

Living with the Dead: The Rites and Rituals of Toraja in Indonesia

Hidup Bersama Orang Mati: Ritual dan Upacara Adat Suku Toraja di Indonesia

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Abstract

The paper highlights the interaction and association between the living and the dead in the Toraja people of Indonesia. Death rituals and peculiar funeral practices are prevalent on Sulawesi Island in this country. There are two such rituals named Ma'nene and Rambu Solo, which emphasize the role of the deceased in family and community life. In these customs, dead people are not buried right away, but they are kept in their houses. The idea highlights their beliefs regarding life, death, and memory. The paper examines the importance of the Toraja people's perspective on death and how it reinforces family and cultural identity. It also provides an insightful view of how death rituals contribute to community connection across cultures. This research integrates anthropological, sociological, and philosophical perspectives to explore the unique funeral traditions of the Toraja people. It seeks to reveal both the inherent meanings and practical implications of these rituals, providing deeper insights into fundamental aspects of life, death, and their significance within human societies. These traditional practices reflect profound spiritual and cultural ties to the land and ancestors, providing insight into the unique way of life of the Toraja people. In this regard, the paper also explores implications for future research and practice.

Abstrak

Makalah ini menyoroti interaksi dan hubungan antara yang hidup dan yang mati pada masyarakat Toraja di Indonesia. Ritual kematian dan praktik pemakaman yang unik lazim di Pulau Sulawesi di negara ini. Ada dua ritual seperti itu yang disebut Ma'nene dan Rambu Solo, yang menekankan peran orang yang meninggal dalam kehidupan keluarga dan masyarakat. Dalam adat istiadat ini, orang yang meninggal tidak langsung dikuburkan, tetapi disimpan di rumah mereka. Gagasan ini menyoroti kepercayaan mereka tentang kehidupan, kematian, dan ingatan. Makalah ini meneliti pentingnya perspektif masyarakat Toraja tentang kematian dan bagaimana hal itu memperkuat identitas keluarga dan budaya. Makalah ini juga memberikan pandangan mendalam tentang bagaimana ritual kematian berkontribusi pada hubungan masyarakat lintas budaya. Penelitian ini memadukan perspektif antropologis, sosiologis, dan filosofis untuk mengeksplorasi tradisi pemakaman yang unik dari masyarakat Toraja. Penelitian ini berupaya mengungkap makna yang melekat dan implikasi praktis dari ritual-ritual ini, memberikan wawasan

yang lebih dalam tentang aspek-aspek mendasar dari kehidupan, kematian, dan signifikansinya dalam masyarakat manusia. Praktik-praktik tradisional ini mencerminkan ikatan spiritual dan budaya yang mendalam dengan tanah dan leluhur, memberikan wawasan tentang cara hidup masyarakat Toraja yang unik. Dalam hal ini, makalah ini juga mengeksplorasi implikasi untuk penelitian dan praktik masa depan.

INTRODUCTION

Death is an inevitable part of human life. Even though there are many who prefer to avoid it, actually we don't want to die. Human survival instincts drive us to cling to life despite the certainty of death from a young age. Family relationships further enrich these bonds, resulting in strong bonds that make it difficult to imagine life without loved ones. After someone passes away, their family and community are often left to handle the emotional impact through different rituals and ceremonies. The rituals performed during death are meant to express mourning and respect for cultural beliefs. This brings families and communities together to grieve and remember.

Edward Tylor, one of Europe's most prominent anthropologists, has categorized culture as a multifaceted concept that encompasses knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any additional abilities and habits that human beings acquire as part of society (Rao, 1990). Each society has its own culture, customs, practices, rites, and rituals related to death. Religious beliefs are the basis for most practices, which allow for a sense of connection to the afterlife and a way to express one's faith. Rituals can strengthen beliefs and unify the physical and spiritual realms. In many religions, funeral rites and rituals are seen as essential for aiding the deceased in their transition to the next life. These practices transform death into a profound social and cultural event, not just a personal experience.

