting the Marpege – pege money.

The Marpege – pege tradition is characterized by trust, as the community trusts one another when they contribute financial resources to help reduce the burden of the groom's wedding expenses. The Marpege – pege tradition contributes to increasing social capital by fostering solidarity and community cohesion through mutual assistance. During the Marpege – pege tradition, attendees gather at the event host's home (the person hosting the event) to deliberate, and each invited resident contributes money. This money is given to the Anakboru (Children's Association), responsible for collecting the Marpege – pege funds.

(2) Increasing Economic Capital

The Marpege – pege tradition contains economic elements. The amount of money given depends on a person's economic situation. The proceeds from the Marpege – pege tradition can also contribute to the economy of Batak Angkola traditional weddings, which are quite expensive and cover everything from the Tuhor (prisoner) to the wedding ceremony itself. In addition to social capital, the Marpege – pege tradition also contributes to the accumulation of economic capital. The research also revealed that the most obvious form of capital increased through the Marpege – pege tradition is economic capital. Because the Tuhor tradition in Batak weddings, including those in Angkola, is so significant, and if the family wishes to hold a wedding reception, the costs will be even greater, the Marpege – pege tradition has been proven to play a role in increasing economic capital in Batak Angkola traditional weddings, particularly in the Sialogo Village study.

Because the Marpege – pege tradition is closely linked to economic capital, it certainly influences the community's economy. The better the economic situation, the greater the role of increasing economic capital in Batak Angkola traditional weddings in Sialogo Village. However, this is limited to income; the Marpege – pege tradition remains quite effective in helping with wedding costs and increasing economic capital. The Marpege – pege tradition contains economic elements. The amount of money given depends on a person's economic situation. Furthermore, the proceeds from the Marpege – pege tradition can contribute to the economy of Batak Angkola traditional weddings, which are quite expensive and cover everything from the Tuhor (priest) to the wedding reception itself.

(3) Increasing Cultural Capital

The Marpege—pege tradition also contributes to the accumulation of cultural capital. In sociology, cultural capital consists of an individual's social assets (education, speech, intelligence, social capital, clothing style, and others) that facilitate social mobility in a stratified society. In the Batak Angkola culture, the practices of their ancestors are still practiced in daily life. Everything from etiquette to behavior and work ethics is regulated by custom. The Marpege—pege tradition also contributes to the accumulation of cultural capital. Cultural capital in the Marpege—pege tradition is embodied. In this Marpege—pege tradition, the people of Sialogo Village maintain their ancestral cultural heritage, which is still practiced today.

Manifest and Latent Functions of the Marpege-pege Tradition

Robert K. Merton, working within the framework of structural functionalism, distinguishes between manifest functions, which are deliberate and recognized outcomes of social practices, and latent functions, which are unintended, unrecognized, yet equally important outcomes (Merton 1968). Using this framework, the Marpege—pege tradition in Angkola Batak wedding ceremonies exemplifies both types of functions.

The clear, manifest purpose of the Marpege—pege tradition is economic. It serves as a collective means for community members to financially support the groom's family to cover wedding costs, especially the tuhor (bridewealth). This intended purpose is well understood and regarded as the main goal of the tradition. Essentially, Marpege—pege acts as a socially organized form of mutual aid, reducing individual financial burdens through collective effort, thus supporting the continuation of marriage—a vital social institution—within the community.

Aside from its explicit economic role, Marpege—pege also produces important latent functions that participants may not always consciously recognize. One of the most notable latent effects is the enhancement of social solidarity, kinship bonds, and communal harmony among Angkola Batak members. Through repeated reciprocal exchanges, individuals reinforce social ties, build mutual trust, and foster a shared sense of responsibility. As Merton notes, such latent functions often contribute to social integration and stability, even if they are not the practice's primary objectives (Merton 1968).

In the Batak Angkola cultural setting, ancestral traditions serve as normative frameworks that regulate behavior, ethics, and social relations. These traditions serve as unwritten rules that guide daily interactions and reinforce collective identity. The continued practice of Marpege—pege despite social change highlights how traditions can serve as stabilizers within a modernizing society. From a sociological view, this ongoing practice reflects the role of tradition as a form of cultural capital—embodied knowledge and practices passed down through generations that help sustain social continuity (Bourdieu 1986). Therefore, Marpege—pege fulfills its manifest economic role and also functions as a means of reproducing cultural capital and strengthening social solidarity, a latent effect. Participation in this tradition reaffirms community members' sense of belonging, upholds ancestral values, and sustains reciprocal social networks. In this way, the Marpege—pege tradition functions as a multifunctional social institution, addressing material needs while also maintaining the moral and social fabric of Angkola Batak society.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Marpege—pege tradition remains a vital part of Angkola Batak wedding ceremonies in Sialogo Village, South Tapanuli. Carried out

through stages such as Manyapai Boru, Marpege—pege, and Pataru Tuhor, this tradition exemplifies an institutionalized social practice rooted in customary norms rather than merely a ceremonial act. In response to the first research question, the findings show that Marpege—pege has a clear manifest function by offering collective financial support to the groom's family, especially for wedding costs and the fulfillment of tuhor (bridewealth). Recognized by community members, this function helps maintain marriage as a key social institution in Angkola Batak society. Regarding the second research question, the study uncovers that Marpege—pege also has important latent functions, such as fostering social solidarity, kinship bonds, togetherness, and brotherhood among community members. Through ongoing reciprocal exchanges, the tradition builds trust and mutual responsibility, thus increasing social capital as an unintended but vital result. Additionally, Marpege—pege acts as embodied cultural capital, aiding in the transmission and preservation of ancestral values and collective identity across generations.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes to Robert K. Merton's structural functionalism by empirically illustrating how a local cultural tradition serves both manifest and latent functions to support social cohesion. By viewing social capital as a hidden function rather than an explicit goal, the findings support Merton's view that the unintended effects of social practices are often essential to societal stability. In practice, the study suggests that traditions like Marpege—pege can serve as social resources that enhance community resilience and mutual support, especially in rural areas facing economic difficulties.

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