



Michaela Budiman

Contemporary Funeral Rituals of Sa'dan Toraja

From Aluk Todolo to “New” Religions

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Michaela Budiman

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To my parents

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*Tidak ada agama yang saya benci, semua agama baik,
sepanjang mereka itu mengejar kebenaran.*

*There is no religion that I do not respect; all religions
are good if their quest is the pursuit of truth.*

Tato' Dena'

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Kurre sumanga'!

1 Introduction

1.1 Themes and Objective of the Present Work

The present work discusses the Toraja ethnic group, who inhabit the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, and who, until the arrival of the first Dutch missionaries at the beginning of the 20th century, had essentially been cut off from the rest of the world. It can thus be said that until that point, the Toraja represented an isolated socio-cultural system. The present work draws on the field research of the author, which focused on the study of the most important contemporary Toraja ritual – the funeral – and furthermore on identifying and documenting the changes that have affected Toraja society as a result of their embrace of Christianity during the past century. The Toraja region, which is at present populated by the adherents of various Christian denominations, Islam, and the autochthonous religion *Aluk Todolo* (lit. the religion of the ancestors), offered an exceptionally rich and varied source material for study. The result of this field research is the present work, which aims to analyse the material gathered and to present a description of the formal and principal shifts expressed in the traditional rituals, which reflect seminal changes in terms of the role of religion. The book points out how Christianity, which has been adopted relatively recently, is incorporated into the indigenous religion and the customary law *adat*, which is derived from it. The present work ventures to explain why in less than a hundred years, almost 90 % of the population converted from *Aluk Todolo*, mainly to Christianity, also describing the process of conversion, and the extent to which (and in which localities) the new religion most visibly affected the form

of modern-day rituals. The opinions of both Christians and minority adherents of *Aluk Todolo* are noted, especially with regard to the current situation, where funeral rites in particular represent a curious syncretic phenomenon, reflecting the societal changes that have taken place.

The body of textual, oral and audio-visual documentation collected by the author is unique, chiefly in that it includes interviews with one of the last living experts on the traditional Toraja religion. The present work offers the first processing of the material thus gathered, which is now ready for further expert review. It can be used for instance for linguistic analysis, or as a study from the perspective of the ethnography of communication, or in comparison with other ethnicities undergoing similar changes.

1.2 Structure of the Present Work

The present work is divided into two parts, logically interconnected, and sub-divided into chapters. The results of the research are summarized in the *Conclusion*.

The first part, *The Foundations of Toraja Culture*, is subdivided into three chapters surveying various aspects of Toraja culture. Chapter One, entitled *Tana Toraja and Its Inhabitants*, outlines the origin of the Toraja, as well as the etymology of the term *Toraja* itself. Given the cultural differences as well as the geographical remoteness of the country, it also presents brief essential information on the geography, climate and economic situation of the region. This is followed by an introduction into the Toraja language and available literature on the Toraja language and cultural traditions; the chapter closes by citing the historical milestones of the Toraja ethnic group. Chapter Two, *Autochthonous Religion Aluk Todolo and Adoption of Christianity*, presents the two main theories regarding the status of God, *Puang Matua*, in the indigenous religion. Another section is dedicated to the arrival of Protestant missionaries to the territory of present-day Toraja region, the foundation of the first schools, the arrival of Catholics in the area and the disputes of the two denominations which were sparked by their efforts to gain as many converts as possible. The final chapter of this part, *Important Aspects of Toraja Culture*, discusses the social stratification which – though officially abolished – is still evident in practice, and which even today to some extent determines the form of rituals. This is followed by a general classification of Toraja rituals and the classification of funeral rites based on the social status of the deceased. The chapter closes with the description of traditional Toraja houses, which play a crucial role during the rituals, and also of the burial chambers which form an integral pairing with