Sociological studies on death have largely drawn their insights from anthropologists who conducted in-depth observations of death rituals and theorized their broader significance in maintaining the

continuity of society. From a structural-functional perspective, Radcliffe-Brown emphasized that death rituals serve as "collective expressions of feeling appropriate to the situation" (Cohen n.d.: 10). These rituals foster a shared emotional connection, reinforcing individuals' commitment both to the community and to each other. Their primary function is to uphold and affirm "the social bond" (Radcliffe-Brown 1968: 168).

India has a variety of religious practices, with particular attention given to how people honor and lay to rest the dead. Ancient Egyptians believed that the dead would continue to live in an afterlife. Their funeral customs were shaped by this belief, which led to rituals and texts that served as a link between the worlds of the living and the dead. For example, the Parsis practice distinct rituals for their dead people. They keep dead bodies in the open air at the tower of silence and invite vultures to eat them. It is a symbolic way to return to nature. They don't bury and fire the dead bodies because fire and earth are the purest things in their culture. More than 1,000 years ago, they came from Persia, which today is now known as Iran.

Muslims bury their dead with the body positioned to face Mecca, Islam's holiest city, while Christians also practice burial, often marking the grave with a cross. Jewish funerals often begin with a service at the synagogue before moving to the cemetery. Here, accompanying the deceased to their final resting place is considered a sacred act. Hinduism, on the other hand, has a distinctive approach. Hindus believe that the body is made of five fundamental elements, called "panchamahabhutas"- earth, water, fire, air, and space. The cremation process, therefore, is seen as a way to return the body to these

elements, while the soul is believed to continue on, reincarnating based on past actions or karma.

Each of these practices reflects deeply rooted cultural and religious beliefs, showing how humanity tries to make sense of death and the afterlife. Around the world, funeral rites reflect an understanding of death not just as an end but as a transition, often one to a new existence or spiritual state. Among these diverse traditions, the rituals of the Toraja people in Indonesia stand out for their distinctive approach. The Toraja are an Indigenous community living in the Tana Toraja region in the southern part of Sulawesi, Indonesia. Known for their spectacular landscapes and cultural richness, this area is popular with tourists who come to experience the local customs and the lush natural beauty. The Toraja have a unique death ritual known as “Rambu Solo,” a ceremony that encapsulates their belief in communal unity and continuity with the dead. In Torajan culture, death is not viewed as a sudden break but as a gradual transition, with families often keeping the deceased close for years before their final burial (Hoppenbrouwers et al., 2017). Rambu Solo ceremonies are often elaborate, sometimes taking years to plan and carry out. They symbolize the importance of family bonds and the community’s collective responsibility toward the deceased. This process, though costly and time-consuming, brings the community together, honoring the life of the deceased and reinforcing the cultural ties that bind the Toraja people. For the Toraja, maintaining a connection to their loved ones after death is a cherished tradition, signifying both respect and love.

Through their rituals, the Toraja people reveal a profound relationship with the concept of death, one that differs from but is no less meaningful than those found in other parts of the world. Their customs provide insight into how cultures develop unique ways to honor life and death, reminding us of the diverse ways people find meaning in the universal experience of loss. There is a noticeable gap between theoretical

perspectives on death rituals and empirical research on their evolving significance in contemporary societies. While structural-functionalists like Radcliffe-Brown emphasize the role of death rituals in maintaining social cohesion, empirical studies often reveal variations in how these rituals adapt to modern influences, such as globalization, urbanization, and changing religious practices. Despite extensive anthropological and sociological studies on death rituals across cultures, there remains a gap in understanding how these diverse practices influence social cohesion, identity formation, and intergenerational continuity in modern societies. Additionally, comparative studies on lesser-known traditions, such as those of the Toraja people, in relation to mainstream religious customs are limited. This study aims: 1) to highlight the interaction and association between the living and the dead in the Toraja People; 2) to explore the Toraja people's perspective on death and its significance in shaping the understanding of mortality.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a comprehensive literature review as its methodology, following a systematic approach to identify, analyze, and synthesize relevant scholarly works. The selected literature was critically examined to uncover recurring themes, gaps, and patterns. This method facilitated the triangulation of insights from diverse perspectives, establishing a strong foundation for understanding the research topic. A thematic analysis framework was used to structure the findings, ensuring coherence and alignment with the research objectives.

