

CHRISTIAN FUNERAL RITES AND *RAMBU SOLO'* IN TANA TORAJA

RITUSAN PEMAKAMAN KRISTEN DAN *RAMBU SOLO'* DI TANA TORAJA

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Abstract

This article aimed to elaborate on the death ritual carried out by the society of Tana Toraja. Tana Toraja people, apart from their official affiliation to Christianity, yet practised an indigenous ceremony known as *Rambu Solo'* as a part of *Aluk Todolo*, which is identified as a local belief system of the Tana Toraja. To describe a proper image of both rituals simultaneously, this paper used some methods: structuralism, comparison, and interviewing. The structuralism method of research came more profound into a comprehension of the funerals regarding their prominent position within Tana Toraja people; the comparison method traced both similarities and differences of the ritual based on its theological origin and practises while interviewing was done formulating pieces of information derived from Tana Toraja religious figures and intellectuals, stood for an additional effort enriching available documented sources. This research concluded that the community of Tana Toraja combined their death ritual from both Christianity and *Rambu Solo'* basis, making it an inevitably distinguished ritual practise. Considering the traditions' divergent values, the discussion suggests multiple identity belongings in the local Indonesian context.

Keywords: *Aluk Todolo*, Christianity, Death Ritual, *Rambu Solo'*, Tana Toraja

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mendalami topik upacara kematian yang dilakukan masyarakat Tana Toraja. Masyarakat Tana Toraja, terlepas dari identitas keagamaan yang secara resmi memeluk agama Kristen, tetap mempraktikkan upacara *Rambu Solo'* yang merupakan bagian dari kepercayaan lokal Tana Toraja; *Aluk Todolo*. Untuk mendapatkan gambaran yang jelas atas dua praktik ritual secara simultan, makalah ini menggunakan sejumlah metode yaitu metode strukturalisme, perbandingan, dan wawancara. Metode penelitian strukturalisme membahas secara mendalam atas upacara-upacara tersebut berdasarkan posisinya dalam masyarakat Tana Toraja; metode perbandingan melacak persamaan dan perbedaan dari praktik

ritual berdasarkan fondasi teologis dan praktisnya; sementara metode wawancara dilakukan membentuk argumentasi yang didapat dari sejumlah figur agama dan intelektual Tana Toraja guna melengkapi sumber literatur yang telah dimiliki. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa masyarakat Tana Toraja menggabungkan kedua ritual kematian berdasarkan fondasi Kristen dan Rambu Solo', menjadikannya ritual kematian yang unik dan berbeda. Mempertimbangkan sejumlah nilai keagamaan yang beragam terkandung dalam kedua ritual, diskusi ini juga mengantarkan kepada kemungkinan adanya kepemilikan identitas ganda dalam konteks lokal Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Aluk Todolo, Agama Kristen, Rambu Solo', Tana Toraja, Upacara Kematian

INTRODUCTION

The examination of local religious beliefs such as *Aliran Kepercayaan/ Penghayat/ Kebatinan* in Indonesia is inherently intertwined with the endeavors of indigenous communities to adapt and cultivate strategies for survival, drawing upon their indigenous wisdom and knowledge (Rozi & Taufik, 2020). In recent times, there has been a growing recognition of the academic concerns surrounding the treatment of local religions as cultural heritage, necessitating their protection by the state. Consequently, it is imperative to foster an inclusive environment that promotes the acceptance of diverse belief systems across various societal strata, ranging from grassroots communities to the upper echelons of society. This calls for comprehensive adaptation and reconciliation efforts at multiple levels (Legowo et al., 2019; Sirait et al., 2015). The present discussion necessitates the establishment of a scientifically sustainable framework. In this context, the incorporation of local wisdom values is regarded as not only capable of coexisting but also being interconnected with the prevailing religious system, hence fostering communal unity and concord (Halimatusa'diah, 2018; Juba, 2016; Maulana et al., 2022; Syuhudi & Nensia, 2021). This entails enhancing the perception of community resilience and adaptability at times of acute and severe challenges (Harifuddin & Zainuddin, 2017; Rozi, 2017).

One manifestation of the interplay between significant religions and *Aliran Kepercayaan* is observed in the Tana Toraja community, where the continued adherence to Aluk Todolo is evident through the observance of funeral rituals, specifically the *Rambu Solo'* rite. Tana Toraja, located in the South Sulawesi province, is a region characterized by a predominant adherence to the Christian faith among its population. It is noteworthy that in addition to the Christian faith that has flourished in Tana Toraja, the local community continues to engage in many religious ceremonies imbued with religious connotations (Tangdilintin, 2014). One intriguing aspect pertains to the demographic composition of Tana Toraja, a district situated in the South Sulawesi province. Notably, Tana Toraja exhibits a Christian majority, accounting for 85.4 percent of the population. In contrast, the province is predominantly Islamic, with a total of 7.2 million adherents, while Christianity is embraced by a smaller population of 305 thousand individuals (BPS, 2010; Disdukcapil, 2023).

The Tana Toraja people often engage in two distinct sorts of ceremonies that correspond to various occurrences in their daily lives: birth ceremonies and funeral ceremonies. The indigenous population of Tana Toraja refers to the death ceremony as *Rambu Solo'*. The *Rambu Solo'* ceremonial, a funeral procession observed by the Tana Toraja community, continues to be practised in contemporary times. (Guntara et al., 2016; Naomi et al., 2020; Paranoan, 1994). Based on the cultural beliefs of the Tana Toraja community, the *Rambu Solo'* ceremony holds significant importance and is considered imperative to uphold without any disregard. The rationale behind the Tana Toraja community's belief in conducting death ceremonies stems from their perception that such rituals serve as a culmination of the deceased individual's passing. Consequently, the absence of these ceremonial proceedings would result in the deceased being regarded merely as an ailing individual, with their body being treated in a manner akin to that of a living person, including the provision of sustenance and a resting place. While lying in bed, the individual engaged in conversation as though they were not deceased (Paranoan, 1994).

