



## The *Mata Golo* Ritual in the Culture of Ngada of Central Flores and Its Challenges for Catholic Theology

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**Abstract:** *The theology and death rituals of the Catholic Church are challenged by the concept of the Mata Golo ritual in the Ngada culture of Central Flores. Although the majority of the Ngada people are Catholic, their understanding and practices surrounding death especially in cases of unnatural death (Mata Golo), such as suicide, accidents, or murder are significantly different from the theology and rituals of the Catholic Church. In such cases, the bodies of the deceased are not treated according to the Catholic rites, but instead are fully honoured through the traditional Mata Golo rituals. This research, conducted between December 2023 and January 2024, aims to assess the influence of Catholic theology and death rituals when confronted with the Mata Golo concept and practices. A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing literature reviews, observation, and interviews. To interpret these dynamics within the framework of contextual theology, the researcher began with a receptive process by listening to and engaging with the local culture, followed by theological dialogue and synthesis. The theological model applied in this study is based on the concept of counter-culture. The findings indicate that, in the face of Mata Golo events and rituals, the Catholic teachings and rites concerning death have a limited influence. The Church's position, particularly regarding Catholic theology and death rituals, appears significantly weakened in comparison to the strong influence of the Mata Golo tradition. Therefore, a model of encounter is needed as a form of critical engagement with the Mata Golo ritual practice. This study is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge in the fields of contextual theology, sociology of religion, and anthropology of religion.*

**Keywords:** *Ritual; Death; Catholic Church; Mata Golo*

### Introduction

The presence of the Catholic Church in Asia is seen as an opportunity to enter a plural world as it encounters with non-Christian religions, cultural plurality, and conditions of poverty.<sup>1</sup> The present study focuses on the encounter of the Catholic Church with local cultural plurality, specifically the *Mata Golo* ritual lived by Catholics in Ngada, Central Flores. The researchers believe that the local community has an epistemology to understand, explain, and pass on that ceremony. Related to this is the construction of ethnic epistemological reasoning that is used as a basis for explaining the ritual. There is a pattern of rationality and epistemological structure that underlies the ritual, although it is recognized that ethnic epistemology is

<sup>1</sup>Franz-Josef Eilers (Ed.). *For All the Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents from 1997 to 2001*, volume 3. (Manila: Claretian Publications, 2002), 12-14.

still considered marginal and pseudo-scientific.<sup>2</sup> *Mata Golo* is a concept deeply embedded and rooted in Ngada's ethnic epistemology. It has given birth to the ritual and is revitalized, maintained, and passed down from generation to generation. Certain parts of the ritual are considered contrary to Christian teachings, especially concerning the respect for the body and proper burial practices. The people of Ngada have concepts and rituals that are different from the theological beliefs and practices of the funeral ceremonies in the Catholic Church, especially in their dealing with unnatural deaths called *Mata Golo*.

The data from the local Central Bureau of Statistics, released on October 18, 2024, shows that the Catholics constituted 91.00% of the Ngada population,<sup>3</sup> and that they are devout Catholics. However, facts also show that in the case of a *Mata Golo* incident that happens to a member of the Ngada people, the rite used to bury the body is not based on Catholic theology, but instead on local cultural rituals. The question is: Why does this ritual more strongly influence the community than the teaching and practice of the Catholic Church? This study is significant because the *Mata Golo* practice does not align with the proper funeral standards in the Catholic Church or those of other communities. Another question is: How does the Church's teaching on the sanctity of the body as God's temple affect this ritual?

The Catholic Church is deeply rooted in Ngada society, especially through the official liturgical ceremonies, devotions, and popular worship that are practised in the church. Susan Schröter affirms that the Ngada people are religious by showing themselves as devout and passionate Catholics. However, at the same time, they are very faithful tradition-bearers because of a great fear of the curse of the ancestors if they ignore it or forget the commands and prohibitions of the ancestors.<sup>4</sup> Ethnic epistemology taught them that great calamities will befall members of the tribal group or family if they fail to observe the rituals. Ngada people keep Church customs alive, such as child baptism, holy communion, Christmas and Easter celebrations, rosary prayers in May and October, and praying for the dead. They nevertheless also perform the local rituals. Christianity and traditional rituals are two major forces that influence their lives. They seem to be able to build and manage a parallel belief system, so that Christianity and traditional customs can coexist.<sup>5</sup> In a *Mata Golo* event, Church is powerless and even submerged in the face of the strong

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<sup>2</sup> Yohanes S. Purwadi, Ignasius Bambang Sugiharto & Elvy Manurung, "Memahami Konstruksi Nalar Epistemologi Etnik: Sebuah Kajian Filosofis," *Jurnal Ledalero*, 21 no. 1 (June, 2022): 71-85.

