

ELEPHANT TUSKS AND BELIS TRADITION BY LAMAHOLOT COMMUNITY IN EAST NUSA TENGGARA, INDONESIA (Gading Gajah dan Tradisi Belis oleh Masyarakat Lamaholot, di Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia)

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ABSTRACT

The unique dowry tradition in Indonesia is called “belis” with the raw elephant tusks where the origin is still a mystery and will certainly be controversial at this time because they are prohibited to be traded and used. The study was conducted in May-June 2022 in East Flores, Adonara and Lembata of East Nusa Tenggara province through semi-systematically interview method. It aimed at examining the belis and use of elephant tusks in belis tradition of Lamaholot community. Based on interviews to 101 respondents of key person including traditional leaders, the elephant tusks and the belis tradition have existed for hundred years ago and as a symbol as the glory of women and their high dignity. There were in the belis tradition three-furnace system which served as central point, coda form and dowry negotiation between male and female families. The local community still wanted to preserve the tradition, but it was desire to avoid the use of the ivory to reduce tradition cost. Until today, the Lamaholot community is in a dilemma of preserving the long living tradition of the ivory belis in which it is increasingly rare and the elephant conservation in Indonesia is getting more important.

Keywords: CITES, elephant tusk, dowry, Lamaholot, Three-furnace system

ABSTRAK

Tradisi mahar unik di Indonesia disebut belis dengan gading gajah utuh yang asal usulnya masih menjadi misteri dan tentunya akan menjadi kontroversi saat ini karena dilarang untuk diperdagangkan dan digunakan. Penelitian dilakukan pada bulan Mei-Juni 2022 di Flores Timur, Adonara dan Lembata provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur melalui metode wawancara semi sistematis. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji filosofi belis dan pemanfaatan gading gajah dalam tradisi belis masyarakat Lamaholot. Berdasarkan wawancara terhadap 101 responden tokoh kunci termasuk tokoh adat, tradisi gading gajah dan belis sudah ada sejak ratusan tahun yang lalu dan merupakan simbol kemuliaan perempuan serta harkat dan martabatnya yang tinggi. Dalam tradisi belis terdapat sistem tiga tungku yang menjadi titik sentral, bentuk coda dan negosiasi mahar antara keluarga laki-laki dan perempuan. Masyarakat setempat tetap ingin melestarikan tradisi tersebut, namun ada keinginan untuk menghindari penggunaan gading untuk mengurangi biaya tradisi. Hingga saat ini, masyarakat Lamaholot berada dalam dilema dalam melestarikan tradisi belis gading yang sudah lama ada, yang semakin langka dan adanya upaya konservasi gajah di Indonesia semakin penting.

Kata kunci: Mahar, belis, Flores Timur, Adonara, Lembata

I. INTRODUCTION

The marriage tradition includes long living sacred ceremonies, customs and habits of Indonesian people that are inherited from generation to generation and still widely practiced today. A part of the marriage tradition is a dowry that

is given and as a sign to respect by a man to a woman (Harrel & Dickey, 1985; van Willigen & Channa 1991; Jovani, 2020; Twikromo, 2020; Mataradja, 2021). In Indonesia, it is called “mahar” in Arabic or “mas kawin” in west part of Indonesia, “ararem” in Papua or “belis”

in Nusa Tenggara Islands (Poli *et al.*, 2020; Apiem, 2021). The dowry materials are generally gold, including gold rings and bracelets, moko or jewelry made of gold or copper jars, elephant ivory, mamoli or masculine gifts such as arrows, spears or machetes (Wiryadinata & Joseph, 2023). Some "belis" dowries also consist of livestock, namely horses (*Equus* sp.) or buffaloes (*Bubalus* sp.) (Wiryadinata & Joseph, 2023). The people use raw elephant tusks as dowry in east part of East Nusa Tenggara, Sikka, Larantuka, Adonara, Lembata, Solor and Alor Pantar, especially among Lamaholot tribemen (Kewaama, 2010; Banfatin & Partini 2012; Wadu, 2015; Rodliyah *et al.*, 2017; Jovani 2020; Kleden *et al.*, 2021).