The study is grounded in contrasting philosophical perspectives: Hegel, who views death as insignificant on a personal level but essential for the life of Spirit, and Heidegger, who sees death as the defining element of selfhood. Ireton’s work finds common ground in interpreting death as a symbol of possibility, freedom, and completeness.

While the Toraja death rituals serve as the focal point of the research, the underlying philosophy and an etic analysis of these rituals form the study's epistemological foundation. By integrating anthropological, sociological, and philosophical perspectives, this research examines the distinctive funeral traditions of the Toraja people. It aims to uncover both the intrinsic and instrumental implications of these practices, offering broader insights into fundamental questions of life and death within human civilization and society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sulawesi, an island rich in cultural and ecological diversity, is home to the Toraja people, known for their elaborate funeral customs. The Torajan region, Tana Toraja, is famed for its mountainous *terrain* and cultural heritage sites, which attract researchers and tourists alike. Torajan society places significant emphasis on maintaining ties with the deceased, reflecting values rooted in community, ancestry, and tradition. The unique rituals, such as Ma'nene, where ancestors are exhumed and honored, provide insight into the Torajans' belief system, which regards the deceased as integral members of the family, deserving continuous respect and engagement.

The Sulawesi Island

Sulawesi is a key island in Indonesia, known for its rich cultural heritage and unique natural environment. It is divided into six provinces: North Sulawesi, Gorontalo, Central Sulawesi, West Sulawesi, South Sulawesi, and Southeast Sulawesi. Much of the island is mountainous, with only about 10% of the land being flat. This distinct topography contributes to Sulawesi's varied flora and fauna, often referred to as "Wallacea," a region recognized for its biodiversity due to specific climatic conditions. Over half of Sulawesi, around 53%, is covered by forest, which helps maintain its natural beauty. Indigenous

communities in Sulawesi, particularly the Toraja people, uphold unique rites and rituals that center around honoring the dead, which have become a point of interest globally.



Figure 1: Sulawesi Island of Indonesia

Credit: www.flamingotravels.co.in

Ethnic Groups in Indonesia

Indonesia is a diverse country, and the island of Sulawesi or Celebes, is home to several distinct ethnic groups, each with unique customs, traditions, and lifestyles. Some of the most notable ethnic groups in Sulawesi include the following:

Bugis: One of the most prominent ethnic groups in Sulawesi. The Bugis live mainly in the southern region of the island, particularly in South Sulawesi. They are known for their seafaring traditions, trade networks, and vibrant cultural heritage. The Bugis have a strong identity tied to their history as traders and sailors, which continues to shape their community today.

Makassar: Closely related to the Bugis, the Makassar people also reside in southern Sulawesi. They are historically significant due to their commercial activities, especially around the city of Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi. Known for their entrepreneurial spirit, the Makassar people have played a vital role in the island's trade and commerce for generations.

Minahasa: Primarily found in the province of North Sulawesi, the Minahasa people are known for their unique cultural practices, distinct homes, and rich cuisine. They have strong Christian traditions and are easily recognized for their architecture, which includes traditional houses built on stilts. Their cultural heritage is well-preserved, and

they hold a central place in Sulawesi's cultural landscape.

Gorontalo: Living in the northern part of Sulawesi, the Gorontalo people have a culture deeply rooted in Islamic traditions. They possess a unique language and cultural identity that significantly influence their practices and way of life. The Gorontalo culture emphasizes community values and spirituality, especially through their religious traditions.

Mandar: Situated mainly along the western coast of Sulawesi, the Mandar people are recognized for their maritime history and shipbuilding expertise. Their language is closely related to the Bugis language, reflecting the shared heritage among Sulawesi's coastal communities. With a long tradition of fishing and sea trade, the Mandar contributes significantly to the island's economy and cultural diversity.

