

The Massali Tradition in Bugis Society: Ritual Meaning, Cultural Health Beliefs, and Social Change in Bompo, Bone Regency

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Abstract

This study examines the Massali tradition in the Bugis community of Bompo Hamlet, Mattampa Bulu Village, Lamuru District, Bone Regency, Indonesia. Massali is a collective fasting tradition based on the restriction of animal-based foods and other customary prohibitions that continue to shape community life. The study aims to analyze the socio-cultural background of the tradition, explore the meanings attributed to the practice by community members, and examine the dynamics of its contemporary transformation. This research employed a qualitative design grounded in a sociological approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation involving fifteen informants, including customary leaders, religious figures, community leaders, health workers, and community members. The data were analyzed thematically through processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, supported by source and method triangulation. The findings show that Massali originates from a long-standing customary tradition associated with ancestral authority and oral transmission within Bugis society. The tradition is understood by community members as a form of ritual discipline that expresses self-control, social responsibility, and bodily balance. It also reflects a locally grounded system of cultural health beliefs, especially through food restrictions, behavioral discipline, and ritual purification. The study further shows that Massali has undergone gradual reinterpretation in response to changing social and religious contexts, particularly through the incorporation of Islamic elements into the ritual process. These findings indicate that Massali continues to function as a cultural institution that connects ancestral heritage, social regulation, and contemporary religious life in the Bugis community of Bompo.

Keywords: *Massali tradition, Bugis society, ritual meaning, cultural health beliefs, social change*

A. Introduction

Indonesia is widely recognized as one of the most culturally diverse societies in the world. The country is home to more than one thousand ethnic groups whose social life is shaped by distinctive traditions, belief systems, and

inherited cultural practices (Fuadi, 2020). These traditions form systems of values that regulate social behavior, structure communal relationships, and shape collective identities within local communities (Setiyawan, 2020). Cultural diversity in Indonesia therefore reflects not only differences in language or customs but also complex interactions between local traditions, historical experiences, and religious institutions that coexist in everyday life (Farhaeni & Martini, 2023).

Within this plural cultural landscape, religious practices often intersect with local customs and produce distinctive forms of socio-religious expression. Anthropological and sociological studies have long shown that religion operates not only as a system of beliefs but also as a social institution that organizes collective life. Durkheim (2016) argued that religious rituals strengthen social solidarity by creating shared moral commitments within a community. Geertz (2013) further described religion as a cultural system that provides symbols and meanings through which individuals interpret their experience and orient their behavior. Berger (2011) later emphasized that religious worldviews function as a legitimizing structure that sustains social order through what he termed the sacred canopy. These perspectives highlight that religious practices are embedded within social structures and cultural meanings that develop historically within particular communities.

In many Muslim societies, ritual practices that appear religious often emerge through processes of cultural adaptation and reinterpretation. Fasting, for instance, is widely recognized in Islam as a central form of spiritual discipline. Yet in everyday social life fasting practices may acquire additional meanings shaped by local traditions and cultural knowledge. Sociological studies of religion show that such practices often become part of broader cultural systems through which communities regulate behavior, construct identity, and maintain social cohesion (Haeran, 2019). As a result, religious practice frequently develops through a dynamic relationship between doctrinal teachings and local cultural frameworks.

This dynamic interaction between religion and culture can be observed in the Bugis community of Bompo Hamlet, Mattampa Bulu Village, Lamuru District, Bone Regency. Bugis society is widely known for its strong customary institutions and cultural traditions that continue to influence social organization and everyday life (Ahmadin, 2021). In this community, fasting takes a distinctive form through a tradition known as Massali. The practice involves the restriction of animal-based foods for a specific period of time and is performed collectively according to customary rules. Within the local cultural understanding, Massali functions as a discipline of self-control, a mechanism for maintaining bodily balance, and a practice that reinforces solidarity among community members.

The tradition also reflects the close relationship between Bugis customary values and Islamic religious norms that shape everyday life within the community.