The origin of the use of ivory for belis is very speculative and poorly documented because it relates more to oral tradition or koda which is passed down orally and there is not any strong historical record of the origin of the belis and the use of ivory. However, there are some manuscripts assumed to record the origin of the tradition. The manuscripts suggest that ivory trading was commonplace among kingdoms in the archipelago, including Majapahit and it continued to colonial era of Portuguese and Dutch in East Flores and Solor from Asia and Africa mainland (Nugroho, 2016; Rodliyah *et al.*, 2017; Lawe, 2020; Kelen *et al.*, 2020). Interestingly, Flores Island has historical record of ancient elephants, known as *Stegodon florensis*. It is known that they have lived in early Pleistocene to the middle of the Pleistocene era (Van den Bergh *et al.*, 2008; Louys *et al.*, 2016; Van der Geer *et al.*, 2016). In today's era, ivory is still a commodity sought after by many people because it is expensive, very exotic, and prestigious and serves as a symbol of wealth. However, due to the

declining population of elephants worldwide, especially African Elephant (*Loxodonta africana* and *L. cyclotis*) and Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*), the ivory trade has long been closed since January 1990. The regulation of the African Elephant populations except in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe are included in Appendix I – CITES (Thornton & Currey, 1991; Currey & Moore, 1994; Nurse, 2013). African Forest Elephant (*L. cyclotis*) and Sumatran Elephant (*E. m. sumatranus*) are now critically endangered species and sub-species (Gopala *et al.*, 2011; the International Union for Conservation of Nature [IUCN], 2021). Moreover, Asian Elephants are protected animals according to the Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry No. 106 of 2018 (Oktavira, 2019; Wicaksono, 2020). Therefore, the use of elephant tusks for belis is a serious challenge for the Lamaholot community.

The study aimed at examining in depth the belis tradition and the use of elephant tusk in the tradition for Lamaholot community. The study provided in gaining an overview of the attitudes, the behavior and the views of the community regarding the belis tradition, especially the use of the elephant ivory and opportunities to change it, giving recommendations, and formulating strategies to protect Asian and African elephants concerning the use of the elephant tusks in the belis tradition of the people of Nusa Tenggara.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Study location

The study was conducted in three islands representing most of Lamaholot community, which were Flores Island (East Flores within the Larantuka district), Adonara Island (Larantuka district) and Lembata Island (Lembata

District), the East Nusa Tenggara Province - Indonesia. East Flores is 5,983.38 km² of width covering the eastern part of Flores Island, Adonara Island (529.8 km²), Solor Island (217.8 km²) and other small islands. East Flores district consists of 19 sub-districts, 21 sub-districts, and 229 villages. In 2020, the population was 297,599 people (Central Statistics Agency 2021). Lembata is an island of 1,266.39 km² of

width with a population of 135,930 people (Central Statistics Agency 2021). The in-field survey was started by organizing a trip to Kupang, the capital city of East Nusa Tenggara in Timor Island) and then researchers visited Larantuka area and its surroundings, and finally traveled to Adonara Island and organized a trekking trip to Lembata Island.

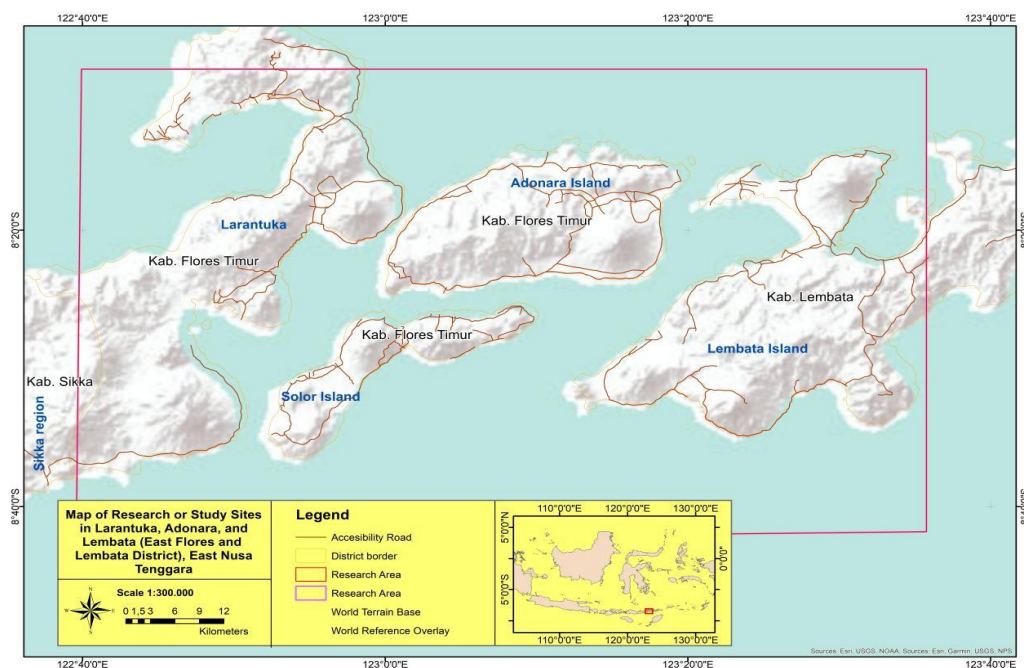


Figure 1. Map of research or study sites in East Flores and Lembata District East Nusa Tenggara - Indonesia