Bajo: Also known as Bajau or Sea Gypsies, the Bajo people are distributed throughout Sulawesi's coastal areas and other parts of Southeast Asia. They are traditional seafarers, well-regarded for their fishing skills and boat-building techniques. The Bajo community lives closely connected to the sea, maintaining their way of life on the water and contributing to the local economy through fishing.

Toraja: The Toraja people, who live in the mountainous region of Tana Toraja in southern Sulawesi, are perhaps the most distinctive ethnic group on the island due to their elaborate death rituals. Torajans are predominantly farmers, cultivating rice and coffee in terraced fields. Their culture is defined by its unique funeral ceremonies, which involve a deep respect and connection with their ancestors. Unlike other communities, Torajans keep their deceased loved ones in the home for extended periods, treating them as if they were still alive. Family members continue to interact with the deceased, providing them with food and speaking to them, symbolizing an unbroken bond between the living and the dead.

Life and Cultural Landscape of Toraja

The name Toraja literally means 'man from above.' Their name is derived from the mountainous terrain of their region and was given to them by Bugis. Bugis is one of the dominant ethnic groups on the Sulawesi coast. The Dutch adopted the name at the end of the nineteenth century to identify agriculturalists living in the highlands.

The Toraja culture is highly distinctive, with funerals that often include the preservation and occasional exhumation of the deceased, along with elaborate sacrifices. These ceremonies are not only expressions of grief but celebrations of the deceased's life and their transition to the spirit world. The Toraja people view this practice as a way to stay connected to their loved ones, merging the worlds of the living and the dead in a unique relationship that extends far beyond death.

Torajan people have long faced hardships due to outside influence. One of the main sources of this historical deprivation was colonialism, which began in the late 16th century when the Dutch began colonizing parts of Indonesia, including Sulawesi. This colonization period, lasting until Indonesia's independence in 1945, brought significant changes to the Torajan way of life, affecting their land, livelihood, and cultural practices. During the Dutch colonial era, the Torajan people's lands were systematically exploited. Colonial powers introduced cash crops such as coffee, cloves, and cocoa, transforming the region's landscape and pushing aside local agricultural practices. This not only affected the food security of the Torajan people but also disrupted their traditional farming methods and close relationship with the land. Forced labor practices were common, and many Torajan people were compelled to work under harsh conditions with little compensation. This unequal economic system placed the Torajan community at a disadvantage, stripping them of economic autonomy and forcing them into a cycle of poverty and dependence. The colonial period also brought cultural and religious

suppression. Dutch colonizers promoted their own governance systems and educational models, disregarding and undermining the Torajan traditions and social structures. Indigenous cultural practices, especially those tied to ancestral worship and rites for the dead, were seen as incompatible with the Christian doctrines introduced by the colonizers. This led to the suppression of local beliefs, as well as restrictions on the Torajan's ability to practice traditional rituals. The influence of Christianity was particularly strong prior to 1950, during which time it became challenging for the Torajan to uphold their indigenous practices, as Christianity did not allow for many of the rites and ceremonies integral to Torajan culture.

Toraja society is highly stratified, and organized on the basis of age, descent, wealth, and occupation. Traditionally it is divided into four hierarchical classes. The "class of gold" is the high noble class constituted by the wealthy. They are considered to possess the traits of courage, justice and knowledge. Principal ritual specialists as well as traditional chiefs originate from this class. The secondary class of nobles, the "class of iron," is subdivided in degrees, while the greatest number of Toraja belongs to the "class of palm tree wood." In former days, slaves included those born into the "class of grass" as well as prisoners captured in war or those made slaves by debt.

Despite Indonesia gaining independence from Dutch rule in 1945, the Torajan people continued to face challenges. The rapid modernization and development initiatives that followed independence disrupted the lives of the Torajan people. Infrastructure projects, environmental changes, and land grabs occurred at a pace that did not consider the preservation of indigenous lifestyles. These development policies often led to the displacement of Torajan communities and the further erosion of their cultural and social structures.