From a sociological perspective, traditions such as Massali raise important analytical questions concerning the relationship between religion, culture, and social order. Ritual practices often operate as mechanisms through which communities negotiate moral authority, construct collective identity, and regulate everyday behavior. In this context, the boundary between religious doctrine and cultural tradition is rarely fixed. Instead, it is continuously interpreted and renegotiated within social interaction. Practices that originate from customary traditions may gradually acquire religious legitimacy, while religious practices may be localized through cultural reinterpretation.

At the same time, local traditions do not remain static. Processes of modernization, expanding religious education, and broader social change often reshape the meanings and forms of cultural practices. In many Indonesian communities, increased exposure to scriptural interpretations of Islam has led to new discussions about the relationship between adat and religious norms. Such developments create a dynamic arena in which local traditions must continually adapt in order to maintain their relevance within changing social conditions.

The Massali tradition therefore provides an important case for examining how local communities negotiate cultural heritage, religious authority, and social change. While previous studies of Bugis culture have discussed various customary practices, scholarly attention to the socio-cultural dynamics of Massali as a collective fasting tradition remains limited. In particular, little research has examined how this practice functions simultaneously as a cultural ritual, a form of social regulation, and a locally grounded system of health-related beliefs. The analysis is primarily guided by discussions of ritual, collective life, and cultural meaning, while the health dimension is interpreted through anthropological work on culturally grounded understandings of bodily balance and illness. The research focuses on three main questions: the socio-cultural background of the Massali tradition, the meanings attributed to the practice of animal fasting by members of the community, and the dynamics of change in its contemporary implementation. By situating Massali within the broader discussion of ritual, cultural identity, and community-based knowledge systems, this study contributes to ongoing discussions in the sociology of religion and anthropology of culture regarding how local traditions continue to shape social life in contemporary Muslim societies.

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in a sociological approach to examine the Massali tradition within the Bugis community of Bempo Hamlet, Mattampa Bulu Village, Lamuru District, Bone

Regency. A qualitative design was selected because the research seeks to understand how community members interpret and experience the practice of animal fasting within their cultural and social environment. Rather than measuring behavior quantitatively, the study explores the meanings, values, and social functions associated with the tradition. In sociological inquiry, qualitative research enables the researcher to examine how cultural practices are constructed, maintained, and interpreted through everyday interaction within a community (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Abubakar, 2021). Through this approach, the Massali tradition is examined as a social practice that reflects the relationship between cultural values, religious understanding, and collective identity in Bugis society.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that the individuals involved possessed direct knowledge and experience related to the Massali tradition. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to identify participants who possess specific knowledge relevant to the research problem (Robinson, 2024). The study involved fifteen informants consisting of customary leaders, religious figures, community leaders, health workers, and community members who participate in the practice. These individuals represent different social roles within the community and therefore provide diverse perspectives on the implementation and meaning of the tradition. The informants ranged in age from 29 to 86 years old and included both senior customary authorities who possess historical knowledge of the tradition and younger community members who experience its contemporary practice. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted directly with each informant and generally lasted between thirty and sixty minutes. Conversations were recorded with the consent of participants and supported by field notes in order to capture the social context of the interactions. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve the accuracy of participants' statements and to facilitate systematic analysis.

The analysis followed a thematic procedure that involved several stages: organizing the interview transcripts, identifying recurring themes, interpreting the meanings expressed by participants, and relating these interpretations to the broader social context of the community. This analytical process was informed by the qualitative data analysis framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which emphasizes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing as iterative stages in qualitative interpretation. To enhance the credibility of the findings, the study applied source and method triangulation by comparing information obtained from different informants and integrating insights derived from interviews, observations, and documentation (Denzin, 2012; Elliott, 2005). The analysis continued until the information collected from

participants no longer produced substantially new insights, indicating that the data had reached a point of saturation (Gentles et al., 2015). To maintain participant confidentiality, all informants are presented in the study using coded identifiers (I1–I15), a common practice in qualitative research to protect anonymity while preserving the authenticity of the data (Kaiser, 2009).