B. Data Collection

This study used a descriptive desk study method at an early stage to get an initial picture of the belis tradition and the use of elephant ivory in Lamaholot community. References are collected from various sources, especially those based on studies of the history, culture, language and politics of the Larantuka and Adonara communities (Graham, 1991; Rodliyah *et al.*, 2017; Kelen *et al.*, 2020; Poli *et al.*, 2020). Then this initial information is used as material for

developing interview methodologies and building important questions for respondents. The selection of area studies is based on the results of this desk study and initial information from various colleagues who live or have source information in this area, especially in Larantuka, Adonara and Lembata Island.

The study started in May 2022 where field surveys were conducted on May 22th – June 12th, 2022. Data was collected using semi-systematic

interviews with structured questionnaire. Semi-systematic interviews were conducted with identified traditional figures and key figures who well-understood the belis tradition and the use of elephant tusks. The items of the questionnaire were formulated especially for the key figures and used in a semi-structured discussion. And the same time, the interviews were conducted with at least 30-40 respondents for each island who represented the communities in the three islands based on their knowledge, experiences and where he lives which has a strong attachment to the tradition

of belis ivory. A structured questionnaire was prepared to acquire the knowledge, the attitudes, the behavior and the views of the community concerning the belis tradition, the use of elephant tusks in the tradition, the impact on society and the opportunities for changing traditions to protect Asian and African elephants. The recruitment of the respondents was based on the information of previous respondents and the information from the local communities. It was also necessary to document the elephant tusks of the respondents who had experience of the tradition.

Figure 2. Two types of respondents and the level of questions for the respondents

Traditional head as a respondent question	The commonly local people as a respondent question
1. Deeply knowledge and experiences about belis tradition history and its philosophy	1. His experiences and implementation about belis tradition and use the ivory
2. Implementation about belis tradition and use the ivory	2. Attitude and opinion about belis and use ivory traditions
3. Attitude and opinion about belis and use ivory traditions	3. Focus on 15 questions from interviewers
4. Focus on 15 questions from interviewers	

C. Data Analysis

The data collected using the datasheet form that had been completed by the respondents were analyzed. There were 60 questions totally in datasheet form asked to respondents and 15 questions in paper form specifically for analyzing background knowledge, traditions and opinions regarding belis and the use of elephant ivory. The analysis was made using Microsoft Excel 365 (2010) in pivot table and five questions used Likert scale (Derick & White, 2017). Answers in five questions to closed-ended questions were grouped and analyzed using statistic analyzing technique to calculate the frequency, the percentage of frequency and the statistics of the correlation of two variables

(Spearman non-parametric correlation tests) in the answers that had values on a Likert scale in three point scales (see Figure 4).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Belis Tradition, ivory price, and “Three Furnace” (Tiga Tungku) System

Based on our interviews with the communities in particular traditional heads, *belis* tradition had variations in implementation and there were differences in procedures and social strata (Graham, 1991; Ninggrum, 2016; Wejak, 2020). However, the philosophy of the *belis* related to the values of women's dignity and upholding their status. Silvester Hurit suggested that in

addition to the effort to improve the dignity of women, the *belis* tradition was also a symbol of tribal beliefs, a sign of fertility and self-esteem (Hurit S 2022, pers. comm.). In the past, when ivory *belis* had not been used, after marrying a woman, a son served a woman's family (Lewadoken M 2022, pers. comm.). David Kopong Lawe also suggested that ivory *belis* was interpreted as the glory of women and their high dignity. In this context, the ivory *belis* was highly valued and expensive so that a man did not act rashly in marrying a woman and men were forced to maintain monogamous marriage because of the high cost of the tradition and it served as part of tribal strategy for men to remain loyal to women (Harrell & Dickey, 1985; Graham, 1991; Rodliyah, *et al.* 2017; Lawe, 2020).

All of Lamaholot men and outsiders were obliged by the customary law of Lamaholot community to pay the dowry using ivory when they married Lamaholot women (Andaya, 2016). On the contrary, the customary law did not require a man to give ivory *belis* to non-Lamaholot women though in some cases Lamaholot men gave the ivory *belis* to their non-Lamaholot wives and families. Therefore, the practice of marrying someone outside of Lamaholot became one of the escapes for men not to use ivory as a *belis* that was considered to be expensive because the ivory was increasingly rare and hence the price was continuously skyrocketed. In the *belis* tradition, women reward men once ivory has been given to them. The measure of recompensate was equal to the value and the price of the ivory. The reward was women cloth and a number of household items for the men. The woven cloth was of the kind of original one that was woven using tribal yarns and it made the cloth very expensive. In some cases, the

reward paid the ivory *belis* off because it was a closet full of expensive woven fabrics. Rafael Lamanepa also suggested that the custom of repaying the family represented the "baralaran" received by a man's family from a woman at the time of the death of her parents, the death of her husband and finally her death.

