



Strengthening Customary Law Through the Mosehe Peohala Owose Ceremony: The Construction of Identity and Conflict Resolution in Tolaki Society

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Abstract. This study aims to examine how the Tolaki Customary Institution (LAT) addressed a perceived customary violation resulting from administrative negligence by the Southeast Sulawesi General Elections Commission (KPU Sultra). The omission of LAT from the invitation list for the plenary session that determined the elected Governor and Deputy Governor, although not constituting a legal violation, was perceived as a breach of Tolaki customary norms. In response, LAT conducted the *mosehe peohala owose ceremony* on February 23, 2025, which was attended by government officials, community representatives, and KPU commissioners. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the researchers observed the ceremony and conducted interviews to document and analyze the ritual process. The findings reveal that the ceremony reconciled the perceived violation, imposed customary sanctions on KPU Sultra officials, restored social harmony, and reinforced the authority of Tolaki customary traditions. Key elements of the ritual included offerings of a white buffalo, a *kaci* cloth, and a water kettle, accompanied by prayers and ritual mantras. This study highlights the enduring role of indigenous rituals in conflict resolution and the maintenance of community cohesion..

Keywords: Conflict Resolution, Mosehe Peohala Owose, Tolaki Traditional Institution.

1 Introduction

The term *mosehe* refers to a traditional ceremonial practice of the Tolaki people in Southeast Sulawesi. The *mosehe* ceremony holds significant cultural importance in Tolaki society, as it is regarded as a means of restoring social and spiritual balance within the community. It is also performed to seek forgiveness and atone for past wrongdoings.

The aim of *mosehe* is to restore social balance by addressing the disturbances caused by conflicts or misunderstandings between the Southeast Sulawesi General Elections Commission (hereafter KPU Sultra) and the Tolaki Customary Institution (hereafter LAT). The LAT considered KPU Sultra to be responsible for the perceived customary violation; therefore, KPU Sultra was required to openly express remorse and seek forgiveness from the ancestors and God before Tolaki traditional leaders. In addition, *mosehe* aims to rectify such violations through compensation and ritual offerings, including a white buffalo, a *kaci* cloth, and a water kettle. Furthermore, the ceremony serves to strengthen social relations among individuals and groups within society, particularly between KPU Sultra as the election organizer and the Tolaki community.

In their study, Basri and Asdiana (2022) explain that *mosehe* in Tolaki society reflects the philosophy that life should resemble flexible and flowing water. People are expected to maintain calm and peaceful hearts so that harmony, mutual love, and mutual respect can flourish in relationships among individuals, between humans and the environment, and with the Almighty. They also argue that *mosehe* functions to strengthen solidarity and promote adherence to social norms within the community.

This study adopts terminology from The Existence of the Sara Peokindoroa Customary Settlement (Customary Forgiveness) through the LAT in Kendari City and Konawe Regency. In this context, the Tolaki Customary Institution (LAT) refers to the principal cultural authority of the Tolaki people. The institution is mandated to safeguard collective rights, preserve and transmit customary law, empower women, and promote interfaith harmony. In addition, LAT serves as the primary forum for resolving disputes and enforcing customary sanctions within the community.

Osara is the collective term for Tolaki customary law, encompassing transgressions such as murder (*mombepate*), assault (*mowakati/mobeliti*), and theft (*momboponini*). Such offenses are resolved through established customary procedures (Suriyadi & Melamba, 2024). Within this framework, *peohala owose* refers to the customary fines or sanctions imposed on individuals who commit serious violations. More broadly, custom refers to the traditions and norms that regulate social life and are transmitted across generations within the Tolaki community. In addition, sago, a staple crop processed into *sinonggi* for communal gatherings, carries symbolic significance as an important element of Tolaki cultural identity (Melamba, 2014).

The Tolaki Customary Institution (LAT) serves as the principal cultural authority of the Tolaki people and is mandated to safeguard their collective rights. Its functions include preserving customs and cultural values, empowering women, and promoting interfaith harmony. Another important concept in this study is *peohala owose*, which refers to a customary fine or sanction imposed on individuals who commit serious transgressions. More broadly, “custom” denotes a body of traditions and

norms that are recognized, practiced, institutionalized, and preserved across generations within the indigenous community.