The socio-religious landscape in Tana Toraja is intriguing, given the prevalence of Christianity among the local population. Therefore, it may be said that the inhabitants of Tana Toraja have embraced and applied Christian doctrines. The teachings, undoubtedly, exert influence on the cognitive processes, emotional states, and behavioral patterns exhibited by the individuals residing in Tana Toraja. (Panggarra, 2015). This study aims to comprehensively examine the Christian Death Ceremony and *Rambu Solo's* rituals as observed within the cultural practises of the Tana Toraja community, with a specific focus on anthropological investigations. Henceforth, the inquiry that shall be addressed pertains to the nature of Christian death rituals observed by the *Rambu Solo'* community in Tana Toraja.

METHOD

This study is within the domain of Anthropology and focuses on the role of religion in shaping society's structure and function. Consequently, it contributes to the advancement of the field of Anthropology of Religion (Gellner, 2002). In this context, the utilization of the structuralism method is deemed the most suitable approach for doing this research. Within the realm of religious studies, the Structuralism approach offers a means of comprehending a comprehensive system by directing attention onto a specific component of said system, encompassing elements such as culture and rituals (Kunin, 2011). The findings derived from this comprehension afterward yield a tangible elucidation of a particular ritual or culture, so facilitating the comparison of religious phenomena and the examination of the dynamics of ritualistic practises and cultural evolution (Gellner, 2002 ; Kunin, 2011). Structuralism has exerted a profound impact on anthropological research by emphasizing the interconnectedness between

architectural structures and the underlying diversity in human perceptions and constructions of reality. In essence, structuralism encompasses the notion of a unified and comprehensive framework that underlies the multifaceted range of human manifestations, encompassing religious systems as well (Blackburn, 2016; Gellner, 2002). The examination of the text commences gradually, focusing on the intricate processes of linguistic and social conversion. This analysis offers a comprehensive and profound explanation of reality (Detweiler, 1978; Helm, 1979). In this study, the research methodology employed is structuralism, which aims to elucidate the correlation between the funeral rites observed by the Tana Toraja community, namely those rooted in the Christian ceremonial systems and *Rambu Solo'*, and their significance in shaping the religious framework of the Tana Toraja people.

Another crucial strategy to employ in this research is the comparison method. Within the context of anthropological investigations into religion, the comparison approach extends beyond an interdisciplinary examination of religious phenomena and includes the discovery and analysis of similarities and differences among these phenomena (Freiberger, 2018; Lessa, 1979). The comparison technique offers the chance to examine a religious phenomenon within multiple social contexts, facilitating a broader understanding of the subject. It also enables the formulation of generalizations regarding religious phenomena in relation to other social conditions (Munson, 1999). This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of Christian death rituals and *Rambu Solo'* in order to identify commonalities and disparities between these two ceremonial practises while also highlighting their significance within the religious framework of Tana Toraja society.

In addition to the aforementioned methodologies, this study also incorporates the utilization of the interview method. In order to get more precise empirical data on Christian death rites and *Rambu Solo'*, a series of interviews were undertaken with several recognized experts in their respective professions. In this particular instance, the study will use an '*Expert Interview*' methodology, wherein the sources engaged are prominent figures within the respective field (Bromberg, 2011). This study will employ a *semi-structured* interview format, wherein predetermined themes will be discussed, followed by the inclusion of additional questions and subjects during the interview process (Bromberg, 2011). This study aims to examine the historical context and implementation of Christian death rituals and *Rambu Solo'* in order to enhance the existing literature data. The objective is to ensure a comprehensive and well-rounded analysis using many reference materials, optimizing the research outcomes.

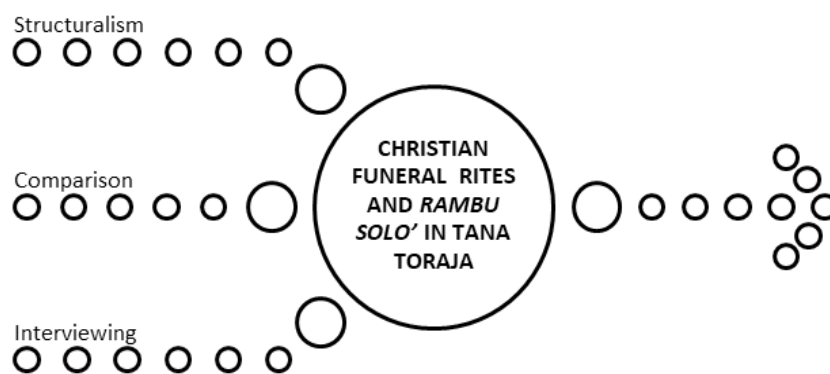


Figure 1. Methodical Chart of Christian Death Ceremonies and Signs of Solo'

The above Figure (Figure 1) describes the methodological flow of narrating this article. These methods -Structuralism, Comparison, and Interviewing- will be employed simultaneously while observing data, reviewing the literature, and conducting analysis concerning the research question.

