



Michaela Budiman

Contemporary Funeral Rituals of Sa'dan Toraja

From Aluk Todolo to “New” Religions

Contemporary Funeral Rituals of Sa'dan Toraja

From Aluk Todolo to "New" Religions

Michaela Budiman

Reviewed by:

Ing. Mgr. Zorica Dubovská (Prague)

Prof. Rudolf Mrázek, Ph.D. (Michigan)

PhDr. Tomáš Petrů, Ph.D. (Prague)

Edited by Petra Bílková

Layout by Jan Šerých

Typeset DTP Karolinum

First edition

© Charles University in Prague, 2013

Text © Michaela Budiman, 2013

Translation © Barbora Štefanová, Keith Jones, 2013

Cover photo © Michaela Budiman, 2013

Illustrations © Polina Kazakova, 2013

Photographs © Michaela Budiman, Martin Točík (photographs nos. 6, 7, 26),

Stanislaus A. Dammen (photograph no. 28)

ISBN 978-80-246-2228-6

ISBN 978-80-246-2456-3 (online: pdf)



Charles University in Prague
Karolinum Press 2013

<http://www.cupress.cuni.cz>

To my parents

Contents

Acknowledgements	---	13
1	Introduction	--- 15
1.1	Themes and Objective of the Present Work	--- 15
1.2	Structure of the Present Work	--- 16
1.3	Research Thus Far	--- 17
1.4	Field Research and Methods of Work	--- 18
1.5	Informants	--- 20
1.6	Gathered Material and Methods of Analysis	--- 21
2	The Foundations of Toraja Culture	--- 25
2.1	Overview	--- 25
2.2	Tana Toraja and Its Inhabitants	--- 25
2.2.1	Origins of the Population	--- 25
2.2.2	Contemporary Understanding of the Term Toraja and the Ethnological Classification of the Toraja	--- 26
2.2.3	Etymology of the Term Toraja	--- 27
2.2.4	Geography, Climate and Economy of the Toraja Region	--- 29
2.2.5	Key Historical Events	--- 32
2.2.6	Language and Literature	--- 35
2.3	Autochthonous Religion <i>Aluk Tódolo</i> and Adoption of Christianity	--- 41
2.3.1	<i>Aluk Tódolo</i> (<i>Alukta</i>)	--- 41
2.3.2	Social and Ceremonial Roles in <i>Aluk Tódolo</i> Rituals	--- 47
2.3.3	The <i>Pesung</i> (Offerings)	--- 49
2.3.4	The Adoption of Christianity	--- 50

2.4	Important Aspects of Toraja Culture	---	58
2.4.1	Social Stratification and Its Influence on Society	---	58
2.4.2	The Classification of Rituals	---	61
2.4.3	The Traditional House	---	63
2.4.4	Types of Tombs	---	68
2.4.5	The Buffalo – The Most Important Animal in Toraja Culture	---	70
3	Forms of Funeral Rituals in the Past and Today	---	76
3.1	Overview	---	76
3.2	General Information on Funeral Rites	---	76
3.2.1	The Soul After Death	---	77
3.2.2	Providing for the Body After Death	---	79
3.2.3	The Role of the Social Status of the Deceased and the Financial Situation of the Family Regarding the Character and Duration of the Funeral	---	82
3.2.4	The Site of the Funeral Rite and Attendant Rituals	---	86
3.3	The Actual Catholic Funeral and the Shift in Meaning in Some Rites Practised by Christians	---	91
3.3.1	Account of Yohana Maria Sumbung's Funeral	---	91
3.3.2	The Shift in Meaning in Some Rites Practised by Christians	---	99
3.4	Toraja Pentecostalists and Their Funerals	---	101
3.4.1	The Funeral of Ne' Tappi and Interview with Her Son, Duma' Rante Tasik	---	101
3.4.2	Information Provided by Pastor Nehemia Tangkin and His Wife Saarah Salino	---	103
3.4.3	Interview with Pastor Yunus Padang	---	104
3.4.4	Practices Rejected by Pentecostalists	---	106
3.5	Toraja Muslims	---	108
3.5.1	Toraja Muslim Death-Related Rites	---	109
3.5.2	<i>Malam Empat Puluh</i> (The Fortieth Night)	---	110
3.5.3	The Slaughter of the Buffaloes	---	112
3.5.4	Interview with Mrs. Nurhayati	---	113
4	Conclusion	---	117
4.1	Transformation of Toraja Culture and Religion	---	117
4.2	Funeral Rites	---	119