This research is situated within the political and legal context of the simultaneous regional elections, particularly the election of the Governor and Deputy Governor of Southeast Sulawesi held on November 27, 2024. Following the resolution of electoral disputes by the Constitutional Court and the issuance of a final decision confirming the elected candidates, KPU Sultra proceeded to the subsequent stage of the electoral process: a plenary session to formally determine and announce the elected governor and deputy governor.

Traditionally, prior to the plenary meeting, KPU Sultra issues formal invitations to election participants and various associations representing community groups within the province. In this instance, however, one association representing the Tolaki community—an indigenous ethnic group in Southeast Sulawesi—was omitted from the list of invitees. Although KPU Sultra later withdrew the invitations, several associations had already received them and noticed the exclusion of the Tolaki association, which was subsequently brought to the attention of the broader Tolaki community. This omission generated considerable concern and debate within the community. In response, KPU Sultra issued a public statement explaining that the incident resulted from human error rather than deliberate intent and formally apologized to the Tolaki association. Nevertheless, the Tolaki community regarded the incident as a serious breach of customary protocol. In accordance with Tolaki tradition, the *mosehe* ceremony—specifically *peohala owose*—was therefore considered necessary as a customary sanction to restore social harmony and reaffirm respect for tradition.

The violation discussed in this study does not concern the electoral process itself or any stages involving election participants, nor does it involve participants who were disadvantaged by the process. Rather, it relates to the conduct of KPU Sultra toward a particular community group, namely the Tolaki people. The issue arose when KPU Sultra issued invitations for the plenary session on the determination of the governor and deputy governor but failed to include the Tolaki association on the official list of invitees. Although KPU Sultra subsequently revised the invitation list and issued a formal apology, Tolaki traditional leaders regarded the omission as a serious breach of customary norms. Consequently, the *mosehe* ritual, particularly the *peohala owose* ceremony, was considered necessary to symbolically reconcile the election organizers with the Tolaki traditional leadership.

Several studies have examined the practices of *mosehe* and *mosehe peohala owose* as mechanisms of conflict resolution among the Tolaki people. For example, Koodoh et al. (2018), in their study highlight the significant role of religious leaders in mediating both latent and open conflicts within the Tolaki community. They identify the primary sources of conflict as *tulura* (speech), *peowai* (actions), and *powaihako* (behavior), which frequently manifest in forms such as *sisala'aineperapua* (marital conflicts), *sisala'aine hapo-hapo* (property-related disputes), and other social conflicts. These conflicts are traditionally resolved through culturally embedded mechanisms such as *melannggahako*, *mesokei*, *peohala*, *mombopoo'rai*, *sombalabu*, and ultimately *mosehe*. Similarly, Koodoh (2016) focused on family-related conflicts, emphasizing

that their resolution also depends on the involvement of customary and religious leaders, while identifying similar sources of conflict.

Another relevant study by Lestari (2024), examines the resolution of customary offenses within Tolaki society. The study found that individuals who commit the offense of *umoapi walinggino pukopu* are required to pay customary fines to the aggrieved party, as the act is considered to undermine the dignity and self-esteem of the affected husband. In contrast, individuals who commit the offense of *umoapi wali ndaa nidambi* are subject to the *peohala owose* sanction, which involves the imposition of a severe customary fine. These findings are consistent with the study by Handrawan (2016) on customary sanctions for adultery under Tolaki customary criminal law, which reports that offenders are traditionally required to provide a live buffalo as a ransom or substitute (*umoapi*) to restore social harmony.

Furthermore, Hafid and Raodah (2018), in their study emphasize that *mosehe* is a ritual transmitted across generations as an expression of reverence toward the deities (*Sangia*), with the ultimate aim of seeking the acceptance and blessings of God Almighty (*Ombu*). For the Tolaki people, *mosehe* serves not only a spiritual function—ensuring collective safety and well-being—but also a social one, functioning as an institutionalized mechanism for dispute resolution and the restoration of communal harmony. Its origins are rooted in the actions, attitudes, and vows of the Tolaki ancestors, which have shaped *mosehe* into a cornerstone of Tolaki customary law and cultural practice. In addition, several variations of *mosehe* exist, including *mosehe wonua* (the purification of land or territory) (Arifin et al., 2021).