<sup>3</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada, "Persentase Pemeluk Agama (Persen), 2024," Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Ngada, 2024. <https://ngadakab.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/2/Mjg2IzI=/percentage-of-religious-adherents.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Susanne Schöter, *The Indigenization of Catholicism on Flores* (Frankfurt: Institut für Ethnologie, Senckenberganlage, 1998), 11-15; Cf. Felix Baghi et.al. *Hermeneutika Tradisi Ngada: Mitos-Logos-Anthropos*. (Mauere: Ledalero, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Chris Parera, "Katolik Masuk Ngada, Berawal dari Surat Controleur Couvreur," *Sergap*, 2020, <https://www.sergap.id/katolik-masuk-ngada-berawal-dari-surat-controleur-couvreur/>; The Catholic mission in the land of Ngada began with a letter from Controller Couvreur dated October 1, 1907. He was a military ruler of the Nangapanda, Ngada, and Manggarai regions who was well-acquainted with the area. The letter requested that the mission station in Larantuka carry out missionary activities in the western region because the area was fertile, beautiful, and densely populated. This letter marked the beginning of missionary efforts related to the modernization of the Ngada community through Catholicism, via education, economy, and especially the spread of the Catholic faith; Cf. L. Lame Uran, *Sejarah Perkembangan Misi Flores Dioses Agung Ende* (Ende: Nusa Indah: n.d.), 242-243.

influence of *Mata Golo* practices. Another point to raise in this study is: How does the Catholic Church assess and take a stand on the strong influence of the *Mata Golo* ritual?

Previous studies on *Mata Golo*, conducted by Paskalis Lina and Raymundus I. Made Sudiarsa focused on doing a theological synthesis related to the death of Christ on the Cross, which in the Ngada context is regarded as *Mata Golo*. Further research by Susan Schröter (1998) and Emanuel Suka (2016) serves as a reference and object of comparison for this study. Their phenomenological and ethnographic works detail all stages of the *Mata Golo* rite among the Lolo tribe in Ratogesa Village, Ngada Regency. These studies reveal variations in the ritual's names and procedures across tribes, yet all share a common purpose, namely as healing or reconciliation ceremony with ancestors to prevent similar tragic events from recurring in the future. However, none of these studies examine in depth how the ritual engages with the Catholic theology. The present study aims to fill that gap by critically analysing that ritual through the lens of the Catholic theology using Stephen Bevans's countercultural model.

This study uses a qualitative approach by conducting a literature review and interviews. The researchers interviewed informants who observe the *Mata Golo* cultural ritual. Three informants were interviewed as part of exploring this ritual, as well as for the receptive stage of cultural listening. One informant experienced *Mata Golo* within their family, whereas the other two are customary elders and cultural observers. Both has researched the *Mata Golo* ritual for a long period. The field research was conducted from December 2023 to January 2024. Data then analysed through the perspective of contextual theology.<sup>6</sup> The researchers use Stephen Bevans's countercultural model as an analytical framework.<sup>7</sup> The countercultural model, or contrast model, provides space for the local context of people's experience (*local wisdom*),<sup>8</sup> culture, and social location very seriously, but at the same time invites critiques on the culture in the light of the Gospel. It is so because the Gospel that is proclaimed is always critical and challenging, calling for the purification of people's lives. Bevans maintains that "some contexts are anti-thesis to the Gospel, and must be challenged by the liberating and healing power of the Gospel."<sup>9</sup> In this case, certain cultural contexts are open to be criticized, illuminated, and converted by the light of the Gospel.