Summary --- 121

Bibliography --- 123

Appendices --- 127

Transcription of Interviews in Indonesian --- 127

Interview no. 1 --- 127

Interview no. 2 --- 127

Interview no. 3 --- 128

Interview no. 4 --- 128

Interview no. 5 --- 128

Interview no. 6 --- **129**

Interview no. 7 --- **129**

Interview no. 8 --- **129**

Main Informants --- **131**

Timetable of the Funeral of Yohana Maria Sumbung --- **134**

Genealogies of the Gods --- **136**

Glossary and Index --- **139**

Plates follow page **143**

*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'

Acknowledgements

This work was possible thanks to the selfless help of several people. However, whatever mistakes appear are mine alone. Firstly I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Alena Oberfalzerová, for her consultancy, kindness and the time she dedicated to my intellectual pursuits. I wish to thank my teacher, Ing. Mgr. Zorica Dubovská, who motivated me to follow a more profound study of Indonesia, and who also inspired me to love this wonderful country. My deep gratitude goes to my family for supporting me both materially and emotionally throughout my studies at the university. In particular, I would like to thank my mother, Dr. Katarína Rybková, for her assistance with the final proofs of the present text, and my husband, Erik Herlambang Satrio Budiman, for his help with the transcription and analysis of the interviews I recorded in Indonesia. I would also like to thank my friends, Mgr. Ivan Hartmann, for editing the work in Czech and Karen McIntyre, for proofreading the English text. I am also deeply grateful to many other friends for the support they offered, as well as for their assistance with the final adjustments.

Naturally, the present work could not have materialized without the contribution of hundreds of Indonesians, and the Toraja in particular, whom I met during my field research, and who have helped me in countless ways. My gratitude goes to my main informant, Tato' Dena', an exceptional figure, who was willing to share with me part of his store of priceless knowledge regarding Toraja culture, and whose general approach to life provided a lesson in its own right and enriched me in human terms. Another key figure was the Catholic Priest, Drs. Lucas Paliling, LicIC. Apart from being a vital source

of information, he provided me with a moral base to fall back on during my sojourn in Indonesia. Among the other people to whom I am indebted for advice are the Catholic priests, Drs. Stanislaus A. Dammen, MPS, MA. and Drs. Yohanes Manta' Rumengan. Additionally, I would like to thank the family of Stanislaus Dammen for their kindness and hospitality. I also wish to thank Drs. Paulus Palondongan, MM and Paulus Pasang Kanan, a number of relatives of Father Lucas, STIKPAR students, Mrs. Lily and other Toraja, whom for obvious reasons I cannot list here in entirety.

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

the house, as well as the role of buffaloes, an essential fixture in most Toraja funerals.

The core of the work is presented in the second part of the book, entitled *Forms of Funeral Rituals in the Past and Today*, which is based almost exclusively on my own field research. The first chapter *General Information on Funeral Rites* outlines what happens to the soul of the deceased according to the indigenous Toraja belief, the ways in which the family of the deceased administers to the body, and the extent to which the social status and financial situation of the family influence the form and duration of this most important Toraja ritual in the present day. Next is a general outline of the funeral site and the accompanying rituals. The following chapter *The Actual Catholic Funeral and the Shift in Meaning in Some Rites Practised by Christians* describes the funeral of Yohana Maria Sumbung. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to the differences between funerals held in keeping with the rules of the indigenous religion, *Aluk Todolo*, and the contemporary Toraja rituals of Catholics and Protestants. The last two chapters, *Toraja Pentecostals and Their Funerals* and *Toraja Muslims*, present interviews with adherents of both Pentecostalism and Islam, discussing the manner in which other religions have come to terms with Toraja traditions.