C. Results and Discussion

1. The Historical Origins of the Massali Tradition

The Massali tradition has long been recognized as an important cultural practice among the Bugis community of Bompo Hamlet, Mattampa Bulu Village, Lamuru District, Bone Regency. Local understanding of the term Massali is closely related to the Bugis word *assaliang* or *yassaliang*, which refers to the act of avoiding or refraining from certain actions. In the context of the tradition, this meaning is expressed through the practice of abstaining from specific types of food, particularly animal-based products, during a ritual period determined by customary authorities. Within the community, this act of restraint is associated with ideas of bodily balance, moral discipline, and social harmony. Cultural narratives surrounding the tradition also emphasize that the restrictions involved in Massali are not simply dietary rules but part of a broader system of values that regulates personal conduct and communal responsibility (Yahya, 2025).

Oral histories preserved among the elders of Bompo suggest that the Massali tradition predates the formal establishment of the Bone Kingdom. Community members frequently associate its origins with the era of the *Pitu Silessureng*, a group of seven ancestral figures who are believed to have played a central role in shaping the early social order of the Lamuru region. According to local accounts, these figures were responsible for establishing norms that governed social conduct, ritual practice, and communal well-being. Their authority extended beyond administrative leadership and included spiritual responsibilities related to maintaining harmony between human life, the natural environment, and unseen forces believed to influence community life. The continued transmission of this historical narrative demonstrates how collective memory functions as an important mechanism for preserving cultural knowledge across generations.

Informants in the community consistently connect the origins of Massali to this early period of social organization. One customary leader explained that the practice has existed since the time when the *Pitu Silessureng* exercised authority over the region, emphasizing that the tradition is understood locally as part of the ancestral heritage of the community. As one elder stated during the interview, “Massali has existed since the time of the Pitu Silessureng” (Interview with I1, 81 years old, customary figure, November 11, 2025). Such accounts

illustrate how historical legitimacy is constructed through oral transmission and how traditions continue to derive authority from ancestral narratives.

Historical accounts of Massali also indicate that the early Bugis communities in the region relied heavily on customary knowledge to regulate everyday life. At that time, written records had not yet been widely used, and social norms were transmitted through oral instruction, ritual practice, and collective memory. Community members recall that knowledge concerning health, food restrictions, and moral conduct was conveyed through stories, advice from elders, and ritual practices that were reinforced during communal gatherings. One informant described this condition by explaining that “at that time people did not yet know writing, only simple marks long before the Lontara script was used” (Interview with I5, community figure, 55 years old, November 11, 2025). These narratives indicate that the Massali tradition developed within a cultural context where social order relied primarily on oral transmission and customary authority.

The ritual cycle of Massali also reflects the significance attributed to the tradition within the community. Unlike many cultural ceremonies that occur annually, Massali is performed only after a relatively long interval, often between seven and ten years. The decision to organize the ritual is not based solely on practical considerations but emerges through consultation among customary authorities who evaluate social conditions, communal readiness, and signs interpreted through local cultural knowledge. Once the ritual is agreed upon, the community enters a preparation stage that culminates in a period of fasting lasting approximately thirty to forty days. During this time participants abstain from various foods, regulate emotional behavior, and maintain social discipline. As one customary leader explained, “Massali usually lasts between thirty and forty days” (Interview with I8, customary figure, 51 years old, December 15, 2025).

From a sociological standpoint, these ritual restrictions function as mechanisms that structure collective life within the community. Shared participation in the tradition reinforces moral expectations concerning discipline, respect, and self-control. In this sense, Massali can be understood as a form of ritual practice that strengthens collective consciousness among community members. Durkheim (2016) emphasized that rituals play an important role in sustaining social solidarity because they create shared experiences that reaffirm the moral bonds of a community. The continued observance of Massali illustrates how ritual practices operate as cultural institutions that preserve social cohesion while simultaneously transmitting values across generations.

The restrictions imposed during the ritual further illustrate the cultural logic underlying the practice. Participants are expected to refrain from consuming various forms of meat such as chicken, beef, goat, fish, and eggs, as

well as several types of fruit considered to disturb bodily balance according to local belief. These prohibitions extend beyond food consumption and include expectations regarding speech, behavior, and emotional control. Community members believe that adherence to these restrictions helps maintain physical well-being while also protecting the spiritual integrity of participants during the ritual period. A customary leader described this principle by explaining that the restrictions are intended to maintain the purity of the body and mind throughout the practice (Interview with I4, customary figure, 86 years old, December 12, 2025).