The present study is significant because, from a legal and administrative perspective, the actions of KPU Sultra did not constitute a criminal offense or a violation of state administrative law. Rather, the incident was regarded as a case of administrative negligence, specifically the omission of one of KPU Sultra's long-standing community partners—the Tolaki Customary Institution (LAT)—from the official list of invitees to the plenary session.

A review of the literature indicates that dispute resolution involving election organizers through the application of local wisdom is most commonly framed in terms of mediation (Syahptra, 2023; Tobing et al., 2024). Other studies highlight different forms of local wisdom in conflict management, such as the role of community leaders in articulating political party aspirations among workers on the Tambi Tea Plantation (Ruhadi, 2023), as well as the participation of local communities in dispute resolution through trust-building and collective dialogue (Makie & Rindiani, 2024).

The purpose of this study is to examine and describe the *mosehe peohala owose* ceremony conducted by the Tolaki Customary Institution (LAT) in response to the negligence of KPU Sultra in issuing invitations for the plenary session on the determination of the elected governor and deputy governor. Specifically, the study seeks to understand both the ceremonial process and its significance as a form of customary sanction, even though the incident did not constitute an administrative or criminal violation under national electoral law but was regarded by Tolaki traditional leaders as a serious breach of customary norms.

2 Research Method

This study focuses on the *mosehe peohala owose* ceremony conducted by the Tolaki Customary Institution (LAT) in response to the perceived violation committed by KPU Sultra through the omission of LAT from the invitation list for the plenary session. The research documents the entire ceremonial process, culminating in the *mosehe peohala owose* ceremony held on February 23, 2025, at the Central Board Office of LAT in Kendari. The primary informants included the chairperson of KPU Sultra, several LAT traditional leaders, and members of the Tolaki community who were directly involved in or knowledgeable about the ceremony.

Methodologically, this study employs an ethnographic approach that combines direct observation of the ceremony—conducted over the course of a full day on February 23, 2025—with semi-structured interviews with key informants. In addition, documentation of the event and secondary sources, such as online news reports, were collected to complement and triangulate the primary data.

3 Results and Discussion

The controversy arose from the attachment to the plenary session invitation issued by the Chairperson of KPU Sultra, in which the Tolaki Customary Institution (LAT) was not included among the invitees. The plenary session, held on February 6, 2025, formally determined the winning candidate pair for the positions of Governor and Deputy Governor of Southeast Sulawesi for the 2025–2030 term, namely Andi Sumangerukka and Hugua. Although several community associations were included in the attachment—such as the South Sulawesi Family Association (KKSS), the Muna Sultra Cultural Institute, and the Bau Bau Family Association—the omission of LAT was widely regarded as a disregard for its status as a long-standing partner of KPU Sultra.

Subsequently, although the initial invitation attachment did not include the Tolaki Customary Institution (LAT), KPU Sultra revised the document and resent it. The chairperson of KPU Sultra, representing the institution, publicly acknowledged the omission, apologized for the administrative oversight, and emphasized that it resulted from human error rather than a deliberate attempt to discredit LAT. Despite this clarification, LAT regarded the omission as a serious violation of customary norms. Consequently, LAT determined that customary sanctions were necessary and organized the *mosehe peohala owose* ceremony on Sunday, February 23, 2025, at the Central Board Office of LAT. The ceremony involved several ritual requirements, including a white buffalo, a *kaci* cloth, and a kettle, and was preceded by internal discussions between representatives of KPU Sultra and LAT traditional leaders.

Following the agreement to hold the ceremony, the first author learned about the *mosehe peohala owose* event through an announcement circulated in the WhatsApp group of the RRI Kendari Listener Communication Forum, which invited members of the public to attend. The announcement stated that the ceremony would function as a customary sanction against KPU Sultra for its perceived violation of customary norms.

It also noted that the event would be attended by representatives of the Central Executive Board of the Tolaki Customary Institution (hereafter DPP LAT), commissioners of KPU Sultra, as well as local government officials and law enforcement authorities serving as observers. The proceedings were to be guided by *tolea-pabitara* traditional elders.