The size of the ivory *belis* reflected the family strata in some places. One of the places that still maintained these strata was Adonara Island, especially in the "inland" part of the island. In Larantuka, the ivory *belis* given was usually a large tusk of the minimum size of the middle fingertip to the middle of the human chest or referred to as "bala lega", but it did not rule out the possibility of "bala leku" or "bala hu'ut" (Graham, 1991; Lawe, 2020). Lewokluok still retained 3 tusks for *belis*. In Adonara, each man was charged 3 tusks on average, especially when marrying an Adonara girl. Several respondents suggested that there were tribal and regional policies that reduced the number of the ivory *belis* to a tusk as a *belis*. In Lamahala, the *belis* tradition did not used real ivory, but it used a symbol and there was not any real ivory appearing in marriage customs. In Lembata, the social strata were symbolized by 3 tusks and an ivory of the size of 3 sarongs. Several respondents suggested that a customary meeting was held in 1984 inviting religious and government leaders. One of the decisions made in the meeting was that they agreed to reduce the ivory *belis* to one tusk of the size of "bala siku". The *belis* of 3 tusks indicated a higher stratum. Muhammad Muchtar Lebu Kelake Kei from Goran Tokan tribe representing a dignitary or nobleman in Witihamas suggested that the *belis* he gave to his wife were 5 tusks accompanied by 60 goats. The children

of the tribe were also required to give 5 tusks when they got married. In the past, Goram Tokan or Lama Tokan whose ancestors were immigrants from the islands of Seram and Gorom had a history of 15 tusks in the belis tradition that was later reduced to 11 tusks, and then 7 tusks are reduced to 5 tusks today. In 1995, Jakobus Dewaraya Lamablawa gave belis of 7 tusks accompanied by 15 pigs and 15 goats to his wife because he belonged to the nobles of the Korebima tribe.

The price of ivory on the market in the Lamaholot area varies. It is estimated that the price of small ivory that is worth only for decoration and whole ivory that exceeds the span of both human hands referred to as "bala hu'ut" or "bala rain" ranges from 13 - 200 million rupiahs per ivory. It is relatively fluctuating depending on the ability and the prestige some people get from owning ivory. The results of the interviews using questionnaires showed that the price of the ivory in Larantuka was lower than in Adonara and Lembata where a large ivory was worth of around 100 million rupiahs. In Adonara and Lembata, a large whole ivory was worth of around 200 million rupiahs and some said that it was worth of over 200 million rupiahs. In Lembata, the value of ivory was equal to that of sarong. The value of an ivory of "bala siku" size was equal to 3 woven sarongs. The value of the ivory of smaller size was equal to two sarongs or less. The value of bigger ivory was equal to 5 sarongs even up to 7 sarongs.

The economic problems and the burden for men because of increasingly rare and expensive ivory and the rewards that women should give gave birth to various solutions. One of the solutions was three furnaces system. The three-furnace system focused on two things. The first was the strategy of maintaining

inter-tribal populations by avoiding marriage with close relatives. Inbreeding was prohibited for all tribes in Lamaholot. So, marriage was arranged between tribes. A man in a tribe could only marry a woman of another tribe on the same plot or in terms of *opu-belake* (Larantuka term) or *opu lake-ana opu* (Lembata Island term). A tribe could pair up with another tribe in the context of *opu-belake*, while a tribe in a *belake* position could not become an *opu* in a tribe in an *opu* position. He had to find another tribe as *Belake*. The name *opu-belake* or *opu lake - ana opu* was not known by Adonara community. In Adonara, the position of *opu* could become *belake* if a man or a woman of the *belake* side married a man or a woman. The second was the system that helped men who were not able to give tusks to a woman or indebted to their families or tribes. Men could devote their life to women's families until they got ivory belis. However, men could get ivory from *opu* (*opu lake*) through marriage his sisters or men should wait for their female descendants to get tusks because they were married by men of other tribes.

The three-furnace system had two advantages for tribal life, which were maintaining the genetic quality of descendants because it avoided inbreeding and streamlining the rotation of tusks between tribes. In the case that the position of marriage in which ivory alternated between tribes through the *opu-belake* marriage system, the ivory will return to the starting point and the men considered the ivory debt to be fully paid. A cycle of ivory in the system could take a generation or two to break even, but there were up to ten generations in various tribes. It was for the reason that traditional elders were often required to have the ability to

memorize the position of the ivory and the debts of the men's tusks and

conveyed it orally during traditional ceremonies.