The historical narratives surrounding Massali therefore reveal that the tradition developed as a system of social regulation embedded within Bugis cultural knowledge. The rules governing food consumption, personal conduct, and ritual participation reflect a broader worldview in which bodily discipline, social harmony, and spiritual balance are closely interconnected. Through these practices, the community reproduces cultural values that have been transmitted across generations, demonstrating how local traditions continue to shape social life within contemporary Bugis society.

2. The Meanings of the Massali Tradition and Its Role in Community Health

The Massali tradition is widely understood within the Bugis community of Bempo as an important form of local wisdom that contributes to maintaining balance in both individual and communal life. In Bugis cultural thought, customary norms known as *ade'* regulate many aspects of everyday behavior, including patterns of food consumption, moral conduct, and ritual discipline. These norms function as a system of inherited cultural knowledge through which individuals learn how to maintain harmony between the body, the surrounding environment, and the broader social order. Within this framework, Massali is interpreted as a cultural practice that encourages restraint, self-discipline, and collective responsibility. Community members believe that controlling food intake and regulating personal behavior during the ritual period help preserve bodily balance while also reinforcing social harmony within the community.

The emergence of such practices can also be understood within the historical conditions of rural communities where access to formal medical knowledge and healthcare institutions was once limited. In many traditional societies, cultural practices developed as practical ways of managing health risks and maintaining physical well-being. Within the Bugis community of Bempo, the Massali tradition reflects this type of inherited knowledge system. Similar cultural rituals related to health and bodily balance have also been documented among Bugis communities in other regions of Indonesia (Satrianegara et al., 2021). The fasting practice does not function as a medical treatment in the biomedical sense, but rather as a culturally grounded form of preventive discipline. In this study, the health dimension of Massali is therefore interpreted

as part of a cultural system of health beliefs that guides everyday behavior within the community. Anthropological research has long shown that communities develop their own explanations for illness and healing through cultural interpretation and collective experience (Foster, 1975; Leslie, 1980). Kleinman (1980) described these culturally embedded understandings as explanatory models that shape how communities interpret bodily conditions and appropriate responses to illness.

One of the central components of the Massali tradition is the restriction on consuming certain foods during the ritual period. Participants abstain from various types of animal-based foods such as chicken, beef, goat, buffalo, fish, and eggs. In addition, several types of fruit including pineapple, jackfruit, breadfruit, and guava are also avoided because they are believed to disturb bodily balance according to local understanding. These restrictions are interpreted by community members as a preventive measure intended to protect the body during the ritual period. An elderly informant explained that certain foods are believed to slow the healing process when the body is in a vulnerable condition, which is why they must be avoided during Massali (Interview with I3, 81 years old, December 10, 2025). Although these interpretations are grounded in cultural belief rather than biomedical evidence, they reflect a coherent system of reasoning within the community regarding the relationship between food consumption and bodily well-being.

Anthropological studies of food taboos provide an important framework for understanding this practice. Food restrictions are widely documented in different societies and are often associated with cultural interpretations of bodily balance and environmental knowledge (Knutsson & Selinus, 1970; Meyer-Rochow, 2009). Meyer-Rochow (2009) explains that dietary prohibitions are common across many societies and often emerge from a combination of ecological knowledge, symbolic meanings, and cultural beliefs about health. Food taboos frequently function as mechanisms that regulate consumption while reinforcing cultural identity and social order. Research by McNamara and Wood (2019) further demonstrates that such restrictions are often maintained through collective authority within the community, where customary leaders and inherited traditions shape norms regarding acceptable and prohibited foods. Within the Massali tradition, the prohibition against certain foods operates simultaneously as a form of bodily discipline and as a cultural mechanism that preserves inherited knowledge about health and well-being.