The ceremony commenced with a traditional sentencing hearing (*mombesara*), followed by the recitation of mantras and prayers by the *mbusehe* (traditional officiant) to seek protection for the Southeast Sulawesi region from *malapteka* (misfortune or undesirable events). The ritual then proceeded to the sacrificial slaughter (*nisebi*) of the designated animal, which was performed by the *mbusehe*.

3.1 Customary Adjudication Session (*mombesara*)

Mombesara constitutes a key stage in the Tolaki customary dispute-resolution process, during which the parties deemed responsible for a customary violation—in this case, KPU Sultra—are brought before traditional leaders (*pabbitara*) and community members serving as witnesses. The purpose of this hearing is to formally address the perceived violation of Tolaki customary law, namely the omission of the Tolaki Customary Institution (LAT) from the list of community associations invited to KPU Sultra's plenary session.

The *mombesara* process consisted of several distinct stages: the collection of evidence, the summoning of the accused party, the reading of charges, and the rendering of a decision. During the evidence-collection stage, traditional elders and the chairperson of the central executive board of the Tolaki Customary Institution (DPP LAT) compiled relevant information and documentation concerning the alleged customary violation. This was followed by the summons stage, in which the accused party was formally called to appear before the customary forum to provide an explanation of their actions. As explained by Asril:

“In accordance with the agreement reached prior to the *mosehe peohala owose* ceremony, we conveyed our apologies to the leaders of the Tolaki Customary Institution, the Southeast Sulawesi Community Organization Forum, and the wider community. Initially, we failed to include the Tolaki Customary Institution in the invitation list; however, this omission was later corrected through a revised attachment. This was not an intentional act but rather an oversight resulting from our failure to conduct a thorough review before the invitation was distributed. With the completion of this ceremony, we consider the reconciliation process to be formally concluded.” (Interview with Dr. Asril, Chairperson of KPU Sultra, February 23, 2025).

The third stage involved the formal reading of the charges, during which the alleged violations of customary law were articulated and the accused party was granted an opportunity to present a defense. As shown in Figure 1, the final stage was the decision-making phase, in which the customary elders, together with the General

Chairperson of the Central Executive Board of the Tolaki Customary Institution (DPP LAT), deliberated and determined the appropriate sanction to be imposed.



Fig. 1. Opening remarks delivered by the General Chairperson of the Central Executive Board of the Tolaki Customary Institution of Southeast Sulawesi (DPP LAT Sultra) prior to the *mombesara* (customary sentencing session).

The customary sanctions imposed consisted of: (1) one white buffalo, (2) one piece of *kaci* cloth, and (3) one bronze kettle, as documented in Minutes No. 02/DPP-LAT/II/2025 dated February 23, 2025. The minutes were formally signed by key stakeholders, including the General Chairperson of the Central Executive Board of the Tolaki Customary Institution (DPP LAT), Masyhur Masie Abunawas; the Chairperson of KPU Sultra, Asril; as well as representatives of the government, the police, and members of the Southeast Sulawesi Organization Forum (FORSA). These signatories also included representatives from WATRA, the Southeast Sulawesi Youth Front (Barata-Sultra), DMT, Laskar LAT, the Southeast Sulawesi Tolaki Community Association (PMTS), PTS, Tamalaki KAPITALAU, Ponggawa Sultra, and TPWK. The three forms of customary sanctions correspond to those historically imposed on members of the Tolaki community, as previously documented by Suriyadi and Melamba (2024). In addition, the leadership of KPU Sultra was required to deliver a formal public apology to all LAT administrators, community organizations, and residents of Southeast Sulawesi.

Following the completion of the buffalo slaughter ritual (*nisebi*), the Chairperson of KPU Sultra delivered a formal public apology as part of the customary reconciliation process. In his statement, he emphasized both personal and institutional accountability, declaring: “On behalf of myself, my family, and the entire election organizing body, I express my deepest apologies...” This apology marked the culmination of the *mosehe peohala owose* ceremony and symbolized the restoration of harmony between KPU Sultra and the Tolaki Customary Institution (LAT).