This study employs the countercultural model to critique the *Mata Golo* practice and explore ways to transform the aspects of the ritual that conflict with the Church's theology, liturgical practice, and the theology of the body. The model assumes that no culture is perfect and therefore calls for renewal and conversion, especially where cultural elements diverge from the Gospel's values. Alongside this, contextual theology is applied to uncover the theological richness within the *Mata Golo* ritual as a meaningful contribution to the local expression of faith in the context of Catholic eschatology.

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<sup>6</sup> Adrianus Sunarko, *Teologi Kontekstual* (Jakarta: Obor, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Model-Model Teologi Kontekstual* (Maumere: Ledalero, 2013), 218-231.

<sup>8</sup> Armada Riyanto, *Relasionalitas Filsafat Fondasi Interpretasi: Aku, Teks, Liyan Fenomen* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2018), 172-173.

<sup>9</sup> Emanuel Martasujita, *Teologi Inkulturasi: Perayaan Injil Yesus Kristus di Bumi Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2023), 219-223.

## ***Mata Golo* as a Death Ritual in Ngada Culture**

### ***Mata Golo* Concept**

Previous research shows that there are two types of death in Ngada culture, namely *mata ade* and *Mata Golo*. *Mata ade* is a natural type of death, such as death due to illness, disease, long suffering, and old age. Meanwhile, *Mata Golo* includes all forms of unnatural death caused by murder, accidents, death caused by natural disasters, and other external factors, like being struck by lightning or being hit by a tree or vehicle. Reactions of fear, sadness, and terror are always the first things that come to mind when people know that a member of their tribe has experienced *Mata Golo*. *Mata Golo* is seen as a threat and a catastrophe for the extended family.<sup>10</sup> It is solely this type of death that this present study focuses on. However, according to Vianney Watu, there is another burial ritual among the Ngada people, namely the *Gore Gote* ritual, which is a death that should not be mourned but celebrated with joy.<sup>11</sup>

Schröter's publication maintains that *Mata Golo* is a warning from the ancestors due to the neglect of a tribal obligation to the ancestors, or the violation of rules set by the ancestors, or the violation of a social order that has been agreed upon by the surviving family members. This realm of thought forms the concept of eschatology that is understood as a battleground between ancestors and evil spirits. Ancestors are believed to be the guardians of the living family and must be respected. If they are not respected, ignored, or forgotten, they will allow evil forces to kill family members in the traditional house. These instances of death by evil spirits are referred to as *Mata Golo*. Additionally, the ancestors are believed to issue specific commands and prohibitions. These commands and prohibitions must be obeyed by the family members who are still alive. Ignoring them can lead to punishment in the form of *Mata Golo*.<sup>12</sup>

This socio-religious dichotomy gave birth to a firm awareness to perform the *Mata Golo* ritual. This ritual is intended to reconcile the living with the ancestors, so that this type of death will not happen again to family members in the future. There is a form of a negotiation between the family who wants to perform the ritual and the ancestors, so that the living family is shielded from any unnatural death in the future. Many terms are used in this restorative process, and they vary from tribe to tribe. One that has been raised in the writings of Paskalis Lina and Raymundus Sudiarsa is the *ke'o rado* ceremony. In other places, this kind of ritual is called "a ritual to ward off bad luck with the aim of obtaining salvation."<sup>13</sup> In a religious

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<sup>10</sup> Susan Schröter, "Death Rituals of the Ngada in Central Flores, Indonesia," *Anthropos*, Bd. 93, H. 4/6 (1998): 418-419.

<sup>11</sup> Yohanes Vianney Watu, "Penguatan Pembentukan Karakter Berbasis Permainan Berhitung Orang Ngada," *Jurnal Lumen Veritatis* 10, no. 2 (April 2020): 181-195.

<sup>12</sup> Linus Timoteus Dopo, "Interview", Mangulewa, December 03, 2023.