Beyond the regulation of food consumption, Massali also requires participants to regulate their behavior and emotional responses during the ritual period. Individuals are expected to maintain respectful speech, avoid conflict, and control anger while participating in the fasting practice. These behavioral expectations are closely linked to the cultural belief that emotional stability

contributes to bodily balance. In the context of communal life, such discipline also promotes social harmony by reducing tensions and reinforcing respectful interaction among community members. Contemporary psychological studies have noted that practices involving emotional regulation and self-discipline can contribute to psychological well-being and self-awareness (Guendelman et al., 2017). While the Massali tradition emerges from a different cultural framework, the emphasis on emotional control illustrates a similar concern with maintaining equilibrium between personal behavior and collective life.

Another element of the tradition that reflects its connection with cultural understandings of health is the ritual act of purification using water that has been blessed by customary authorities. Within local belief systems, water symbolizes cleansing and renewal. Participants understand this act as a way to restore balance after completing the fasting period. Ritual purification practices involving water appear in many cultural traditions around the world and are often associated with symbolic healing and spiritual renewal. In the case of Massali, the purification ritual reinforces the cultural meaning of the practice by linking bodily discipline with spiritual balance and communal well-being.

From a sociological perspective, the various practices associated with Massali demonstrate how cultural traditions function as mechanisms of social regulation. The shared experience of fasting, food restriction, and behavioral discipline creates a collective environment in which community members reaffirm shared values concerning self-control, health, and social responsibility. Participation in the ritual strengthens the sense of belonging within the community while also transmitting cultural knowledge to younger generations. Through this process, the Massali tradition continues to operate as a cultural institution that integrates health beliefs, moral discipline, and social solidarity within the everyday life of the Bugis community in Bompo.

3. The Dynamics of the Massali Tradition

The implementation of the Massali tradition in the Bugis community of Bompo has gradually evolved in response to broader social and religious developments. Cultural traditions rooted in customary authority rarely remain unchanged across generations. Instead, they adapt to new social contexts while maintaining continuity with inherited values. In Bompo, changes in the Massali tradition are closely related to demographic growth, increasing exposure to religious learning, and shifting interpretations of the relationship between *adat* and Islamic teachings. These developments illustrate how local traditions continue to function within a changing social environment while preserving their cultural foundations.

Information gathered from community members indicates that a significant transformation in the practice of Massali occurred between the early 2000s and the mid-2010s. Informants frequently referred to the period around

2000 and 2014 when describing these changes. During the earlier period, the ritual was conducted almost entirely according to customary rules determined by traditional authorities. The ritual structure emphasized ancestral traditions and cosmological symbolism, and the sequence of ceremonial activities was guided by the *jangka*, the customary leader responsible for interpreting ritual obligations. Although Islamic practices shaped everyday life in the community, they were not explicitly incorporated into the structure of the ritual during this period.

By the period around 2014, several elements of Islamic practice began to appear within the ritual process. Informants explained that Qur’anic recitation and Islamic prayers were gradually introduced into the ceremony while the traditional framework of the ritual remained intact. One religious leader noted that “around 2014 the recitation of the Qur’an began to be included, while earlier rituals did not include it” (Interview with I2, religious leader, 58 years old, December 9, 2025). This development illustrates how local traditions often adapt by integrating elements that reflect the religious orientation of the community without abandoning earlier cultural structures. These shifts become clearer when the tradition is compared across several dimensions of ritual practice, participation, social meaning, and demographic context, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
 Transformation of the Massali Tradition in the Bompo Community

Aspect	Around 2000	Around 2014	Pattern of Change
Ritual Structure	Ritual activities were centered on customary rules determined by traditional authorities. Cosmological symbolism was dominant and Islamic elements were not explicitly included.	Qur’anic recitation and Islamic prayers began to be incorporated while maintaining the traditional ritual framework.	Cultural adaptation through the integration of Islamic religious practices.
Participation	Participation was limited to close family members and conducted within a relatively small social circle.	Participation expanded to involve extended families and members of the wider community.	Expansion of ritual participation and stronger communal engagement.
Meaning of the Tradition	The ritual emphasized cosmological	The tradition is increasingly interpreted as	Reinterpretation of traditional meanings

	balance between spiritual discipline, within humans, nature, family strengthening, contemporary and spiritual and cultural identity. religious forces associated with ancestral belief. understanding.
Demographic Context	The community population was relatively small and participation remained limited. Population growth contributed to the ritual scale within the community. Expansion of the ritual scale within the community.
Social Relations	Ritual activities were primarily internal within the Bompo community. The ritual has become an occasion for collective interaction and social solidarity among community members. Strengthening of communal identity through shared ritual practice.