DISCUSSION

Geographical Description of Tana Toraja

The term '*Toraja*' may be traced back to its etymology, originating from the phrase '*To-ri-aja*', which refers to those belonging to the indigenous tribes residing in the mountainous hinterlands. These individuals are commonly referred to as '*Tau*' by the neighboring communities. The term '*Toraja*' was derived from the word '*Tau*', giving rise to its semantic composition. This perspective aligns with another notion positing that Toraja can be traced back to its derivation from '*To-ri-aja*'. The term '*To*' or '*Tau*' denotes an individual, but '*Raya*' is derived from the term '*Maraya*', which signifies 'large' or 'distinguished'. In brief, the term '*Tana Toraja*' refers to a geographical region known as '*Tana*', which translates to "land," and is inhabited by individuals of noble or aristocratic status (Nooy-Palm, 1979).

Tana Toraja, often known as '*Tator*', is a geographical region located in Sulawesi Island's southwestern, central, and southern areas. Throughout its developmental stages, numerous scholars have defined the term '*Toraja*' as referring to individuals who inhabit elevated regions or highlands, distinguishing them from coastal populations residing in lowland areas. These Toraja communities exhibit distinct linguistic and cultural traits across the Western, Eastern, and Southern regions (de Jong, 2013). The reference to the Tana Toraja community residing in the highlands can be attributed to the geographical positioning of the South Sulawesi province, where the Tana Toraja people inhabit. This region is characterized by its elevated terrain and hilly landscape, encompassing two prominent rivers: the Sa'dan and the Mamasa rivers. The two water centers also serve as the foundation for designating regional appellations for the community, known as '*Sa'dan Toraja*' and '*Mamasa Toraja*' (Nooy-Palm, 1979). It is worth

noting that the term “Toraja” carries a religious connotation, as it was used by Dutch missionaries and officials to encompass all non-Muslim religious communities. Subsequently, this appellation was preserved as a designation employed to delineate the region’s inhabitants (Aritonang & Steenbrink, 2008).

The region of Tana Toraja is renowned for its steadfast adherence to local customs and culture, particularly during the era of missionary deployment in the 19th century. Based on the observations made by Nooy-Palm (1978), it may be inferred that the Tana Toraja population represents an ethnic community that has undergone a developmental process influenced to some extent by the historical impact of Dutch colonization (Nooy-Palm, 1979). The dispersion of the Tana Toraja community was characterized by demographic movement along the Sa’dan and Mamasa rivers. This population comprises a collective governed by a leader who presently retains the esteemed designation of aristocrats and customary authorities in the northern and southern regions of Tana Toraja (Tangdilintin, 2014).

Tana Toraja Community Structure and Beliefs

The majority of the population of Tana Toraja continues to practise their traditional ancestral beliefs. The traditional religion of Aluk Todolo is characterized by its adherence to ancestral beliefs (Budiman, 2013; Nirwana, 2018; Nooy-Palm, 1979). According to the indigenous inhabitants of Tana Toraja, the religious beliefs and practises prevalent in their community were introduced by *Puang Matua*, also known as the ‘Almighty God’ or the divine entity responsible for the creation of their earliest ancestors. The initial progenitor was known as ‘*Datu La Ukku*’, who transmitted the tenets of this religious belief system to subsequent generations, including his offspring and descendants. Consequently, it is incumbent upon individuals to engage in acts of worship, reverence, and adoration towards *Puang Matua*, which manifests itself through the observance of rites and the presentation of offerings, including ceremonial practises (Rahayu, 2017). Several theories suggest that the preservation of Aluk Todolo’s beliefs and cultural values has resulted in their official acceptance and classification within Hinduism. Despite the brevity of this acknowledgment, the Tana Toraja community persists in upholding their distinct ethnic customs and religious observances (Bulu’, 2016; Hartanto, 2012; Ismail, 2019; Venihariaty & Panggarra, 2021).

The belief system of Tana Toraja encompasses religious teachings and ideals that guide individuals towards acknowledging God Almighty as the Creator of the heavens, the world, and all its contents. This belief system is characterized by a fusion of legal principles, religious practises, and cultural traditions that serve as governing principles for the people of Tana Toraja. Aluk has a crucial role in the regulation of several aspects of societal functioning, encompassing social interactions, agricultural practises, and religious observances. The inhabitants

of Tana Toraja exhibit a profound preoccupation with death rituals, mainly influenced by the beliefs of Aluk Todolo. These ceremonies hold significant cultural and societal value, and are regarded as indispensable, warranting utmost commitment and adherence (de Jong, 2013).

Death rituals are commonly paired with birth ceremonies as well. These practises are commonly referred to as the “Eastern Ritual” and the “Western Ritual.” Eastern rituals encompass practises that are oriented towards the direction of the rising sun. This orientation is seen as a symbolic representation of significant life events, such as birth, well-being, prosperity, and even ceremonial occasions like weddings. Additionally, these rituals are closely associated with the construction and maintenance of traditional *Tongkonan* houses, emphasizing their cultural importance. In contrast, Western Rituals encompass ceremonial practises that draw inspiration from the geographical positioning of the sunset, symbolizing themes of mortality and deterioration. The Tana Toraja people place significant emphasis on death rites, considering them to be the primary objective of human existence. Consequently, death rituals hold a crucial position within the belief system of the Tana Toraja community (de Jong, 2013). In the form of diagram, *Tana Toraja’s* structure of belief may be displayed as below:

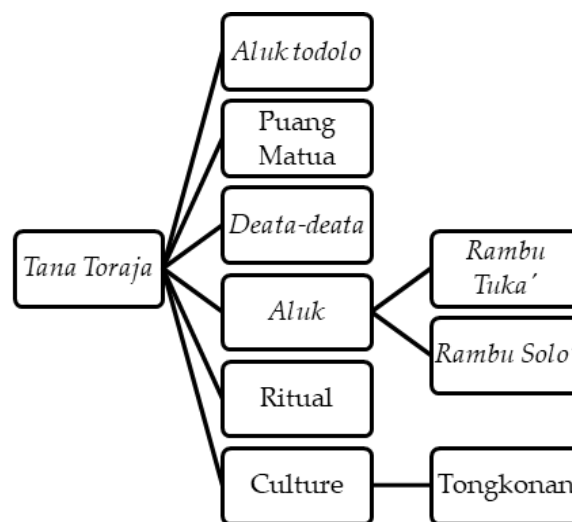


Figure 2. Chart of the belief structure of the Tana Toraja Community

In the Figure 2, it is apparent that *Tana Toraja’s* belief system consists several elements including *Aluk Todolo* as its spiritual or religious tradition. *Aluk Todolo*, as an indigenous religious worldview, emphasizes the existence of *Puang Matua*, the Almighty Being and the Sole Creator of this universe. In order to maintain His creation, *Puang Matua* assigns *Deata-Deata*, means ‘Dewa-Dewa’ or Gods. *Aluk*, which literally means ‘Ways’ particularly describing rituals such as *Rambu Tuka’* and *Rambu Solo’*. Last, *Tongkongon* refers to the customary hereditary dwelling, rumah adat, of the Torajan community in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The structure features a unique boat-shaped roof, notably large and saddleback in design.

Rambu Solo' Ceremony in Tana Toraja

The primary objective of the *Rambu Solo'* ceremony in Tana Toraja is to function as a concluding homage, facilitating the transition of the departed individual's spirit into the realm of spirits, enabling them to attain eternal existence with their forebears (Ismail, 2019). The aforementioned ritual entails a celebratory gathering wherein a selection of livestock, including buffalo and pigs (known as *Ma'tinggoro Tedong*), are ritually sacrificed and presented to the mourning family. The implementation of *Rambu Solo'* is structured according to many levels of classification, which are determined depending on the social status and position of the community:

1. *Dasilli'* is the initial stage within the *Rambu Solo'* ritual, primarily designated for individuals belonging to the lower social strata and infants who have not yet developed teeth. This stage necessitates the ritualistic sacrifice of a female pig.
2. *Dipasangbongi* is conducted for the broader community, specifically for *Tana' Karurung*. The ceremonial event is conducted exclusively over the course of one evening, during which a minimum of two buffalo are sacrificed.
3. *Dibatang* or *Digoya Tedong* is conducted by the middle-class nobility or *Tana' Bassi*. This ceremonial event involves the sacrificial slaughter of eight buffalo and fifty pigs.
4. *Rampasan* is *Rambu Solo'* which is carried out for high-ranking nobles or *Tana' Bulaan* at the most considerable expense and is borne by all noble family members. This ceremony sacrifices at least 9 buffaloes and as many pigs as possible for the *Rampasan Diangon*, 24 buffaloes and as many pigs as possible for the *Rampasan Sundun or Doan*, and hundreds of buffaloes for the *Rampasan Sapu Randaan* (Rizal et al., 2023; Sakti & Saleh, 2022).

Rambu Solo' is driven by the concept that a significant quantity of animals being sacrificed will result in a substantial provision being transported to the afterlife, known as '*Puya*', and conversely, a lack of animal sacrifices will lead to a scarcity of provisions in the afterlife. It is noteworthy that the buffalo being slaughtered can encompass not only ordinary buffalo but also high-quality buffalo of the '*Tedong Bonga*' breed, which can command a price as high as 700 million rupiah per individual (Ismail, 2019). The inhabitants of Tana Toraja continue to bear these substantial expenses due to their conviction that the spirit of the deceased, who fails to undergo the *Rambu Solo'* ritual, will be unable to access the *Puya* thereby subjecting the departed soul to anguish. To clarify, *Rambu Solo'* serves as the gateway to the idealised passage into the hereafter according to the religious beliefs of the Tana Toraja community. This analysis examines the relationship between the ritual practise of *Rambu Solo'* and the establishment of a social hierarchy within Tana Toraja society. It posits that the degree of animal killing during the ceremony directly correlates with the community's perceived

level of dignity. The higher the level of opulence and vibrancy exhibited at the party, the greater the prestige bestowed on the family of the deceased (Rizal et al., 2023; Sakti & Saleh, 2022).

The soul of an individual who has successfully performed the death rituals and has reached the realm of *Puya* is believed to be deserving of reverence and treated with the same respect as one's ancestors. It is also believed that if only one step remains, the spirit will ascend alongside the ancestors (Adams, 1993). Similar to the deities, the ethereal essence of the departed individual would be bestowed with diverse ceremonial tributes by their progeny, aiming to elicit safeguarding and affluence for the latter in reciprocation.

History of the Christianization of Tana Toraja

The introduction of Catholicism and Christianity to the archipelago occurred during the years 1511 and 1799, facilitated by the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch colonial powers. According to Aritonang (2004), the primary objective of these nations was to engage in commerce by identifying regions with plentiful spice production and generating substantial financial gains. In addition, the Portuguese were designated emissaries by the Pope, who holds the highest position within the Roman Catholic Church, to uphold the Church and disseminate the gospel to all individuals within society (Aritonang, 2004). In essence, their arrival encompassed three primary objectives, specifically trade, territorial expansion, and the propagation of the Christian faith. This mission is commonly referred to as the '*Gold, Glory, and Gospel* mission (Bodmer, 1992; Russell, 2004; Wright & Wright, 1970). The aforementioned mission serves as a tangible representation of the Church's influential role in the mission movement within Indonesia, with the aim of constructing a societal framework rooted in the principles of Catholicism and Christianity.