The *Conclusion* presents all the facts gleaned, particularly those gathered on the basis of field research. Appendices include the transcription of the interviews in the original Indonesian language, a list of the most important informants with brief biographical data, a timetable of the funeral of Yohana Maria Sumbung, the genealogy of the Gods nos. 1–3, an index and a glossary of Toraja and Indonesian terms used in the work, and a selection of photographs.

1.3 Research Thus Far

Given the fact that up until the beginning of the 20th century the Toraja ethnic group lacked a written tradition, researchers struggle with the absence of literature on Toraja history before this period. Therefore it is necessary to glean information about Toraja life only from myths, a far cry from modern-day historiography, or from the chronicles of the neighbouring ethnic group of the Bugis, most of which have been published and studied only in part. The first European to mention the modern Toraja was the Jesuit Father Gervaise, at the end of the 17th century.¹ The information he offers, however, does not originate

1 Nicolas Gervaise (1662–1729) was active in Siam (today Thailand) in the years 1681–1685. He was a Jesuit priest, a missionary, and eventually a bishop.

in personal experience, as it is merely drawn from his conversations with two Makassar princes who were students at the Jesuit College in Paris.²

From the 1920s onwards, various myths, folk tales, genealogies, songs, rhymes and proverbs were recorded and published, and there also emerged numerous works on linguistics. The first authors in the latter field were the Dutch, and in later years their place was taken by Toraja researchers. Available literature on Toraja history is relatively limited. The more ancient history is presented in a book by the Toraja author L. T. Tangdilintin *Toraja dan Kebudayaanannya* [The Toraja and Their Culture]. Modern history dealing with events from 1860 until almost the end of the 20th century is laid out brilliantly in Terance Bigalke's (US) work *Tana Toraja: A Social History of an Indonesian People*.³ The Dutch scholar Hetty Nooy-Palm in her two books *The Sa'dan-Toraja: A Study of Their Social Life and Religion I. Organization, Symbols and Beliefs* (1979) and *The Sa'dan-Toraja: A Study of Their Social Life and Religion II: Rituals of the East and West* (1986) provides a detailed description of traditional Toraja culture and its rituals in their original form, before the arrival of Christianity. Another influential book on Toraja culture and, in particular, funerals is *Feasts of Honor: Ritual and Change in the Toraja Highlands* (1985) by Toby Alice Volkman. Apart from the above-cited works, there are a number of other publications concerned chiefly with the traditional form of Toraja rituals. A book dealing with the changes that Toraja society underwent in the last decades – *Paths and Rivers: Sa'dan Toraja Society in Transformation* – was published in 2009 by Roxana Waterson, who has studied the Toraja since 1978. The present work, however, does not draw on Waterson's findings, as my dissertation in Czech, on which the present English translation is based, had been defended one year previously, in 2008. Although the present work is based above all on my field research, the information cited in the part *The Foundations of Toraja Culture* is drawn from the above-mentioned specialized literature.

1.4 Field Research and Methods of Work

The material on which the present work draws is the result of two field research expeditions I undertook in the Toraja region, on the island of Sulawesi. The first of those took place between mid-February and mid-March of 2002,⁴ and its chief

2 Nooy-Palm 1979, pp. 8–9.

3 This book was only published in 2005, nonetheless it is Bigalke's hitherto unpublished 1982 dissertation entitled *A Social History of "Tana Toraja" 1870–1965*.

4 After receiving an Indonesian Government scholarship, I spent the academic year 2001–2002 at the prestigious Universitas Gajah Mada in Java, in the city of Yogyakarta. During the second semester I went to Sulawesi in order to gather the necessary study material for my diploma work.

benefit was becoming acquainted with the socio-cultural environment of the region. The second six-month-long field research undertaken in 2005–2006 was more systematic in nature, underpinned both by deeper personal knowledge and significantly better technical support.