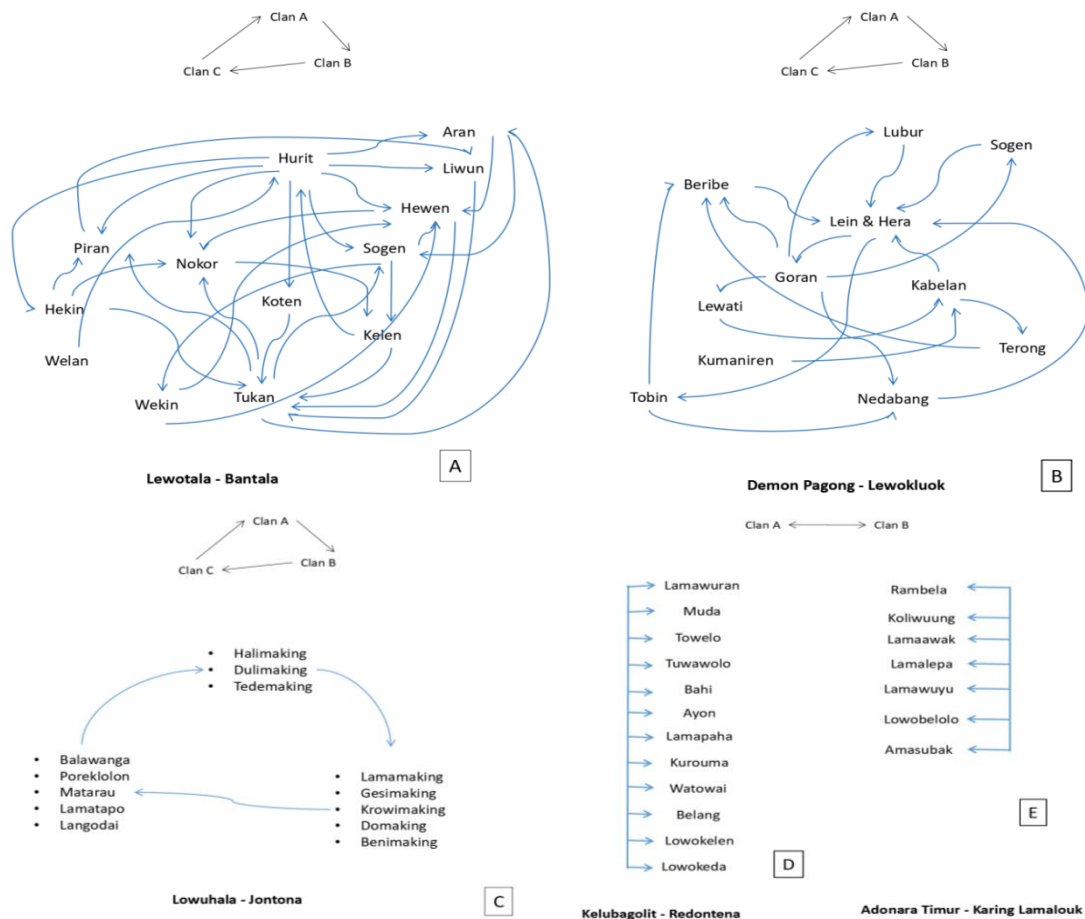


Figure 3. The three furnace system in Larantuka (Lewotala Sub-district, Bantala Village and Demon Pagong Sub-district, Lewokluok Village) (A and B) and Lembata (Lewuhala customary group, Jontona Village (East Ileape Sub-district) (C) and the systems outside of the three furnace system in Adonara where tribe A's family could marry B and vice versa (D and E).