<sup>13</sup> Anselmus Dorewoho Atasoge, Dominikus Doni Ola, and Adison Adrianus Sihombing, "Pate Nalan: Mediatization of Social Cohesion Structural Functionalism Perspective," in *INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THEOLOGY, RELIGION, CULTURE, AND HUMANITIES*, ed. Nikolas Kristiyanto, Agus Widodo, and Ag. Tri Edy Warsono (Yogyakarta: Faculty of Theology Universitas Sanata Dharma Yogyakarta, 2023), 223-38.; Cf. This rite is similar to the annual ritual of the Bugis Tolotang Towani community in Perrinyameng, Sidenreng Rappang Regency, which is held to obtain safety and the gift of life from *Dewata Seuwae* (God Almighty) or also known as *Patotoe*, which means the One Who Determines Human Fate. This annual ritual is a gathering place for Bugis Tolotang Towani residents who come from various regions such as South Sulawesi, Kalimantan, Sumatra and Java and contains cultural values of unity and mutual cooperation Nasruddin, "Ritual Tahunan Masyarakat Hindu Tolotang Di Perrinyameng Kelurahan

context, the *Mata Golo* ritual is a product of indigenous religion. The characteristics of indigenous religion can be summarized in the following: (1) indigenous peoples are local, or at least self-sufficient, and not interested in extending their religious beliefs and practices beyond their environment; (2) they are primarily based on kinship relations, and usually have a strong emphasis on the role of the ancestors; (3) they transmit their traditions orally, which results in a different attitude towards beliefs and practices compared to traditions derived from and based on authoritative written sources.<sup>14</sup> The above characteristics are clearly evident in the Ngada traditions, such that it can also be said that *Mata Golo* is a ritual strongly associated with indigenous religion.

### Ritual Process of *Mata Golo*

The process of performing the *Mata Golo* ritual varies from one place to another within Ngada. This study takes as its example the procedure of performing the *Mata Golo* ritual based on ethnographic notes by Emanuel Suka (2016) in the Lolo tribe, Ratogesa village, Central Golewa Subdistrict. These ethnographic notes aim to provide an overview of the implementation and meaning of the *Mata Golo* ritual. The ritual procedure in *Mata Golo* culture is as follows.<sup>15</sup>

First, *keku* (shout). *Keku* is a question expressed in shouts. It starts at the victim's house, goes to the grave, and is done during the *tibo* process. *Keku* can only be done by a shaman (*mali*).<sup>16</sup> For example: “*Kaju e..... kau da bodu puu zeta tolo nio da pu'u apa, da mode da lima gheso gho or polo dhedo gho?*” (Here, *Kaju* is a placeholder name referring to the deceased. The utterance may be translated as: “*Kaju... what caused you to fall from the coconut tree? Was it because you could not hold on, or was it the work of an evil force?*”).

Second, *pa'i tibo*. *Tibo* is a procedure used to discover the cause of death. Practically, this ritual provides an opportunity to explain the cause of death. The supporting tools in the *tibo* ritual are: 1) corn kernels (corn that is chosen carefully, that is, from the road or from one that falls on the road far from the crowd). The corn is placed on the *wati* and mixed with a plant of the same size as the corn to assist the

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Amparita Kabupaten Sidenreng Rappang,” *Jurnal Al-Hikmah* 21, no.2 (December 2019): 83-114. Similar rituals are also organized by the people of Betung Village, Pangkalan Kuras Subdistrict, Pelalawan Regency, Riau Province through the ritual of rejecting *bala* (disaster). The ultimate goal is the individual and communal safety of the community. Hasbulla, et.al. “Ritual Tolak Bala Pada Masyarakat Melayu (Kajian Pada Masyarakat Petalangan Kecamatan Pangkalan Kuras Kabupaten Pelalawan),” *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 25 no.1 (2017): 83-100.

<sup>14</sup> James L. Cox. *From Primitive to Indigenous: The Academic Study of Indigenous Ideologies*. (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 61.

<sup>15</sup> Emanuel Suka, “*Mata Golo* Cultural Ritual (An Ethnographic Study on Lolo Tribe Customary Community in Ratogesa Village of Golewa Tengah Sub District of Ngada Flores Regency of East Nusa Tenggara),” *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 6, no. 22 (2016): 36-40.