However, the Torajan people have shown resilience. Since the 1950s, there has been a gradual return to cultural practices,

especially with the revival of the Ma'nene ritual—a unique tradition where families clean and care for the preserved bodies of deceased relatives. In recent years, there has been growing awareness of indigenous rights in Indonesia, with efforts aimed at protecting the cultural heritage and land rights of indigenous communities like the Torajan. Various organizations now work to support Torajan communities, helping to defend their rights and promote cultural preservation. Although the Torajan people have faced significant deprivation due to colonial rule and subsequent modernization, they have taken steps to protect and revitalize their heritage. The Ma'nene ritual and other practices have stood the test of time, demonstrating the resilience of the Torajan people in the face of historical hardships. The Torajan people are able to preserve their unique way of life despite changing times through both internal and external efforts.

The Torajan Death Rituals

The Toraja people are an ethnic minority, with the majority being Christian. However, Aluk to Dolo, their ancestral belief system, is still practiced by certain Torajan community groups. The Toraja have developed a complex cultural approach to death rites, blending animistic traditions with Christian influences, as documented by various scholars. Adams (1993) and Trenchard & Marrier d'Unienville (2019) provide foundational insights into these practices, describing how funeral rites reflect both the social hierarchy and the religious beliefs of the Toraja. Adams (1993) explores how individuals of higher social rank are afforded more elaborate ceremonies, an indication of respect and honor for the deceased's societal contributions. This social stratification, he argues, shapes the scale and grandeur of these rituals, which become public displays of respect, identity, and continuity.

The Toraja people, numbering around one million, predominantly reside in South Sulawesi and hold the belief that after death,

the soul lingers in the home. As a result, the deceased are provided with food, clothing, water, and cigarettes. Their bodies are preserved using formalin, a chemical solution composed of formaldehyde and water, to prevent decay, which typically begins within days of death. Due to the strong odor, families place dried plants near the body to help mask the smell.

For the Toraja community, it is believed that having dead bodies of their near and dear ones brings good fortune in the family, which prompts them to take good care of the deceased and keep them in the best possible condition. The bodies are wrapped in blankets and kept in a bed within a room of the house. In wealthier households, they are placed in a *tongkonan*, a traditional ancestral home with a distinctive boat-shaped roof designed to allow rainwater to run off.



Figure 2: A boy gives an ancestor a cigarette
Source: www.claudiosieberphotography.com

Torajan death rites hold a communal importance that stands in contrast to the individualistic approach to death found in many Western societies. According to Gillan (2023), Torajan ceremonies are deeply rooted in the participation of family, friends, and the wider community, who gather to share responsibilities and celebrate the deceased's life. This communal involvement not only reflects social identity but strengthens familial and societal bonds, ensuring that the community remembers and honors its members long after death. Sayoga Putu (2020) further adds that the Torajans invest vast sums of money and time in these ceremonies, emphasizing the collective dedication and reverence toward their departed loved ones,

which draws distant family members back to participate in these events, reinforcing a sense of continuity across generations.

The Rambu Solo

Syarif et al. (2016) describe *Rambu Solo* as an age-old rite and ritual of Toraja which typically performed during funeral ceremonies. This custom requires the bereaved family to host a gathering as a final tribute to the deceased (Tsintjilonis, 2000b). The term *Rambu Solo* originates from *Rambu*, meaning 'smoke or light', and *Solo*, meaning 'down', signifies a ceremony conducted at sunset.

This ritual is also known as *Aluk Rampe Matampu*, where *Aluk* translates to "belief," *Rampe* to "one side or part," and *Matampu* to "west." As a result, the ceremony traditionally takes place on the western side of the ancestral house (Zerner, 1981).

A central and complex part of the Torajan death rituals is the Rambu Solo ceremony, a traditional funeral ceremony marked by processions, sacrificial rituals, and intricate customs based on social status. Aswar, Sani, & Basir (2020) explain that the Toraja community categorizes individuals into four hierarchical levels- Bulaan, Bassi, Karurung, and Kua-kua- with each category having specific customs and ceremonial requirements. Those from the Bulaan rank, often of aristocratic lineage, have the most elaborate funeral processions, which may include water buffalo sacrifices and intricate arts displays. By contrast, those of lower ranks, such as the Kua-kua, may have simpler rites, though they are equally honored within their social sphere. This structure emphasizes the significance of social status within the Toraja culture and the honor bestowed upon the deceased, reflecting their contributions to society.