Nevertheless, the emergence of Christianity in Tana Toraja was limited to the 19th century. According to historical records, a total of six missionaries were present in the region of Tana Toraja during the period spanning from 1913 to 1940. These individuals had a significant role in introducing and propagating the Christian faith within the community (Aritonang & Steenbrink, 2008). The efficacy of Christian missionaries in Indonesia was characterised by a significant receptiveness among the populace towards Christian doctrines, resulting in the widespread adoption of these teachings by the inhabitants of Tana Toraja. The notable pace of advancement has led to significant growth and widespread dissemination of Christianity in Sulawesi despite the continued adherence of a portion of the people to ancestral doctrines (Aritonang & Steenbrink, 2008). Within the context of Tana Toraja, a phenomenon of dual religious affiliation exists, which carries significant ramifications for the religious rituals and observances of the local populace (Cornille, 2010, 2013; Maulana et al., 2021; Phan, 2003).

The Christian community in Tana Toraja is believed to have had a significant role in shaping the opposition towards the proposal to establish Islam as the fundamental basis of the state in the Jakarta Charter (*Piagam Jakarta*) (Ariesman & Iskandar, 2020; Ilyas, 2020; Syarif, 2016). Tana Toraja, as well as several other locations, including Minahasa, Sangir Talaud, Poso, Tapanuli, Sumba, Timor, Maluku, and West Papua, are raising concerns regarding the ability of Islamic authorities to adequately address the religious needs of non-Muslim groups. The representatives of these regions may encounter a situation where the concept and implementation of Islamic law might lead to the emergence of conflicting standards that contradict the principle of equal legal standing (Aritonang, 2004 ; Aritonang & Steenbrink, 2008).

Christian Death Ceremony

Christianity, akin to other religious traditions, encompasses various components that possess distinct significances and objectives, manifesting through tangible manifestations such as rituals, communal practises, and architectural structures (Nuriz et al., 2023; Untung et al., 2023). The primary objective of the Christian death ritual is to engage in the act of adoration towards God. In addition, Christianity perceives death rites as a transformative process from one existence to another (Bregman, 2011 ; Klink, 2012). Irrespective of the myriad of different practises observed within society, there is a consensus among specialists that the fundamental nature of the Christian death liturgy lies in its function as a devotional act of obedience to God (Bregman, 2011).

Within the cultural framework, adherents of Christianity acknowledge the presence of a phenomenon known as inculturation, which involves the adaptation and integration of the Christian religion into many cultural expressions. This implies that a significant number of Christians reinterpret doctrines that are not inherently connected to a pristine Christian belief system, hence influencing the development of novel sects or perspectives within Christian communities. The ceremony is perceived as incorporating the cultural and customary practises of the surrounding region while still retaining the fundamental substance and significance of the Christian liturgy. The act of honouring individuals who have passed away and reflecting on the rituals associated with death can be perceived as a type of sacrifice, akin to the sacrificial nature of Jesus' atonement for the transgressions of humanity (Michel, 2000). Similarly, the resurrection of Jesus subsequent to his crucifixion serves as a theological foundation for the universal resurrection of humanity, so symbolising the concept of ultimate eschatological within the Christian faith (D. Kaluring, personal communication, 14 April 2021).

According to Ruthford (1980), the Christian death ritual has experienced notable transformations from its initial inception. During the early Christian eras, individuals from Mediterranean regions assimilated Greco-Roman customs and then integrated them with their own ancient rituals. Developing a novel

method for conducting death ceremonies. The practice of cremation, sometimes known as the burning of bodies, has been documented as early as the inception of Christianity. Subsequently, it is customary for the deceased's spouse, relative, or closest male companion to transport the body to the designated cremation site. (Rutherford, 1980).

The primary impact that surfaced throughout the 9th century was rooted in the principles and teachings of Judaism. Within the historical context of the Children of Israel, the act of burying one's deceased relatives was regarded as a fundamental commitment that served as a tangible manifestation of love and affection. The theological framework of Judaism pertaining to death demonstrates an acknowledgment of genuine justice and devotion to God, drawing upon the structure of Biblical prayers that were afterwards elaborated upon within the Christian tradition (Mass, 1989; Rutherford, 1980). According to Keene (2006), contemporary Catholics, Orthodox, and Christians have varying preferences in death rites, reflecting the culmination of centuries of evolution. In spite of the variations in implementation, death rituals within the Christian tradition encompass a minimum of two elements: the anticipation of a reunion with Jesus or the apprehension of retribution for transgressions (Keene, 2006 ; Rutherford, 1980).

The following diagram (Figure 3) displays the Christian Death Ceremony Concept Structure; Accordingly, death, in Christian Theology, confirms a number of religious values, such as the departure of the human soul, which is going to be resurrected later on the Judgement Day. Christians believe that Jesus will redempt their sins as long as they are committed to Christianity, as it is a primary requirement for humankind to meet with God the Father.