<sup>16</sup> *Mali* is an individual considered to have expertise in building relationships with the ancestors. With the skills they possess, they are believed to be able to carry out any rituals in the cultural practices of the Ngada people, including the *Mata Golo* ritual. *Mali* is also believed to be a person with supernatural powers, which are obtained through inheritance and passed down. These supernatural powers can be inherited by anyone who is trusted, but if the supernatural powers are passed down, they are transmitted to descendants in a direct line. *Mali* is chosen or requested by families from any clan or family as long as they are still from the tribes in the Ngada region. “Interview”, Linus Timoteus Dopo, Mangulewa, December 03 2023. Cf. Paul Arndt. *Masyarakat Ngadha: Keluarga, Tatahan Sosial, Pekerjaan dan Hukum Adat* (Ende: Nusa Indah, 2022), 574-579.

preservation process; 2) alternatively, if bamboo is used, it must be a young bamboo. During the event, the participants must: 1) not sneeze; 2) not place their feet on a chair (*wa'i ma'e radha dhoa*); 3) not sit on the mat (*podhu dhia te'e*); and 4) nor fart (*ma'e pesu*).

Third, *ja'i laba polo* (devil's dance). *Ja'i laba polo* means that the devil has won as it has taken the victim's soul and the family accompanies the devil's victory. *Jai laba polo* specifically accompanies the corpse of the victim, symbolized by a banana stem, as it returned to its final resting place. This dance is also performed when the body is delivered to its final place (cemetery).

Fourth, *soka golo*. This ritual confirms the victory of the devil who has succeeded in taking the victim's soul. This ritual is performed with a dance called *saka golo*. This ritual aims to restore the *tobo* and free the victim, in addition to legitimizing the victory of the devil.

Fifth, rites of peace. Ideally, every problem should have a solution accompanied by reconciliation as in this event. Mali often symbolically reconciles with the conflicting parties and the victim's family. This reconciliation is intended to prevent hostility between the conflicting parties and the victim's family. In the reconciliation process, there are several requirements that must be fulfilled. The following are the materials and tools that must be prepared in the reconciliation ritual: 1) *wako* (a type of rough forest grass) in six pieces (used as spears), 2) a pig that has not been castrated; 3) small bamboo, approximately two or three meters long (to separate the victim's family from the warring family); 4) *kuali* (a wide-mouthed clay pot); 5) three stones used as fireplace and firewood; 6) *he'a tua* (a cleaned coconut shell for drinking); and 7) arak or *moke* (palm wine).

Sixth, buffalo slaughtering ceremony. Culturally, buffaloes are the most highly valued sacrificial animal as a form of respect to ancestors and God. Buffaloes are offered as a manifestation of hope for salvation for the family left behind. Buffaloes are an absolute requirement for offerings that cannot be replaced with other animals.

Seventh, communal eating. *Mata Golo* is considered by the local community as bad luck for the victim and will also affect his family members. Therefore, the victim's family must recover by holding the *Mata Golo* ritual and slaughtering buffaloes. The local community will be invited by the family to eat together. This way, the family will be accepted back as members of the community without blemish.

Eight, *se de ze'e* (discarding all bad things). *Se de ze'e* is a purification ritual. The leftover food collected over three days and all leftover foodstuffs or supporting tools, such as medical instruments, wood, kitchen ashes, rice, meat, bones, wooden or bamboo cots on which the corpse is placed, and so on are thrown away to a place determined by the *mali*. The disposal of the remnants of this event is called cleansing (purification). Through this disposal, it is believed that the family has been free from victim's bad luck or other ill effects associated with the victim's death.

Linus Timoteus Dupo added that the implementation of the *Mata Golo* rite varies from tribe to tribe and even from family to family. This variation is due to the person chosen to mediate between the living and the ancestors. The intermediary is called a *mali* (shaman). However, variations in the performance of the rituals are not significant. The point is that the concept of *Mata Golo* as a healing ritual is common.

Generally, in Ngada custom, the bodies of *Mata Golo* victims are not placed inside the house. Instead, the body is placed outside the house on a bamboo bed, and in some places, no coffin is used at all. The body is not brought into the house because it is considered to bring disaster to family members and to the tribal community in the future. Bodies of those who die through *Mata Golo* are considered contaminated by evil forces, thus requiring a recovery rite. This restoration serves as a moment of reconciliation with the ancestors, who are believed to be angered by the living. However, in the context of the Ngada society, laying the bodies of victims outside the house is not an act of abuse of human dignity nor a form of disrespect for the sanctity of the body, but rather a symbolic act of discarding misfortune. The primary intention is not the neglect of the human body, but the purification of the family from impending misfortune.<sup>17</sup> Thus, there are concepts and practices that are considered noble in the treatment of the bodies of those who died because of *Mata Golo*. On the other hand, as a Catholic, this concept and practice contradict the Catholic Church's view of respect for the dignity of the human person. Another interviewee, Ms. Bernadeta Bhoki, also emphasized the same thing, that the emphasis is not on ignoring the dignity of the deceased, but on conducting a ritual to reject misfortune so that no further unnatural deaths occur within the family.<sup>18</sup>