A. Preserving Tradition versus Changing Tradition

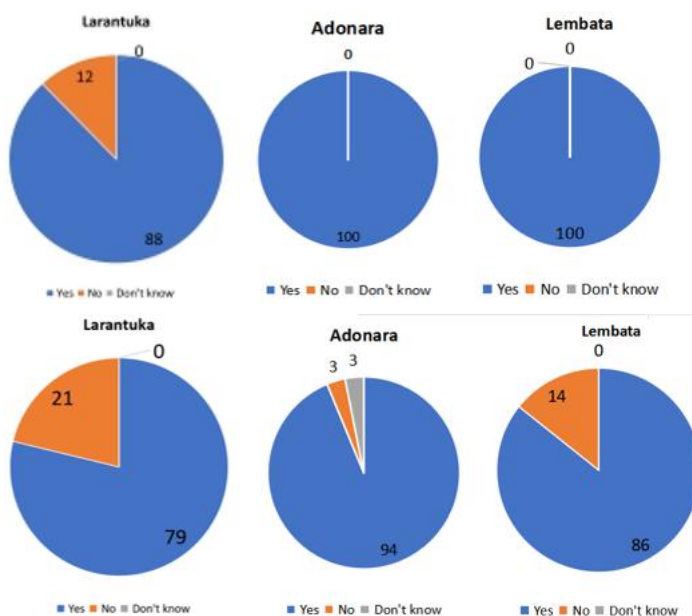
Figure 4 below described the positive values of the belis tradition, the use of ivory in this tradition, its relevance in the future and whether the belis tradition might be changed and the issue of replacing the ivory with another object. There were totally 101 respondents, consisting of 33 individuals from Larantuka, 34 individuals from Adonara and 34 individuals from Lembata. They were analyzed on the basis of the percentage of those who

agreed, disagreed or did not know. In Larantuka, 88% of them agreed that the belis tradition had a positive value and 12% of them considered it as negative, especially young respondents. There were 79% of them who considered the use of ivory in the belis tradition as positive, while 21% of them considered it as negative because it was burdening because the ivory is rare, hard to get this, and very expensive (cannot be bought). There were 85% of them considered that the tradition would be still relevant in the future. Concerning the change of the

tradition, there were 61% of them who considered that it was not necessary to change the tradition, while 64% of them agreed to reduce the amount of the ivory or even to replace it with money or certain symbol.

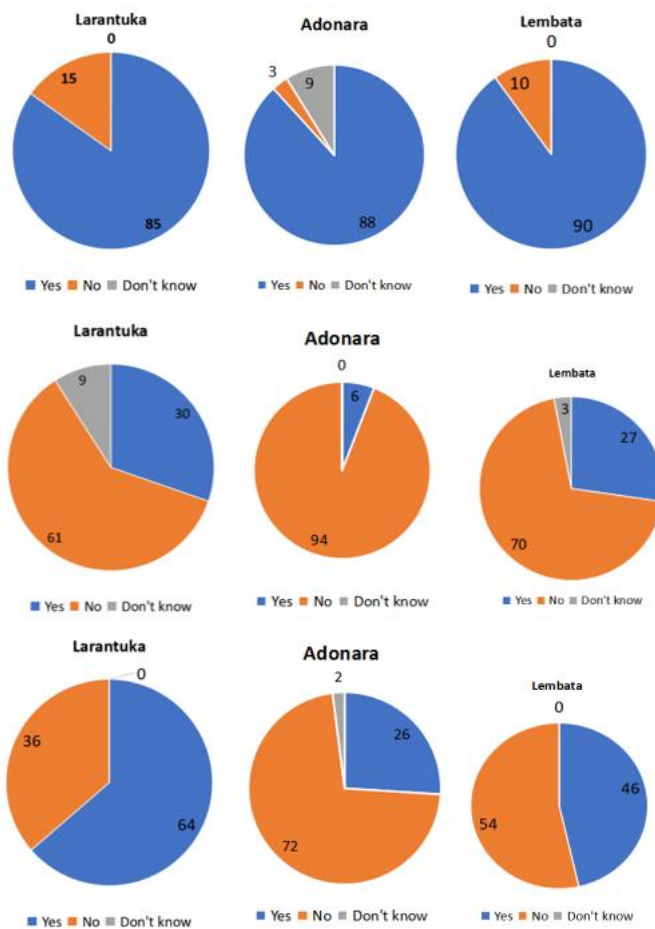
There were 86% of the respondents in Lembata who considered the use of ivory in belis as positive, while 90% of them considered the belis and the use of ivory as relevant. The belis tradition in Lembata is recognized as having a positive value (100% of respondents said so), and the majority of them do not want to change it (70%). But the percentage wishing to change their use of ivory is increasing (46%). Adonara community held the tradition stronger than the respondents outside of Adonara. There were 100% of them who considered the tradition as positive, while 92% of them considered it as positive with the use of ivory. There were 100% of them considered it as relevant in the future,

while 89% of them did not want to change it, including the simplification of the purification of it. There were 72% of them who considered the use of ivory as mandatory in the tradition. Spearman test statistics was used to analyze the correlation between respondents' age, social strata and the number of girls and boys of the respondents concerning their view of the belis tradition, the use of ivory, the relevance and the change of it. The results of the analysis showed that there was significant correlation between the age and the social strata of the respondents in Larantuka concerning the positive or negative value of the belis tradition (0.482, p-values 0.005) and the use of ivory in that tradition (0.601, p-value <0.001). The respondents of young people of Larantuka generally suggested that the belis and the use of ivory were burdening and had negative value as the tradition.



