

THE POTENTIAL OF BADONG MUSIC IN THE RAMBU SOLO' CEREMONY AS A THERAPEUTIC MEDIUM

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore the function of Badong traditional music performed in the traditional death ceremony of Rambu solo' as a therapeutic medium. Badong music, which is rich in spiritual and social values, is believed to play a therapeutic role in aiding the emotional healing process of grieving families. This study examines how Badong musical elements, such as melody, rhythm, and lyrics, interact with cultural and spiritual values to support psychological recovery and social solidarity during the grieving process. This study employed a qualitative approach and utilized an ethnographic method. The research was conducted in Tana Toraja, especially in the Uluvalu area, which was known to be active in carrying out the Rambu solo' ceremony. The primary data sources came from grieving families, Pa'Badong (ritual leaders), traditional leaders, and academics. Data collection techniques included participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The validity of the data was ensured through triangulation techniques, including source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and theoretical triangulation, by comparing data from various subjects, data collection methods, and theoretical perspectives. The results of the study show that Badong music has a significant contribution in channeling emotions and supporting the emotional healing process for bereaved individuals. Slow, repetitive melodies, meaningful lyrics, and collective performance forms in ritual circles create a space of catharsis, strengthening spiritual and social attachments. This study concludes that Badong music can be developed as a culturally grounded therapeutic medium in modern counseling practices. It is recommended that local values be integrated into therapeutic interventions to strengthen emotional resilience while preserving cultural identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Music is a universal medium of expression that has long been used in various cultural and spiritual practices around the world. In the context of modern counseling, music therapy has evolved as an effective form of intervention to help individuals manage emotions, cope with trauma, and restore psychological balance. Music therapy utilizes elements of melody, rhythm, harmony, and lyrics to create a space for catharsis and self-reflection, even in conditions when verbal communication becomes difficult (Djohan, 2006).

Research conducted by Schneidman et al. (2024) shows that music therapy is clinically able to reduce stress and improve psychological well-being. A different study by Ayu et al. (2022) shows the success of music therapy in reducing the intensity of auditory hallucinations in schizophrenic patients. Meanwhile, research by Kana Wadu and Mediani (2021) shows the effectiveness of music therapy in accompanying patients with anxiety and depression. Each of these studies shows that music as a therapeutic medium has broad therapeutic power in a variety of clinical contexts.

Music therapy practices in Indonesia tend to still focus on the use of classical and instrumental music, while traditional music has not been widely researched scientifically as a potential therapeutic medium. In fact, traditional music has a close relationship with local values, spirituality, and the collective emotions of the community. Yusli and Rachma (2019) proved that Javanese gamelan music therapy is effective in reducing anxiety levels in the elderly. Similar findings were also expressed by Supriadi et al. (2015), which showed that the traditional music of Sundanese flute lute was able to lower blood pressure in the elderly who experienced hypertension.

Traditional music that has strong therapeutic potential but has not been studied much, one of which is Badong music from Tana Toraja, South Sulawesi. This music is an integral part of the traditional funeral ceremony of Rambu solo', which is played in the form of collective singing by the Pa'Badong group. In practice, the Pa'Badong stand in a circle and sing verses in the Toraja language containing praise, memories, and prayers for the deceased. Sambira and Kristanto (2020a) note that the Badong musical structure has a repetitive melody and a stable rhythm, which can psychologically create a contemplative and cathartic atmosphere for the participants of the ceremony.

The meaning contained in Badong poetry is not only limited to emotional lamentation, but also full of the values of solidarity, spirituality, and social support. Patandean et al. (2018) stated that Badong singing functions as a form of respect for the deceased as well as comfort for the family left behind. Sulo (2014) even identified the four main functions of Badong, namely advice (Pa'pakilala), lamentation (Umbating), delivery of bodies (Ma'palao), and blessing prayers (Pasakke). This means that Badong music not only reflects sadness, but also becomes a symbolic space rich in cultural meaning and value.

The Rambu solo' ceremony itself is a sacred ritual in the Toraja tradition that marks the spiritual transition of the deceased. In this context, Badong music serves as a link between the real world and the spiritual realm, as well as strengthening the bonds between individuals, families, and communities (Pakulla', 2022). Salinding (2023) emphasized that this ritual is not just a funeral ceremony, but a collective spiritual moment that glues together the social and religious values of the Toraja people.