In addition, Sudi, a representative of the Southeast Sulawesi Community Organization Forum (FORSA), emphasized that the three customary sanctions imposed

on the KPU commissioners carry sacred significance. According to him, the slaughtered white buffalo symbolizes an individual subjected to customary punishment, and its sacrifice signifies the resolution of the dispute and the restoration of harmony within the Southeast Sulawesi region. This interpretation is consistent with the explanation provided by the *mbusehe*, as reported by TribunnewsSultra.com. Similarly, the *kaci* cloth symbolizes the purification of wrongdoing, while the bronze kettle represents a vessel used for ritual cleansing, further reinforcing the themes of purification and renewal.

In contrast, not all scholars interpret the imposition of customary sanctions in the same way. For instance, Basrin Melamba argues that the more problematic issue lies not merely in the omission of LAT from the invitation list, but also in the ordering of the community associations included in it. According to him, placing associations representing communities with ancestral roots outside Southeast Sulawesi—such as the South Sulawesi Family Association (KKSS)—at the top of the list was difficult for the Tolaki community to accept, even if no malicious intent existed on the part of the commissioners. He further contends that, in accordance with customary norms, associations representing indigenous communities should be prioritized in the first four positions, followed by associations representing communities from other regions.

Another distinctive perspective is offered by Sarlan Adijaya, who argues that conducting the *mosehe peohala owose* ceremony may not have been necessary if its primary purpose was merely to appease ancestral spirits or deities believed to have been angered by the actions of the election organizers. In his view, customary violations should not be resolved solely through material compensation, particularly when the prescribed sanction—such as the offering of a single white buffalo—is regarded as relatively minor. He further contends that, if such sanctions are to be imposed, they should be more substantial and burdensome so that violators experience genuinely significant consequences.

The perspectives of the two academics differ significantly from that of the Tolaki Customary Institution. For the Tolaki Customary Institution, any violation of customary rules—regardless of intent—warrants sanctions. The negligence of the KPU Sultra commissioners in excluding the LAT from the plenary invitation is regarded as an insult to the Tolaki people, as the plenary session concerned the determination of the elected governor and deputy governor.

From an academic standpoint, however, the situation is interpreted differently. Some scholars argue that the ordering of invited groups—placing non-indigenous community associations first—suggests an implicit disregard for indigenous groups, though this may have resulted from administrative negligence rather than deliberate intent. Others contend that the *mosehe peohala owose* ceremony was unnecessary, particularly if its sole purpose was to appease ancestors or deities. They further argue that resolving such negligence with a white buffalo as compensation may be disproportionate, given the severity of the act, and thus fails to deliver a truly meaningful sanction.

3.2 Recitation of Mantras and Prayers by the *Tolea-Pabitara* (*Mbusehe*)

Among the Tolaki people, mantras recited by the *tolea-pabitara* or *mbusehe* play a central role in traditional ceremonies. In the context of this study, these mantras were performed during the *mosehe peohala owose ceremony*, which was conducted to address a serious violation of customary norms. Similar mantras are also used in other *mosehe* traditions, such as *mosehe wonua* (purification of the land) and *mosehe mesosambakai* (communal reconciliation).

A mantra may be understood as a sacred or magical utterance, often expressed in poetic form and used to achieve a particular purpose. As noted by Badara and Dinar (2020), the term originates from Sanskrit and means “incantation,” “charm,” or “prayer.” They further emphasize that mantras are not traditionally disseminated widely; rather, they are transmitted selectively from generation to generation to chosen individuals. Based on their functions, mantras may generally be classified into four categories: (1) healing mantras, (2) mantras for clothing or personal protection, (3) occupational mantras, and (4) traditional mantras. Within this typology, the mantras employed in customary sanctions—such as those used in the *mosehe peohala owose ceremony*—are most appropriately categorized as traditional mantras.

For the Tolaki people, *mosehe* is a traditional ceremony intended to purify individuals or the community and to ward off misfortune. Etymologically, the term derives from two elements: *mo*, meaning “to do something,” and *sehe*, meaning “holy.” Thus, *mosehe* may be interpreted as “an act of purification.” The ritual is typically performed when the community faces crises such as crop failure, floods, droughts, disease outbreaks, or major social conflicts. These beliefs are deeply embedded in the Tolaki worldview and continue to shape communal behavior, particularly within institutions such as the Tolaki Customary Institution (LAT).