In the history and tradition background, the *belis* tradition has positive value for you?

If the tradition involves a dowry of elephant ivory, does it have a positive value?



In the historical and traditional background, is the *belis* tradition using ivory dowry still relevant or can it be maintained for you?

Do you agree when the tradition of *belis* is changed or abolished?

Do you agree when the tradition of using elephant tusks is changed?

Figure 4. The percentage results of the interviews with 101 respondents coming from Larantuka, Adonara and Lembata, East Nusa Tenggara based on the value of the *belis* tradition and the use of ivory in the tradition, its relevance and whether the tradition or use of ivory could be changed or not.

Table 1. The results of Spearman non-parametric correlation tests of 7 variables by comparing the age and the social strata of the respondents and the difference in the number of boys and girls of the respondents concerning their views of the *belis* tradition, the use of ivory in *belis*, the relevance and the changes of the tradition

Variables	Respondent's age score			Score difference between men/women from respondent's family			Belis tradition (positive/no)			Use of ivory (positive/no)			The relevance of ivory and belis			Belis tradition change			Changes in the use of ivory		
	Lrntuka	Adnara	Lmbata	Lrntuka	Adnara	Lmbata	Lrntuka	Adnara	Lmbata	Lrntuka	Adnara	Lmbata	Lrntuka	Adnara	Lmbata	Lrntuka	Adnara	Lmbata	Lrntuka	Adnara	Lmbata
Respondent's age score	1	1	1	0,033	0,178	0,101	0,482	0,127	-0,326	0,601	0,004	0,242	0,311	0,257	0,055	0,120	0,020	0,071	0,286	0,108	-0,204
Score difference between men/women from respondent's family	0,033	0,178	0,101	1	1	1	0,062	-0,154	-0,053	0,041	0,007	0,005	0,203	-0,025	0,079	0,264	0,045	-0,050	0,088	0,037	0,146
Belis tradition (positive/no)	0,482	0,127	0,326	0,062	-	-	1	1	1	0,716	-0,054	0,214	0,620	0,460	0,154	0,069	0,044	-0,023	0,105	0,115	0,028
Use of ivory (positive/no)	0,601	0,004	0,242	0,041	0,007	0,005	0,716	0,054	0,214	1	1	1	0,608	-0,113	0,205	0,113	-	0,350	-0,276	0,084	0,316
The relevance of ivory and belis	0,311	0,257	0,055	0,203	-0,025	0,079	0,264	0,045	-0,050	0,088	0,037	0,146	0,372	0,146	0,030	0,070	1	1	1	1	1
Belis tradition change	0,120	0,020	0,071	0,286	0,108	-0,204	0,088	0,037	0,146	0,372	0,146	0,030	0,070	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Changes in the use of ivory	0,286	0,108	-0,204	0,088	0,037	0,146	0,372	0,146	0,030	0,070	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Values in bold are different from 0 with a significance level alpha=0,05

C. Elephant Conservation and Conservation based Local Wisdom

Ivory buying and selling in Lamaholot community was common place. Ivory buying places were distributed in Ende, Sikka, Larantuka, Adonara and Lembata. Several respondents suggested that Bulang Gitang area of Boru Village, Lato Village around Maumere, Maumere, Kedang, Lewoleba, and Illeape were well-known trading hotspot areas. There were also potential areas for selling ivory in Redontena, Witihama, Ileboleng and Kelubagolit. A large and long ivory in Solor in was bought by a respondent from Larantuka in 1977 for belis. Outside of Lamaholot, the respondents mentioned that a relatively big number of ivory buying was done in Malaysia and Indonesia, especially in Sabah and Nunukan from the Adonara and Lembata communities. Several respondents suggested that 5-10 years ago, it was relatively easy to buy ivory from Sabah and Nunukan as long as the ivory were accompanied by legal documents by sea. However, it is very difficult today to trade and to smuggle ivory because ivory buyers from Flores have been arrested five years ago. In 2017, smugglers successfully smuggled elephant ivory from Sabah through Nunukan. In May 2017, the Nunukan people smuggled 5 elephant tusks from Sabah and were caught in Nunukan by the SPORC Ministry of Environmental and Forestry (MoEF) team (World Wide Fund for Nature [WWF] Indonesia, 2017). In July 2017, Nunukan Police arrested Indonesian workers smuggling elephant tusks from Malaysia to Nunukan (North Kalimantan) for traditional purposes in East Nusa Tenggara (Antara, 2017). In 2019, the smuggling of 10 ivories from Lahat Datu, Sabah Malaysia to Nunukan

by the suspect failed (Wicaksono, 2019). In December 2019, 4 smuggled ivories were confiscated by SPORC in Nunukan. Ivories came from Keningau, Sabah - Malaysia (Pejabat Pengelola Informasi dan Dokumentasi [PPID], 2019). In 2020, officers from the special protection unit of the Sabah State Department of Forestry arrested a husband and a wife from East Nusa Tenggara possessing 4 tusks in an oil palm plantation near Luasong (Suhartono, 2020). There was not any record that ivory from Sumatra was sold to Nusa Tenggara.