Practices such as Ma'Badong in the perspective of counseling can be understood as a form of collective therapy rooted in culture. Prasasti (2020) said that figures such as Pa'Badong function like cultural counselors who are able to provide emotional support without formal psychological training. This is in line with the culture-based counseling approach proposed by Sue and Sue (2008), which emphasizes the importance of sensitivity to local values and practices in the counseling process.

Until now, there has been no study that comprehensively explores how musical elements in Badong music such as rhythm, melody, and lyrics can support the process of emotional healing in the context of grief. There have also not been many studies that associate Badong's musical experience with modern therapeutic approaches such as narrative therapy or meaning-making therapy as developed by Neimeyer (2001).

This research aims to explore the potential of Badong music in the Rambu solo' ceremony as a cultural-based counseling therapy medium. The main focus is directed at understanding how this music facilitates emotional responses, strengthens social solidarity, and creates a space of spiritual meaning for individuals experiencing grief. With an ethnographic approach, this study is expected to expand the discourse of music therapy based on local wisdom and make a real contribution to a more holistic, contextual, and inclusive counseling practice to Indonesian culture.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods to explore in depth the potential of *Badong music* as a therapeutic medium in the context of Toraja culture. This method was chosen because it is suitable for studying cultural practices and emotional experiences in the implementation of the *Rambu solo'* ceremony. The research location is in the Uluvalu area, Tana Toraja, South Sulawesi, which is known to actively maintain the *Ma'badong tradition*. The data source was obtained through purposive sampling techniques, involving bereaved families, *Pa'Badong*, and 2 academics. Data collection was carried out by participatory observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document studies in the form of audio-visual recordings, Badong lyrics, and other supporting documents. To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses triangulation techniques of sources, methods, and theories (Djohan, 2006). Data analysis was carried out thematically through the stages of data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing as stated by Miles and Huberman (1994). Each theme that arises is analyzed in the context of Toraja culture and elaborated with music therapy theory, music psychology, and counseling based on local wisdom (Neimeyer, 2001; Sue & Sue, 2008). The analysis process is carried out in a reflective and repetitive manner to ensure valid and contextual interpretations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of data collection through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation during the ceremony that took place in Uluvalu, several important findings were found related to the emotional, social, musical, and spiritual functions of Badong music. These findings are discussed in several key categories.

1. Characteristics of Research Subjects

The subjects in this study consist of various parties who are directly or indirectly involved in the implementation of the Rambu Solo' ceremony and the Ma'badong ritual. The characteristics of the subjects reflect the diversity of experiences, social positions, and depth of involvement in the Toraja tradition. This research involved 12 main informants, consisting of 4 family members who are undergoing the grieving process, 3 active Pa'badong, 2 traditional leaders, and 3 academics who understand Toraja culture and locally-based counseling.

The age range of subjects varies between 27 to 72 years old, with educational backgrounds ranging from out of school to master's level. The grieving family subjects come from different social backgrounds: from families with high social status who carry out the great Rambu Solo' (Tomakaka). Pa'badong is someone who has inherited the skill in chanting Badong verses for generations. They have an important role in conveying cultural and spiritual values through mourning songs. Pa'badong plays a role in facilitating the implementation of the ceremony and interpreting the symbolic values of each stage of the ritual. Meanwhile, academics were involved as resource persons to provide a scientific perspective on the function of Badong music in therapeutic and counseling approaches.

The subjects' involvement in this study was not only as passive respondents, but also as cultural actors who understood the social and spiritual context of the ongoing rituals. This diversity strengthens the validity of the data obtained, as it allows researchers to gain rich perspectives, both emotionally, structurally, and conceptually about the role of Badong music in the process of emotional healing.

2. Characteristics of Badong Musical and Its Effect on Emotions

Badong music musically consists of a repetitive melodic structure, a slow and steady rhythm, and the collective use of vocal sounds without the accompaniment of musical instruments. The Pa'badong sang mourning verses with an appreciative intonation, creating a deep reflective atmosphere. These poems usually contain the life story of the deceased, condolences and prayers, as well as strengthening moral and spiritual values. The melody that is soothing and sung slowly gives the listener space to reflect on the meaning of loss.