Like many others, I struggled with a variety of problems during my field research. In spite of my fairly good knowledge of the environment, it was far from easy to constantly keep in mind all the rules and codes of social life which determine the everyday affairs of the Toraja in a fundamental way. Another delicate task was making the video recordings of the rituals – often, this constituted balancing on the verge between public space and the intimate sphere of the people involved. My primary aim was to gather as much material, video recordings and information as possible without committing a faux pas which would block my access to the community I was observing. On the other hand, my sojourn in the Toraja region was facilitated by the fact that Indonesians in general are highly friendly to foreigners. Most felt honoured by the presence of a European woman at their rituals, and as a result, I generally met with a positive reception.⁵ Working with people who have recently lost someone dear to them, however, was rather demanding psychologically, presenting frequent dilemmas regarding how to articulate my queries as sensitively as possible so as not to hurt or offend the bereaved, and at the same time, to gather the necessary information.

Throughout my field research, I lived at the invitation of my informant, Priest Lucas Paliling, whom I had met already during my first sojourn there, in the city of Rantepao at a building belonging to the STIKPAR school,⁶ which he had founded and where he served as director.⁷ From Rantepao I made regular excursions to the nearby surroundings, where I participated in funerals. Among the field research methods I applied were participant observation and interview. Wherever possible, I would prepare at least a general field of questions, which I would then utilise freely. I deliberately avoided structured question and answer sessions, since given the nature of the environment, they would be very artificial and the replies of my respondents would lose their immediacy.

After the conclusion of the rites at which I was present, I would review the recordings I took as well as the photo-documentation, preparing questions to then put to a selected informant from the family hosting the given ritual.

5 Throughout my sojourn, I tried not to stand out too much. I thus strove to dress, eat and communicate as the Toraja do.

6 STIKPAR (Sekolah Tinggi Kateketik dan Pastoral) – Rantepao Catechetic and Pastoral Institute.

7 Before his tenure in Rantepao, he held the office of the rector of the Universitas Atma Jaya in Makassar.

Several days after the ceremony itself, I would meet the person I had selected as my informant and record the ensuing interview, which as a rule would be semi-structured. I would then analyse these materials after my return from my field research. The present work offers an intersection of ethnological and psychological perspectives. It describes the impact of the conversion to new religions on Toraja people.

1.5 Informants

I list all of my major informants and their basic data in an appendix entitled *Main Informants*. Here I shall mention two of my key sources in more detail.

My main informant was Tato' Dena', from the village of Mandetek in the Tallulembangna region,⁸ and an adherent of the autochthonous religion *Aluk Todolo* who performs the priestly roles of *tominaa* and *tomenani*.⁹ Tato' Dena' only enrolled in school at the age of thirteen, and until then – according to Toraja tradition – he had tended buffaloes. His formal education lasted eight years (six years of grammar school and two years of junior secondary school). Already at a young age (and despite being the youngest of all his siblings) his father, who likewise performed these sacred functions, chose him to be his successor, and over time, he passed on to him the great store of his knowledge.

My interviews with this wise man, which amounted to a unique eighteen-hour long recording, exerted a seminal influence on the form of the present work. At the moment, there exists no other person who knows more about traditional Toraja culture and indigenous religion in the Tallulembangna region than my main informant.¹⁰ In one interview he himself expressly cited: “When I am gone from Tallulembang, from Mandetek (*when I die*), there will certainly no longer remain another who knows the rules.”¹¹ It is obvious from his testimony that

8 Southern part of the Toraja region.

9 See chapt. 1.2.2.

10 I know from Tato' Dena's account that he formerly provided information to several anthropologists researching the indigenous customs and religion of the Toraja. In 2007 Roxana Waterson (Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore) made a documentary film about Tato' Dena' entitled *When the Sun Rises: A Toraja Priest of the Ancestral Way*. In the year 2009 she published the book *Paths and Rivers: Sa'dan Toraja Society in Transformation* where she presents much of the information provided to her by Tato' Dena'. There were also Eric Crystal (retired at present, with over thirty years of close study of Southeast Asia, including lecturing at the University of California, Berkley and at the San Francisco Art Institute) and Dimitri Tsintjilonis (lecturer in social anthropology at the University of Edinburgh, focusing chiefly on the phenomenon of death, religion and ritual in Indonesia and Southeast Asia). He also gave interviews to the ethnomusicologist Dana Rappoport, who wrote a dissertation on Toraja music.

11 Mandetek is a village in the region of Tallulembang.