Source: Authors' field data analysis (2025)

The comparison presented in Table 1 demonstrates that the Massali tradition has undergone gradual reinterpretation rather than abrupt transformation. While the structure of the ritual continues to follow customary patterns established by earlier generations, the incorporation of Islamic elements reflects the growing influence of religious learning within the community. Such adjustments allow the tradition to remain socially meaningful while aligning with contemporary religious values.

These developments illustrate an ongoing negotiation between customary authority and religious interpretation within the community. In many Indonesian societies, *adat* and Islam coexist through processes of reinterpretation and adaptation rather than direct opposition. Local communities frequently reinterpret inherited traditions so that they remain compatible with prevailing religious understandings. Within Bompo, the integration of Qur'anic recitation and Islamic prayers into the Massali ritual demonstrates how this process unfolds in practice.

Changes in participation patterns further illustrate the evolving social context of the tradition. Earlier forms of the ritual were typically practiced within a limited circle of families, reflecting the smaller population and the relatively closed social structure of the community at that time. In recent years, however, the ritual has become a broader communal event that involves extended families and a larger number of community members. This shift reflects demographic growth as well as increasing recognition of Massali as a shared cultural heritage within the village.

From a sociological perspective, these developments show how cultural traditions are reproduced through processes of adaptation and reinterpretation.

Social practices do not persist simply because they are preserved in their original form. Rather, they remain relevant when communities reinterpret inherited traditions in ways that correspond to changing social realities. Berger (2011) argues that social reality is continuously constructed and reconstructed through collective interpretation. The evolution of the Massali tradition reflects this dynamic process in which ancestral practices are reinterpreted in response to changing religious and social conditions.

The case of Massali therefore illustrates how local traditions can persist in the midst of social change by adapting their symbolic meanings and ritual forms. The incorporation of Islamic elements, the expansion of community participation, and the reinterpretation of ritual meanings demonstrate the flexibility of cultural traditions in responding to new social contexts. Through these processes, the Massali tradition continues to function as a cultural institution that connects ancestral heritage with the contemporary religious and social life of the Bugis community in Bempo.

D. Conclusion

This study examined the Massali tradition within the Bugis community of Bempo as a socio-cultural practice that connects ritual discipline, cultural knowledge, and collective identity. The findings show that Massali originates from a long-standing customary tradition associated with the historical narratives of the *Pitu Silessoreng*, which continue to shape the moral authority of the practice within the community. Through restrictions on food consumption, behavioral discipline, and ritual purification, the tradition functions as a cultural system that regulates social conduct while reinforcing shared values of self-control, communal responsibility, and spiritual balance.

The analysis also demonstrates that the meanings attributed to Massali extend beyond the ritual act of fasting itself. Within the community, the practice is interpreted as a form of moral discipline and as a cultural framework for maintaining bodily balance and social harmony. The restrictions on certain foods and the emphasis on emotional regulation reflect a locally grounded understanding of health that forms part of a broader system of cultural health beliefs. In this sense, the Massali tradition illustrates how cultural practices can integrate bodily discipline, social regulation, and inherited knowledge within everyday community life.

Finally, the study shows that the Massali tradition has undergone gradual reinterpretation in response to changing social and religious contexts. The incorporation of Islamic elements such as Qur'anic recitation and communal prayer reflects an ongoing process through which local traditions adapt to contemporary religious orientations while preserving their cultural foundations. The case of Massali therefore illustrates how customary traditions remain

relevant through processes of reinterpretation that connect ancestral heritage with present-day social realities. By examining Massali as a cultural practice situated at the intersection of ritual, health beliefs, and social transformation, this study contributes to broader discussions in the sociology of religion and anthropology of culture concerning how local traditions continue to shape community life in contemporary Muslim societies.

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