The observation results showed that during the procession, many family members were unable to hold back their tears, indicating that Badong music was able to open up emotional catharsis. As explained by Djohan (2006), music has the power to channel emotions that are difficult to express verbally, and in this context, Badong becomes a medium for expressing feelings of grief in depth. This is also supported by the analysis that the repetitive structure of music allows the listener to enter a calmer mental state and be open to personal reflection.

3. Badong Music as a Means of Catharsis and Emotional Healing

Findings from interviews with the families of those left behind show that participation in the Ma'badong ceremony not only pays tribute to the deceased, but also plays a role in helping them process feelings of loss. Many of them confessed that after listening to Badong's poems, they felt more "relieved", as if their inner burden was reduced. This indicates a cathartic process that runs during the ritual performance.

Badong music, according to the informants, provides a safe space for crying, reminiscing and praying. This response is in line with the concept of music therapy as a symbolic space that allows one to integrate emotional experiences through symbolic expression, as stated by Wigram, Pedersen, and Bonde (2002).

4. Social Function and Collective Support through Ma'badong

Apart from being a medium of personal expression, Ma'badong also forms a collective social space that strengthens the sense of togetherness. The Ma'badong circle carried out by the participants became a symbol of solidarity, showing that grief is not borne by the nuclear family alone, but shared with the community. In interviews, several informants stated that the presence of people in Badong circles made them feel stronger and supported.

This phenomenon shows that Badong music plays a role in strengthening the social structure of Toraja society and becomes a tangible form of social support, which according to Sue and Sue (2008), is one of the important elements in the psychological recovery process.

5. Spiritual Symbolism and the Process of Meaning of Death

Badong music is not only mourning music, but also a bridge between the human world and the spiritual world. Badong poems theologically convey the hope that the spirit of the deceased can be accepted in the afterlife and respected as an ancestor. In observation, it appears that the grieving family pays great attention to the narrative of the poem that is presented, because its content is believed to also affect the spiritual status of the deceased.

In this context, Badong music supports the process of meaning-making as explained by Neimeyer (2001), that in facing loss, individuals need to build a new narrative that gives meaning to the event of grief. Badong makes this happen by rearranging memories, praying for the deceased, and creating collective stories about the life they have lived.

6. The Role of Pa'badong as a Cultural Counselor

Pa'badong figures in the implementation of rituals play an important role, not only as singers, but also as meaningmakers and conveyors of moral messages. The Pa'badong are able to choose lyrics that are in accordance with the family context, social situation, and even the conflict that is happening. In interviews, many referred to Pa'badong as an "advisor" who not only entertained but also strengthened the mind.

This shows that counseling practices in the community do not always have to be formal. Prasasti (2020) said that traditional figures such as Pa'badong have a counselor function in a cultural context, because they are able to facilitate the grieving and recovery process through approaches that are relevant to local values.

7. Integration of Cultural and Psychological Values in the Therapy Process

Overall, Badong music shows that cultural and spiritual values can be an important foundation in therapy practice. This research confirms that the process of emotional healing does not necessarily require Western-based clinical interventions, but can be done through contextual approaches, such as vocal arts and local traditions. This value supports the view that culturally based counseling is better able to reach the emotional roots of individuals because it is based on collective experiences and beliefs (Sue & Sue, 2008).

CONCLUSION

Badong music in the Rambu Solo' ceremony not only functions as part of traditional rituals, but also has strong potential as a cultural-based counseling therapy medium that supports the emotional healing process of grieving families. Through repetitive melodies, steady rhythms, and meaningful verses, Badong music facilitates catharsis and reflection so that grief can be expressed symbolically and in a structured manner, while collective participation in Ma'badong rituals strengthens social support and community solidarity. The spiritual values embodied in Badong's poems help families build a new meaning toward death and loss, with Pa'badong acting as a cultural figure who resembles a local counselor in guiding the acceptance process. This integration of musical, social, and spiritual aspects suggests that counseling practices rooted in local culture, such as Badong music, can be a contextual, relevant, and more emotionally acceptable form of intervention than counseling approaches that are solely based on Western traditions.

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