At this point, it is clear that there are concepts and practices that differ from those of the Catholic Church regarding the treatment of the dead, including victims of *Mata Golo*. The Catholic Church regards the human body as sacred under all circumstances, therefore, regardless of the manner of death, the body must be properly honoured and buried. This marks the fundamental contrast between the cultural concept of *Mata Golo* and the teachings of the Catholic theology.

### **Holiness of the Body as the Home of God**

Respect for the human body is part of Christian teaching. The human body is understood therein as the dwelling place of God. Therefore, the human body is regarded as sacred because the human body is the image of God.<sup>19</sup> The sanctity of the body implies respect or appreciation for the body under any circumstances, whether living or dead. The doctrine of faith affirms that the body is the temple of God, that the Holy Spirit dwells in the human body. The greatness and glory of the body can be understood in the mystery of the resurrection at the end of time. The Creed of the Catholic Church ends with a statement of belief in the resurrection of the body. The human body is therefore not a mere temporality and transience, but has an eternal dimension that awaits eternal salvation. Recognition of salvation applies not only to the psychological aspect, but also to the physical aspect. This means that humans are saved fully in soul and body. Salvation is not interpreted partially as only a psychological reality. "Body salvation is not an external salvation but must be interpreted as a participation in the process of redemption. The physical dimension is not opposed to the spiritual dimension but is interpreted as a complete unity of the human person."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Linus Timoteus Dapo, "Interview" Mangulewa, December 3, 2023.

<sup>18</sup>Bernadetha Bhoki, "Interview", Bajawa, December 4, 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Benedict M. Ashley, *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (St. Louis, Mo.: Pope John Centre, 1985), 699-670.

<sup>20</sup> Zachary Swantek, "John Paul II's Theology of the Suffering Body," *The Person and the Challenges* 9, no.1 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.15633/pch.3363>.

In addition, the body is also interpreted as a means for relating oneself to God. Through his or her body, one is directed to God. The Catholic Church teaches that “as beings who are at once body and soul, humans express spiritual reality through physical signs and symbols, humans need the body to relate to others, and likewise in their relationship with God.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, in principle, people should humanize and respect the body. Through the Incarnation, where God became human in Jesus, respect for the body is assigned a special place. This means that through the body, one can become holy, and the dignified body experiences glory in Christ. Therefore, even though death occurs in the context of *Mata Golo*, the role and function of the body remain intact in their wholeness.

Regarding the death of the body, Christian tradition conceptualizes it as the separation of body and soul. These body and soul will be reunited and fully saved at the second coming of Christ. Death in the Christian faith is understood as an event of faith in which God calls people into heavenly perfection. Therefore, in the Christian faith, a person can die in any way and at any time, and the rite of respect for the body is carried out in a dignified way as a form of respect for the sanctity of the body as God's temple. Thus, all deaths in the Christian faith are understood as part of the natural human condition. Because all those who have died are in the perfect happiness of Christ and pray for and support us.<sup>22</sup>

### Letting the Gospel Speak

After exploring the Ngada cultural context of *Mata Golo* and unravelling the Catholic Church's understanding of the sanctity of the body, the researchers consider the need for letting the Gospel speak to the context in the form of criticism as a way of renewing the context. As described above, the Christian faith affirms that a person can die in any way and at any time. Death becomes an existential event at the end of one's life journey in this world. So, there needs to be a critique of the two cognitive aspects of *Mata Golo* which, in our opinion, lack respect for civilizational values and Christian humanism.