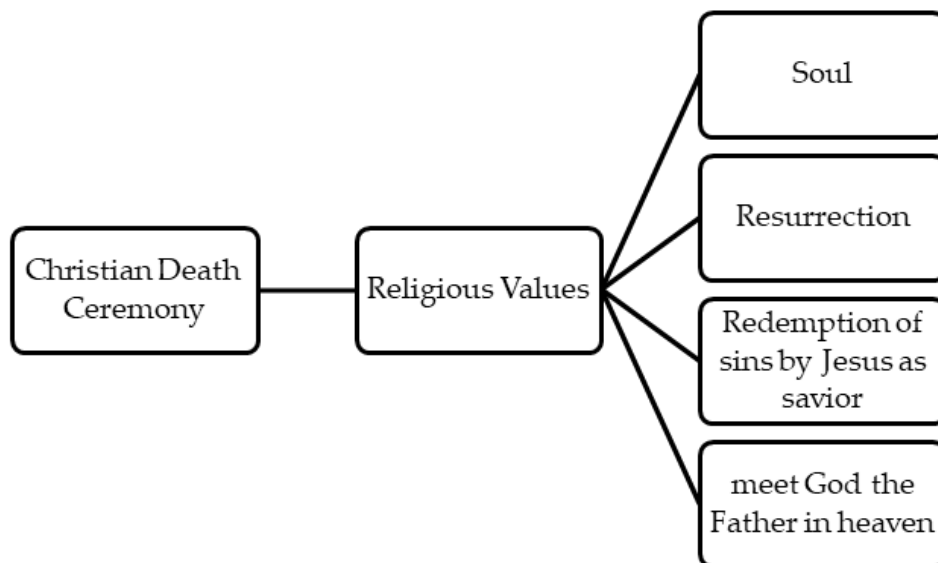


Figure 3. Christian Death Ceremony Concept Structure Chart

Tana Toraja People's Perception of the *Rambu Solo'* and Christian Death Rituals

Rambu Solo', conversely, represents a mortuary ritual that holds significant cultural and religious significance within the Tana Toraja community. The concept of *Rambu Solo'* can be understood as the ontological embodiment of the ancestral beliefs held by the Tana Toraja community. It is commonly expressed that a favorable existence for the Toraja people is intricately linked to a dignified and meaningful passage into the hereafter. The life of a Toraja individual is perceived through the lens of their death, which is commemorated by the performance of a funeral ritual. If this measure is not adopted, it will have catastrophic consequences not only for the individual who perishes but also for their family and the broader community. The objective of the ceremony is to facilitate the transition of deceased individuals' souls to *Puya*, alongside the ancestral spirits, within the eternal realm (A. S. Tanggulungan, personal communication, 12 February 2021). In addition to its theological implications, the implementation of various social components in *Rambu Solo'* engenders a sense of familial survival, altruistic affection, and personal liberty among individuals. *Rambu Solo'*, a cultural practice, serves as a means to cultivate family solidarity by means of traditional funeral ceremonies that are conducted without the necessity of formally inviting relatives (der Lottbek, 2008).

The individuals residing in Tana Toraja who have formally adopted Christianity continue to observe this ritual due to its inseparable connection to their daily existence. This cultural heritage holds significant significance as it is seen by its community as a divine gift, including their identity, beliefs, and profound symbolic worth. The argument presented asserts that there is no inherent contradiction between the aforementioned viewpoint and Christian doctrines (A. S. Tanggulungan, personal communication, 12 February 2021). The Tana Toraja community persists in conducting funeral ceremonial processions as a means to uphold and preserve the societal structure of the Tana Toraja people, mainly through the observance of the *Rambu Solo's* death ritual (de Jong, 2013).

Similarly, it can be said that the inhabitants of Tana Toraja have profound connections to their ancestral convictions, particularly those that are manifested during the *Rambu Solo's* funeral ritual. The foundation of this belief system is rooted in a profound faith in the deity *Puang Matua*, who is believed to have created the *Aluk*. This belief system ensures that any other belief system that individuals encounter does not hinder their ability to uphold and practice the teachings of the *Aluk*. These teachings find their most prominent expression in the *Rambu Solo's* death ceremony. The act of slaughtering or butchering buffalo and pigs is widely regarded as a symbolic representation of a means of transition or passage to the afterlife. Livestock, such as buffalo, hold significant social importance as provisions within the context of *Rambu Solo's* death ceremonies. This is exemplified by the distribution of buffalo meat to the local community,

who participate in these solemn rituals. The blood shed during the slaughter of a buffalo serves as a symbolic means of expiation for the transgressions and errors committed by the deceased individual (Rombe, 2021).

The religiosity of the Tana Toraja people is reinforced by the implementation of the *Rambu Solo'* practice, which is further bolstered by the presence of 'Tongkonan' structures. The Tongkonan is a traditional dwelling of the Tana Toraja people, primarily used as a Rambu Solo ritual venue (Panggarra, 2014). The implementation of the Tongkonan reinforces the religiosity of the Tana Toraja people and serves as a theological symbol for the veneration of *Puang Matua* from various angles. Geographically, it is constructed in a manner that aligns with a north-south longitude and east-west latitude, emphasizing its central role. The Tongkonan structure was constructed with its primary orientation towards the north, while the main entrance and kitchen are positioned to face the east. Based on the cultural beliefs of the Tana Toraja community, it is posited that the northern cardinal point serves as the abode of *Puang Matua*, whilst the eastern direction is regarded as the dwelling place of the deities responsible for the well-being and protection of the Tana Toraja populace (Nursalam, 2019).