Cultural and personal values play an essential role in these ceremonies. Baan, Allo, & Patak (2022) highlight traits such as perseverance, tolerance, and discipline among the Toraja, noting how these values manifest in the meticulous and reverent performance of Rambu Solo. This deep commitment

showcases a resilience and respect for cultural traditions, where death is treated not as an end but as a passage deserving collective honor. Meanwhile, Hasbi, Pulubuhu, Arsyad, & Liu (2020) note the influence of Christianity's spread through education on Torajan rituals. The authors observe that as Christianity integrated into Toraja society, funeral ceremonies adapted to reflect new spiritual influences alongside traditional beliefs, indicating a dynamic blending of spiritual elements that honor both ancestors and the newer Christian values.

An essential outcome of these ceremonies is the strengthening of familial relationships. Matana, Tahir, Hasan, Ahmad, & Inanna (2020) observe that Rambu Solo brings together relatives from far and wide, creating a reunion that reinforces family bonds. This aspect of the ritual is crucial in Torajan society, where kinship ties are deeply valued. Naomi, Matheosz, & Deeng (2020) add that these ceremonies abide by rules and customs that promote social cohesion and peace. The rules are believed to be instrumental in guiding the community towards harmony, as they set the standards for behavior during these events, fostering a sense of shared respect and responsibility.

The Torajan people hold the Rambu Solo as their primary funeral ceremony, which can span multiple days and includes sacrifices and feasts. The scale of the ritual varies based on social status, with noble families organizing more elaborate ceremonies. As a communal gathering, Rambu Solo serves as a final farewell for the deceased, bringing together relatives, friends, and the wider community, highlighting the importance of social unity in Torajan culture.

The preservation of Torajan culture, especially in the face of modernity, is also a concern for the community. Palayukan (2021) stresses the need for younger generations to value and maintain these traditions. Without such efforts, there is a risk of cultural erosion, as contemporary influences increasingly permeate the region. The survival and recognition of Torajan traditions domestically

and internationally rely on the dedication of younger generations who are encouraged to carry forward these unique customs. Such preservation efforts are not only important for cultural continuity but also for the broader recognition of Torajan heritage.

Pasande (2013) offers insights into the moral foundations of Torajan society, applying Kohlberg's stages of moral development to illustrate the community's collective mindset. According to Pasande, Torajans operate primarily at the conventional level, where group harmony and familial loyalty hold the highest value. This moral orientation aligns with the social framework of Torajan rituals, where communal responsibility and respect for social order are emphasized. The funeral aims to guide the deceased's spiritual life force in a controlled manner, ensuring its safe passage to the realm of ancestors and divinities. Until this transition is complete, the departed are cared for and provided for as if they were still living.

Lastly, Syarif, Hasriyanti, Fatchan, Astina, & Sumarmi (2016) discuss the role of traditional Torajan rituals in character education. These ceremonies reinforce values like compassion, cooperation, and communal responsibility, cultivating a shared moral foundation within the community. These rituals are seen not only as expressions of cultural heritage but also as educational tools that teach younger generations about Torajan identity and the importance of community, solidarity, and respect for one another.

The Ma'nene Ritual

One of the most striking aspects of Torajan funeral practices is the Ma'nene ritual, where the dead are periodically exhumed, cleaned, and dressed in new clothes, as Mitchell (2021) describes. This ritual is an annual event where deceased ancestors are brought out of their graves to be cared for by their living relatives, who view this act as an expression of enduring respect. The Ma'nene ritual highlights the Torajan belief that the dead remain a part of the living community, a view that contrasts sharply with

many other societies that view death as a definitive separation. By attending to their ancestors' appearance, the Torajans reaffirm their commitment to maintaining strong ties with their lineage.