In Asia including Indonesia, the main threat to Asian elephants was land conversion that resulted in elephant-human conflicts and hunting (Ling *et al.*, 2016; Gopala *et al.*, 2011; Sukmantoro, 2021). In Sabah, the main threat of land conversion increased from year to year, especially land clearing in Sabah and North Kalimantan for settlements and plantations (Evans *et al.*, 2020; Alfred *et al.*, 2010 in Sukmantoro *et al.*, 2021). Ivory hunting in Kalimantan was also a serious threat because Borneo Elephant has been in the category of endangered species. The 2007-2017 Strategy and Action Plan for the Conservation of Indonesian Elephants has mandated a reduction of the number of ivory poaching in Sumatra and Kalimantan. And then, the latest draft of national strategy continued the conservation. In the provincial strategy of the conservation of the Borneo elephant in North Kalimantan province (2018-2028), the law enforcement mandate for ivory hunting and trafficking, including the coordination and development of a cyber crime task force, was strong and became the main policy of the province in protecting priority species. Therefore, various cases handled by the Nunukan district government in terms of law

enforcement (were successful in seizing ivory) had positive impact on the commitment of the province of North Kalimantan and the step was followed by the government of Sabah (Pemerintah Provinsi Kalimantan Utara, 2018; Suyitno, 2019; Sabah Wildlife Department, 2020).

Elephant conservation and local wisdom were two different things that could be glued in a common protection strategy. Unfortunately, the national elephant conservation strategy contained less local wisdom, especially those related to the efforts of harmonizing elephant conservation with the belis tradition. At the local wisdom level, it seemed that the conservation strategy would work with the attitude and the behavior of Lamaholot community that respected elephants for providing ivory. At the modern conservation level, customary law has regulated the procedures of moving the ivory belis among tribes, selling ivory to other parties that was not for belis, especially customary ivory. Establishing ivory standard was a form of ivory conservation carried out by the Lamaholot community. Selling ivory outside of the tribe for other purposes such as making bracelets or decorations, giving ivory belis to girls who were not descendants of Lamaholot and storing ivory in women's private homes or women's families was considered as an anomaly especially for the tribes that were very strict in managing tribal ivory belis. Unfortunately, many tribes in Lantaka, Adonara and Lembata, did not register or collect ivory data. However, several individuals initiated the effort to collect the data of the ivory. The counter-initiative occurred under the pretext of ivory sanctification or the issue of theft if ivory ownership was known through data collection. In some

tribes, it turned out that data collection has been done by marking the tribal tusks. The tusks were slightly sliced for the marking. It was because in the past ivory theft occurred in the tribe.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The tradition of "belis" among the Lamaholot people represents a form of traditional wisdom that combines centuries-old marriage customs, a philosophy emphasizing the high status of women, and a concern for elephants based on their view as ivory providers. For mainstream conservationists, this perspective is seen as anomalous due to the occurrence of ivory hunting and trading for hundreds of years, some of which are still preserved despite law enforcement cases involving Flores communities smuggling ivory into Kalimantan. This anomaly is reinforced by the fact that ivory is not only used for "belis" but also sold for the economic needs of families, leading to the three-hearth principle of ivory circulation not being effectively implemented in some communities. For young Lamaholot individuals, especially in Lantaka and Lembata, ivory "belis" is perceived as a burden, necessitating a change in ivory usage. In terms of formal Indonesian law, the Lamaholot area exists in a gray area because the movement and trade of ivory occur without punishment. Ivory can even be sold to official state pawn authorities.

Recommendations for the future were cross-sectoral collaboration between governments, customary and religious leaders related to strategies in structuring the circulation of ivory, especially for belis, which could provide the Lamaholot community with the protection in practicing their traditions in the long term in a synergy with the

efforts to protect Asian and African elephants. For elephant conservation at the local level, closing trade routes in many areas up to East Nusa Tenggara is a solution to reduce the ivory trade to the region. Education for many plantation workers from East Nusa Tenggara in Sabah and North Kalimantan and the issue of cross-border collaboration between the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia (Sabah) regarding concrete law enforcement actions against the trade and smuggling of elephant ivory is important in a short period of time.

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