The construction of Tongkonan also serves as a cosmological representation within the cultural context of the Tana Toraja people. This is evident in the three-tiered structure of the Tongkonan, consisting of the top, middle, and bottom layers. The three layers mentioned represent the conceptual domains commonly referred to as the 'Upper World', 'Middle World', and 'Under World' (Nursalam, 2019). The 'Upper World' concept symbolizes the eastern cardinal direction where the celestial realm known as the 'Head of Heaven' or *Ulunna Langi* is believed to exist and is believed to be the dwelling place of *Puang Matua*. The term "Middle World" refers to the earth, inhabited by human beings and considered a suitable realm for religious devotion and worship towards a higher power. The Middle World can be understood as a dimensional space that serves as a meeting point between the Upper World and the Under World, facilitating the establishment of social and peaceful relationships. The 'Under World' concept symbolizes the dwelling place of animals, hellish realms, and moral corruption (Stephany, 2009 ; Zubaidi, 2010). The religious, spiritual, and theological significance of Tongkonan is prominently evident within the framework of the *Rambu Solo'* practice, wherein the ceremonial proceedings are exclusively conducted within the confines of the Tongkonan complex.

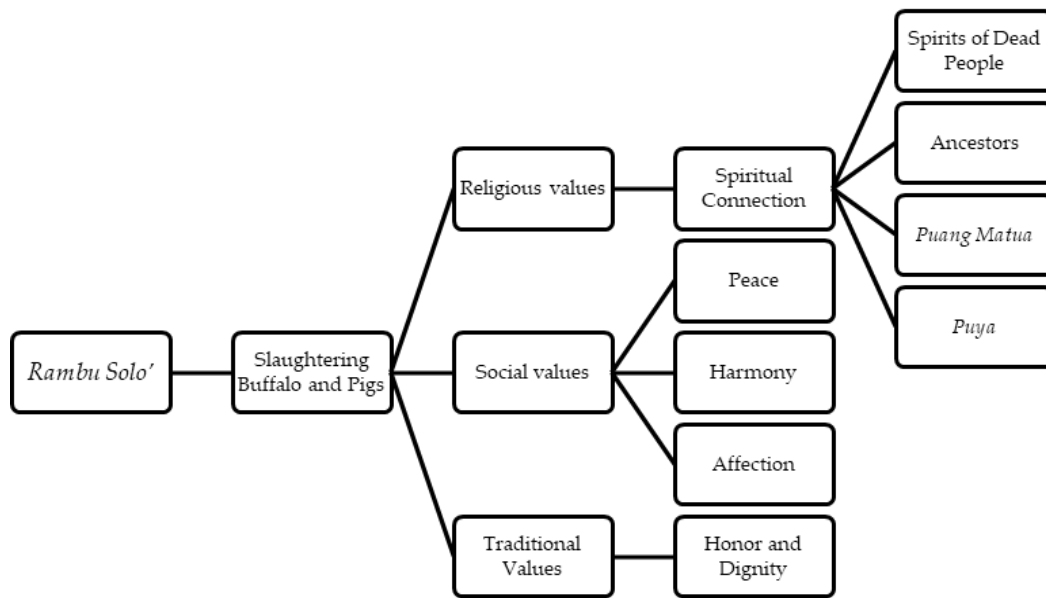


Figure 4. Rambu Solo Death Ceremony Concept Structure Chart

As explained in previous paragraphs, the last diagram (Figure 4) depicts values embedded within *Rambu Solo'* rituals. Through sacrificing cattles, the *Tana Toraja* community affirms their religious values, ensuring proper spiritual connection between the deceased and the realm of death, which consequently delivers their spirit to the Ancestors, *Puang Matua*, in the *Puya*. In terms of social values, *Rambu Solo'* strengthens feelings of peace, harmony, and affection between families and the surrounding society. Traditional values also emphasize the honor and dignity of the families based on the practice of *Rambu Solo'*.

Analysis of the Concept of Christian Death Ceremonies and *Rambu Solo'* in Tana Toraja

Based on the findings of this presentation, it may be posited that the diverse origins of missionaries have contributed to the enduring commitment of the people of Tana Toraja towards their religious beliefs and rituals, particularly in relation to ancestral death ceremonies. The divergent teachings prompted them to see that the doctrines they propagated lacked a definitive framework or foundational principles, owing to the divergent viewpoints of these evangelists (Aritonang & Steenbrink, 2008). The religious relationships between the Tana Toraja people, who strongly adhere to the teachings of Aluk Todolo and the missionaries from other affiliations (Catholic and Christian) were evidently influenced by their divergent viewpoints. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that Christian missionary efforts have significantly influenced the religious landscape of Tana Toraja. As a result, the region now overwhelmingly practices

the Christian faith despite being situated in the province of South Sulawesi, which is primarily inhabited by a Muslim population. (Bigalke, 2005).

The Christian perspective on the *Rambu Solo'* ritual can be understood as a cultural heritage that signifies the commemoration of the afterlife. This ceremony entails a procession that recounts the deceased individual's lived experiences, aligning with Christian principles and beliefs (D. Padadi, personal communication, 14 April 2021). Moreover, it is imperative to acknowledge that Christian funeral rites are intricately intertwined with the ritualistic practices observed within certain cultural and regional contexts. This implies that the Church's policy is to uphold and honor the customs and beliefs of the Tana Toraja people, such as the continued observance of death ceremonies. The Christian death ritual in Tana Toraja has been modified to align with the traditional beliefs and customs of the local Tana Toraja community. In essence, it is evident that the Toraja culture undergoes a process of acculturation with Christian ideas, notwithstanding the fundamental disparities between these two practices (Bregman, 2011; Klink, 2012).