Picture 3: This body has been adorned with a set of false teeth
Credit: Claudio Sieber



Picture 4: Every August, dead relatives are removed from their coffins and cleaned
Credit: Barcroft Media

The Ma'nene ritual involves the tradition of exhuming deceased family members, cleansing their remains, and redressing them to honor their memory on a regular basis. This practice helps the living to reconnect with the deceased and *strengthens* kinship ties that go beyond death. The ritual is organized with great respect and festivity. The cultural significance of Ma'nene transforms the notion of death into a lasting relationship by reflecting the belief in a continued bond with ancestors. The act honors the deceased while also reinforcing social bonds and cultural values.

Maintaining social interaction between those who are alive and those who are dead is important from a sociological perspective.

The definition of social interaction given by sociologists like Gist, Gillin, Sutherland, Woodward, and Maxwell differs greatly from this peculiar circumstance. The dead bodies were previously stored in a structure called Tongkonan, which is similar to a house. There are multiple uses for this Tongkonan. Many institutions, such as religion, family, education, farm connections, forestry, and land links, have Tongkonan as their administrative hub (Sandarupa, 2015). The Tongkonan, or traditional house of this tribe, is used to maintain family connections even with long-deceased ancestors (Pasande, 2013). During the height of mourning, the families who came expressed their sadness in a variety of ways. Bating activities are a way for the Toraja people to express their mourning, as well as the act of expressing grief and a strong sense of sorrow for someone who has been mistreated by death. Someone is sobbing bitterly in support of the deceased on his back while delivering a solemn speech (Herianah, 2012).

There are several funeral and burial locations for Tana Toraja. For example, Lemo, Londa, Kambira and Bori Parinding have a great attraction when it comes to exploring their models of cultural practices. Ke'teKesu' is one of the best examples of traditional villages in Torajan and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This village is home to six Tongkonans. Tongkonan is a traditional building belonging to the Torajan nobles in which the dead ancestors are preserved.

CONCLUSION

Death is a fundamental, inevitable and physiological fact that points to the most objective aspect of human existence. We are material creatures subject to the conditions of the physical world. The funerary rituals of Toraja are carefully constructed and deliberately measured which ultimately reveal life and death to be mirror images of one another in a constant reciprocating tension. With humanity still trying to decode death in its totality despite all the technological

advancements, the Torajan practices of ancestor's ceremony and considering the deceased as sick people offers engaging insights to approach the universal phenomenon of death and decoding its layers. The same food and beverages are served to them every time they eat, just like when they were young.

The different ritual portrayals of the deceased illustrate their transformation from an individual with a distinct social identity and physical presence to an indistinct and ethereal entity within the ancestral realm. Through the death rites of the Toraja people of Sulawesi, we can understand a worldview that sees death as a continuation instead of an end. The Torajans' lasting connection with their ancestors is highlighted by these rituals, which demonstrate that death is not perceived as a final separation but rather as a reaffirmation of family ties, community, and identity. Many global perspectives often consider death to be a finite boundary, and this approach to death and the dead contrasts sharply with that view. These practices encourage us to reassess our relationship with those who have passed on, challenging conventional beliefs about mortality, remembering, and legacy. The purpose of these rituals is not solely to preserve cultural identity, but rather to foster resilience and unity within the community. The Torajan approach to death is a testament to cultural cohesion, even though globalization has diluted local customs.

In summary, extensive research on Torajan death rituals highlights their role in expressing social hierarchy, cultural identity, and intergenerational continuity. Through ceremonies like Rambu Solo and Ma'nene, the Torajans honor their ancestors, reinforce social connections, and preserve their traditions. These rituals are central to Torajan life, acting as links between past and present while embodying core cultural values. The literature also underscores their deep roots in traditional beliefs, which have evolved over time to incorporate Christian influences, economic factors, and societal changes,

demonstrating the resilience and adaptability of Torajan culture. Future research can explore the ways in which these death rites foster social and emotional resilience in indigenous communities, shedding light on the significance of cultural traditions in maintaining community bonds over generations added with the impact of these rituals on overall health conditions of Torajans including their morbidity.

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