First, there is no special respect for the body. We imagine every human being being born in a house that is proper for welcoming a human being. However, when faced with death (*Mata Golo*), the body is placed outside the house. In the researcher's observations in several places, the body is not even put into a coffin. This is a contradictory action because when a human being is born, he or she is welcomed with joy in a warm house, but when a human being dies, especially from *Mata Golo*, the body is placed outside the house or *sa'o meze*, even though the house or *sa'o meze* in Ngada culture has a very central function and symbol.

The bodies of the people who experience *Mata Golo* are regarded as bad luck for the family members who are still alive. However, the anger of the ancestors towards the family members probably is not caused by the evil behaviour made by the *Mata Golo* victim but could be by other family members. The victim of *Mata Golo* seems to be the sacrifice that bears the crimes of other individuals in the extended family. This situation reflects injustice, because the victim cannot be held accountable for the crimes

<sup>21</sup> Konferensi Wali Gereja Indonesia (KWI), *Katekismus Gereja Katolik* (Ende: Nusa Indah, 1993), § 362-366; Cf. Dokumen Konsili Vatikan II, *Gaudium et Spes* (Jakarta: Obor, 1993), 14 §1.

<sup>22</sup> Georg Kirchberger, *Allah Menggugat: Sebuah Dogmatik Kristiani* (Maumere: Penerbit Ledalero, 2020), 337.



committed during his or her lifetime. It is tragic that *Mata Golo* is the result of the evil deeds of other family members. This fact will then be framed by the narrative analysis of the Gospel text.

The figures of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are iconic in Scripture when it comes to caring for Jesus's body. They appear in all four Gospels (Mt 27:57-61, Mk 15:42-47, Lk 23: 50-51, Jn 19:38-42). After Jesus's death, no one had the courage to take Jesus's body down from the cross because his death was caused by two charges: being accused of being a criminal and being accused of blasphemy. The post-crucifixion situation was very tense, as the chief priests, scribes, and the Jews might have suspected each other and sought safety by staying away from the hill of Golgotha. His Jewish background allowed Joseph to request permission to take down Jesus's body. Additionally, Joseph was secretly an admirer of Jesus and His teachings. Christ's death on the cross brought so much love to him. There were things that held him back from loving Christ, but he believed that Jesus's wounds on the cross could free him from fear. On the other hand, Nicodemus with his wealth bought a large amount of spices to care for Jesus's body. He came to Jesus's tomb not with an empty heart but a gift for a nobleman or king. The abundance of spices was a sign of respect for the figure of a king. In this context, there is an implicit acknowledgement of Jesus's position as an honourable person, the messenger king of God.<sup>23</sup> F. F. Bruce adds that the abundance of spices was a burial ordinance for a king (cf. 2 Chronicles 16:14), so Nicodemus must have been in a similar recognition of Jesus's status as a king. George Hutcheson argues that the Jews gave spices because they believed that at the end of time the dead would rise with the same body.<sup>24</sup>

Second, the burial place for victims of *Mata Golo* is made separate from the graves of the people who died naturally (*mata ade*). In fact, in some places the bodies of people who died because of *Mata Golo* are buried near the ravine. Burying the bodies near the ravine clearly shows discrimination against *Mata Golo* victims. Canon 1180 states: "If the parish has its own cemetery, the faithful who have died must be buried there, unless another place of burial has been legitimately chosen by the deceased or by those authorized to take care of his funeral."<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, the Church views the cemetery as a sacred place and therefore recommends that it be blessed and that the cross of the Lord be erected as a sign of hope for the resurrection of all humanity. Indeed, there are some variations in funerals as they are adapted to the situation and traditions of each region, but funerals express the distinctive features of the Christian afterlife, which contains the hope for a resurrection. Funerals also show communion with the departed, which is evident through prayer for the purification of their souls.<sup>26</sup> Although funerals are adapted to the weight given by the family, custom and culture, the course of the ceremony is the same for all liturgical traditions: greetings to the congregation, worship of the word, Eucharistic sacrifice, and farewell.<sup>27</sup>

Funerals are an important part of death. It is no wonder that funerals are carefully prepared, both by family members and by the community. A proper funeral is part of the expression of respect and affection for the person who has passed away. Even burial procedures can be carried out in accordance with the will

<sup>23</sup> Henry D. M. Spence, *Pulpit Commentary* (New York, Toronto: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 2009), 234.