In the context of this study, the negligence of the KPU Sultra commissioners was regarded by the Tolaki Customary Institution (LAT) as a serious violation of customary norms, warranting the imposition of a significant customary sanction through the performance of the *mosehe peohala owose ceremony*. During this ritual, the *mbusehe* or *tolea-pabitara* leads prayers and supplications to the Creator, seeking protection from misfortune arising not only from the election controversy but also from broader concerns related to agriculture and community welfare. This interpretation aligns with the assertion of Tarimana (1989) that *mosehe* functions as a means of individual and communal purification following breaches of customary law.

The *mosehe* mantras encompass a wide range of purposes, reflecting the richness of Tolaki ritual traditions. These include mantras for self-purification, for *mondetewei* (taming), for post-wedding rituals, for healing, and for *ndeposala/mepokomeambo* (reconciliation of disputes).

Among these types, the *mosehe peohala owose ceremony* is classified as a *mosehe mantra* for reconciling disputes (*ndeposala/mepokomeambo*)—in this case, between the Tolaki community and KPU Sultra commissioners. The following *mantra*, recited by the *tolea-pabitara* or *mbusehe* during the ceremony (see Figure 2), is intended to restore harmony and resolve the conflict between the two parties.

Aso, ruo, toli, omba
Tabeamu kaasi ombu ndolea iwawo
sangia
La motudui laa motuha'i sapano
Tolaki
Ulaa sumehei mosehe
Salanggono
Nolaa teposala penao ronga o'ati
Mbeakopo teposepo duluka tepolalo
Mata ndaawu
Satuduno sara laa'i tepokono laa'i
Tetewei
Mbeakopo iwoi laa oti laa buso
Kepo'ie
Penao anonggota meambo ta tepokono.

The *mantra* may be interpreted as follows:

One, two, three, four—
 I call upon You, O God,
 The divine spokesperson,
 Who proclaims the teachings of Tolaki customs.
 Those who harbor hatred must reconcile;
 Those in dispute must restore peace.
 Quarrels are resolved not with weapons,
 But with words and mutual understanding.
 When customs are upheld, reconciliation follows swiftly.
 Like water receding after a flood,
 Discord too will subside,
 For hearts can once again be united.

In general, this *mantra* conveys that the *mbusehe*, acting as a mediator, petitions for divine assistance in resolving disputes and restoring harmony, with the hope that reconciliation will occur through God's will. Prior to the introduction of Islam, the Tolaki people believed in *O Ombu*, a supreme deity regarded as the creator of the universe and all its contents. Worship of *O Ombu* was mediated through various deities, who were venerated according to their respective positions and roles within the cosmos.

This worldview reflects the Tolaki people's strong emphasis on social harmony. When disputes or violations of customary law occur, they are regarded as serious transgressions requiring ritual purification. The self-purification ritual, known as *mosehe*, serves to cleanse the community and restore social balance. The phrase "reconciling disputes" (*motuha'i sapano Tolaki*), which literally refers to Tolaki customary teachings (*kal sara*), underscores the ritual's underlying purpose. This interpretation of the *mantra* is well documented in earlier studies on *mosehe* (Badara & Dinar, 2020; Koodoh, 2007).

The *mosehe* mantra ceremony embodies multiple dimensions of value—social, religious, and economic—each of which plays a significant role in Tolaki customary life. In terms of social value, the *mosehe* ritual, including *mosehe peohala owose*, fosters collective participation among Tolaki community members across different age groups. This shared involvement promotes a sense of solidarity and togetherness, transcending social status and strengthening communal bonds. The atmosphere of mutual respect among participants underscores the ceremony's role in reinforcing social harmony within the community.



Fig. 2. The *mbusehe* reciting a mantra prior to the buffalo slaughter ritual during the *mosehe peohala owose* ceremony

The religious value of the *mosehe* ceremony is reflected in its mantras, which position the *mbusehe* and participants as humble servants who surrender to the Creator (*O Ombu*). Through praise and supplication, they acknowledge that all events are governed by divine will and seek God's blessings for peace, harmony, and collective well-being.