Within these many activities, one can observe the presence of phrases pertaining to the principles and protocols governing Christian death ceremonies and *Rambu Solo'*. It becomes evident that both practices share a fundamental similarity in their execution, as they both serve as a means of paying homage to the deceased individual. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that the commemoration of death and the various rituals associated with it can be understood as acts of sacrifice akin to the sacrificial offering made by Jesus Christ as a means of salvation and redemption for the errors and transgressions of humanity. In order to facilitate the *Puya* ritual, the utilization of buffalo and pig offerings as mediators is anticipated. (Ismail, 2019; Rizal et al., 2023; Sakti & Saleh, 2022). In accordance with Christian doctrine, it is believed that those who have passed on will experience a restoration to ultimate salvation, specifically through their connection to Jesus Christ. This rationale underscores the notion that the significance of believers' lives and deaths lies not in the present world but rather in the future, specifically the end day, which is anticipated with unwavering hope. This hope is centered on the prospective culmination of time, specifically the occurrence of the apocalypse. The doomsday event refers to the anticipated moment when individuals, encompassing both those residing in heaven and those remaining on earth, will be brought together and unified in the presence of Christ. Hence, the existence of the deceased is oriented towards the eventual occurrence of the Day of Judgment (D. Kaluring, personal communication, 14 April 2021; Keene, 2006; Rutherford, 1980).

The Tana Toraja Christian group has the belief that the killed buffalo and pigs serve as redeemers and will accompany them in their journey in the hereafter. During the celebration, the blood of buffalo and pigs is ritually sacrificed, serving as a symbolic representation of the blood of Jesus, which is believed to provide

atonement for human transgressions and act as a savior in the realm beyond earthly existence. Nevertheless, according to the beliefs held by individuals who follow ancestral teachings, this phenomenon serves as a means for deceased individuals to attain eternal life in the *Puya*. (Ismail, 2019; Rizal et al., 2023; Sakti & Saleh, 2022).

Nevertheless, within the context of this ritualistic observance, a theological irregularity arises, wherein it is postulated that the soul or spirit of the sacrificial creature is thought to accompany the departed individual's voyage and trail their spirit to *Puya*, thereby leading an existence akin to that experienced in the mortal realm. The lord of the *Puya* will inquire about the location of the deceased individual. The inquiry pertains to the adequacy of the execution of the death ceremony. In the event that the implementation adheres to the prescribed standards and achieves a state of flawlessness, it shall be deemed permissible. Conversely, any failure to conform to the established protocols and regulations governing the ceremony shall result in the denial of the presence of the deceased individual's spirit within the *Puya*. This perspective diverges from the Christian belief that a deceased servant of God will receive the safeguarding of Jesus and experience bodily resurrection during the Day of Judgment.

CONCLUSION

The death ritual holds significant importance within various religious traditions, such as Christianity and the ancestral belief system of the Tana Toraja Aluk Todolo community, specifically known as the *Rambu Solo'* death rite. The individuals residing in Tana Toraja, who are recognized as followers of Christianity, engage in the *Rambu Solo's* death ritual, which, it should be noted, lacks a Christian theological foundation. The persistence of funeral ceremonies in Tana Toraja can be attributed to the deeply ingrained traditional beliefs maintained by its inhabitants, which compel them to adhere to the ancestral teachings. The forebears of the individual in question. In addition to this, the process of Christianization, which sprang from multiple sources, including Catholic-Christian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch influences, exerted a significant impact on the fundamental tenets of Christian teachings, which stood in stark contrast to those of Aluk Todolo.

Despite the inherent contradiction between the original beliefs and practices of the Tana Toraja people and the teachings of Christianity, adherents of Christianity in Tana Toraja have managed to establish a connection between the two by incorporating elements of the traditional ceremonies, particularly the *Rambu Solo'*, into their religious practices. This allows individuals who identify as Christians to engage in the implementation of *Rambu Solo'* while still maintaining their official adherence to Christianity. The two ceremonies, *Rambu Solo's* death ceremony, and the Christian religious ceremony exhibit distinct concepts when analyzed in terms of their form and structure. However, the continued practice

of the *Rambu Solo'* death ceremony can be attributed to the religious values embedded within it, despite the majority of the population having officially adopted Christianity. This particular number holds the suggestion that the soul of the deceased will be reunited with God the Father and reside in heaven. The oddity in question pertains to the idea held by Aluk Todolo, which posits that individuals who pass away would be directed to a realm devoid of the presence or notion of Jesus. This remark presents a significant challenge in terms of its discussion and further investigation.

The *Rambu Solo'* ceremony, which is progressively being conducted by the inhabitants of Tana Toraja, encompasses several cultural and societal aspects. Based on the aforementioned explanations, it can be inferred that the inhabitants of Tana Toraja maintain their Christian faith and continue to practice this ceremony due to the presence of numerous values, including religious ones, that have implications for the spiritual connection with their ancestors, known as *Puang Matua*, ultimately leading to their attainment of the highest position within that realm. The Tana Toraja people possess a set of social values centered around mutual assistance, fostering harmony, and cultivating affectionate relationships among individuals. These values are deeply rooted in their ancient cultural practices, shaping their way of life. From an economic perspective, it is evident that a social hierarchy exists, characterized by distinct social strata. Within this framework, the Tana Toraja population exhibits a correlation between their elevated social status and the increased number of animal sacrifices performed during the *Rambu Solo'* rite.

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