<sup>24</sup> George Hutcheson, *Bible Commentary on John*. (Scotland: Edinburgh, n.d.), 409.

<sup>25</sup> Paus Yohanes Paulus II, *Kitab Hukum Kanonik* (Jakarta: Obor, 1991), 1180 §1.

<sup>26</sup> Dokpen KWI, *Kopendikum Katekismus Gereja Katolik* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2013), 102.

<sup>27</sup> KWI, *Katekismus Gereja Katolik*, § 1685-1690.

or mandate of the deceased person to family members.<sup>28</sup> This is in line with the affirmation of Canon Law 1176 §2: “By an ecclesiastical funeral the church asks for spiritual help for the departed and honors their bodies and at the same time gives comfort in the form of hope to the living; the funeral must be celebrated according to the norms of the liturgical law.”<sup>29</sup> This makes it very clear that the Church regulates funeral matters to respect the body and has a comforting aspect for the living. Even church funerals are celebrated in the liturgical rites.

Schroter's finding of the Ngada people's success story in integrating two different belief systems, i.e. Roman Catholicism and Ngada customs, is something that must be recognized as a civilizational achievement. On the other hand, it must also be recognized as syncretism in parallelizing cultural elements. Roman Catholicism and Ngada culture were blended and then underwent new adaptations. This process is highly dynamic and is evidenced in the example of a death rite that provides a space for reflection and discussion, a space for social action and constructs a modern indigenous cosmology.<sup>30</sup> The results of Schroter's research must be criticized when parsing the elements in the *Mata Golo* ritual that contradict the teachings of the Christian faith. Up to this point, we have found that there are two problems that can be criticized related to the implementation of the *Mata Golo* ritual, namely the problem of respect for the sanctity of the body (corpse) and the problem of proper burial procedures.

When experiencing *Mata Golo* events, respect for human dignity must be questioned and criticized. Furthermore, different insights must be gained as a counter-effort to clear misunderstandings. In this context, adherents of the *Mata Golo* rite in Ngada culture need to open themselves to the light of the Gospel. The position of the Catholic Church is very clear that respect for the dignity of the human person is highly valued. Humans are valued in the unity of soul and body. Salvation in Catholic theology is an inseparable two-dimensional salvation. When humans experience death in any way, humans still deserve to be respected as dignified individuals. Thus, even when dealing with unnatural death, humans with their bodily aspects must be treated in a natural way; buried in a dignified manner and buried also with high respect.

## Conclusion

The *Mata Golo* ceremony in Ngada culture, in some ways, conflicts with Catholic theology, especially regarding respect for the body and proper burial procedures. Criticism from the perspective of the Catholic theology is needed for the sake of respect for the dignity of the human person. The researcher uses the perspective of contextual theology with a countercultural model, so that the *Mata Golo* ritual can be implemented based on respect for the dignity of the human person. In line with the Catholic theology, the Ngada community, in fact, highly respects human dignity. This is evident in the appreciation and respect that are commonly found in the daily lives of people, whether in health, sickness, or death. However, this does not apply in the case of unnatural deaths, or *Mata Golo*.

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<sup>28</sup> Sally Neparasi, *Allah Merangkul: Memaknai Kehidupan dan Kematian dalam Allah* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2018), 65.

<sup>29</sup> Can. 1176 § 2.

<sup>30</sup> Schröter, “Death Rituals of the Ngada in Central Flores, Indonesia.”

This study is very limited as it positions *Mata Golo vis-à-vis* the Catholic theology, because the perspective used is contextual theology with a countercultural model. This paper might tend to consider *Mata Golo* as a fear that is passed down from generation to generation. It is an inherited fear and suggestion that is difficult to accept with common sense if it is not illuminated by the spirit of the Gospel. This is a shortcoming of this article. The researchers have not explored in depth what this ritual contributes to the life of the local Church of the Archdiocese of Ende, especially for the people who observe this ritual. Therefore, future researchers are expected to identify the contribution of the *Mata Golo* ritual to the pastoral life of Catholics in Ngada and to contextual theology in the spirit of dialogue. Based on this perspective, the shortcomings of this research should be interpreted by future researchers and writers as a cultural wealth, which is an integral part of the Christian faith.

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