Figure 3. Commemorative photograph taken after the signing of the minutes of agreement between the general chairperson of the Central Executive Board of the Tolaki Customary Institution (DPP LAT) and the chairperson of KPU Sultra, witnessed by representatives of FORSA.

In addition, the ceremony carries economic value by attracting large audiences from both Tolaki and non-Tolaki communities. The public nature of the event, especially during the symbolic buffalo-slaughtering ritual, draws spectators and stimulates local economic activity through the presence of vendors and small businesses around the ceremony site.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the signing of the minutes at the Media Center of the DPP LAT Office, witnessed by representatives of FORSA, symbolized the formal conclusion of the *mosehe peohala owose* ceremony. The occasion was commemorated with a group photograph, marking the final stage of the customary reconciliation process.

3.3 White Buffalo Slaughter in the Field (Adjacent to the DPP LAT Sultra Office)

Following the customary adjudication process (*mombesara*), which included the recitation of mantras by the *mbusehe*, the slaughter of a white buffalo (*kiniku wila*) marked the culmination of the *mosehe peohala owose* ceremony. The buffalo symbolically represented the violators—in this case, the KPU Sultra commissioners—so that its sacrifice was regarded as the resolution of the dispute and the ritual purification of the province, thereby restoring social and sacred harmony.



Figure 4. The white buffalo prepared for slaughter by the handler, preceded by the recitation of a ritual mantra.

The slaughtered animal, referred to as a “white buffalo,” was not purely white but rather light-colored and relatively young (see Figure 4), with an estimated value of approximately Rp. 50,000,000 (fifty million rupiah), as reported by one of the handlers involved in the ritual. Distinct from ordinary slaughter practices, the buffalo was slaughtered while standing, which, according to the handler, reflects the gravity of the customary violation. This method symbolizes that the violators—in this case, the KPU Sultra commissioners—were subjected to a severe customary sanction, consistent with the *mosehe peohala owose* ritual.

The slaughter of a white buffalo symbolizes purification and the restoration of social balance and harmony within the Tolaki community. In Tolaki tradition, the white buffalo is regarded as a sacred animal representing purity and spiritual power, making its sacrifice a powerful act of atonement. According to the Acting Regional Secretary of Kendari, Amir Hasan, who attended and witnessed the *mosehe peohala owose* ceremony, KPU Sultra offered the white buffalo as part of its customary obligation, seeking to reconcile with the community and restore collective harmony.

Meanwhile, one of the DPP LAT administrators interpreted the offering of a buffalo as reflecting the severity of the violation committed by KPU Sultra, particularly in relation to its treatment of the Tolaki Customary Institution. Although the incident did not constitute a legal offense under state law, the omission of LAT’s name from the invitation attachment was regarded as a serious breach of respect, even after subsequent revisions. The incident was considered to risk straining relations between KPU Sultra and LAT and, if left unresolved, could have widened divisions and influenced other community groups. Therefore, the customary ritual of mutual forgiveness was deemed essential to restore harmony, reflecting the Tolaki belief that cosmic order supports reconciliation and peace.

The white buffalo was slaughtered by the designated handlers, followed by the recitation of prayers by the *mbusehe*, asking for divine protection over Southeast Sulawesi and the restoration of peace and harmony within the region. The ritual concluded with the distribution of the buffalo meat to the community, symbolizing unity, reconciliation, and the strengthening of social bonds.

4 Conclusion

The *mosehe peohala owose* ceremony conducted at the DPP LAT office on February 23, 2025, represents a significant application of customary law in Southeast Sulawesi. Through a sequence of traditional proceedings—beginning with *mombesara* (customary sentencing), followed by the recitation of mantras and prayers, and culminating in the ritual slaughter of a white buffalo—the Tolaki community reaffirmed the sanctity of its customs and restored social harmony following the administrative negligence of KPU Sultra commissioners. This case highlights the enduring role of indigenous traditions as mechanisms for conflict resolution and community reconciliation, demonstrating that customary law continues to function as an essential moral and social compass for maintaining balance within society.

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