

## **Jakarta Toba Batak Subject Position in Toba Batak *Mangongkal Holi* Discourse: Laclau Discourse Analysis**

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A secondary burial practice known as *Mangongkal Holi* originated in the Toba Batak people. For hundreds of years, the Toba Batak tribe has incorporated this ceremony completely. *Mangongkal Holi*, unlike other Indonesian burial customs that have been successful in attracting tourists like the Ngaben and Rambu Solo celebrations, is going through an existential crisis, as evidenced by the somewhat less intense manner in which it is currently being practiced. The purpose of this study is to examine how the discourse around the *Mangongkal Holi* rite contributes to the development of Toba Batak cultural identity. In-depth interviews with Toba Batak tribal members served as the source of the research's data, along with a literature review. This study uses Ernesto Laclau's insight analysis as its analytical framework. According to the findings, the *Mangongkal Holi* ritual was articulated into four nodal points: reverence for ancestors, indifference to other religions, prestige, and unity. Based on the subject position analysis, the individuals from Jakarta Toba Batak demonstrate that there is a contingency of identity for Jakarta Toba Batak in the *Mangongkal Holi* discourse brought on by the individual's involvement with traditional institutions. The *Mangongkal Holi* rite seeks to promote clan harmony among those Jakarta Toba Batak people who have a close relationship with adat. It is no longer relevant to the social reality of Jakarta, which stresses efficiency in all aspects of life, such as time and money efficiency, for Jakarta Toba Batak people who are far from the *Mangongkal Holi* ceremony.

*Keywords: batak toba, identity, laclau, Mangongkal Holi*

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## INTRODUCTION

Jakarta is inhabited by diverse ethnicities and each ethnicity still maintains a relationship with its ancestral land in various ways. These efforts are related to the community's identity reconstruction carried out by the community. Reconstruction of one's identity involves a variety of tactics, such as upholding tribal traditions and rituals. Funeral customs are one strategy used to uphold the status quo. In Indonesia, several burial customs, such as the Rambu Solo rite in Toraja and the Ngaben ritual in Bali, have been effective as methods of reclaiming one's identity. The parallels between the two funeral rites are found in its function as cultural tourist attraction which helped rituals function as social unifying tool (Puspa, 2019; Randan et. al, 2021).

*Mangongkal Holi*, a secondary funeral custom of the Toba Batak tribe, is another tradition connected to identification. As secondary custom burial, *Mangongkal Holi* has been there for a very long time since megalithic periods. *Batu na pir*, which is located in the Toba Batak clan's ancestral house, is where a series of excavations of bones known as *saring-saring* from various areas are put. *Batu na pir* has the same function as sarcophagus which is communal graveyard used by ancient Batak Toba. The sarcophagus is strongly tied to the history of the ancient Toba Batak people, who worshiped their ancestors (Setiawan, 2009:98). Several earlier research have claimed that the *Mangongkal Holi* ritual existed in the Toba Batak society before Christianity, albeit under a different name (Vergouwen, 1967; Simatupang, 2002). This Toba Batak secondary burial custom is thought to have originated under the name *Horja* or *Horja Turun*. As part of an endeavor to eradicate pagan values from *Mangongkal Holi*, the name change tries to alter attitudes. Then, Christianity gradually displaced the Toba Batak tribe's pagan culture after it arrived (Vergouwen 1964).

Nowadays, The Toba Batak people practice *Mangongkal Holi* today as a way to pay homage to their ancestors. *Mangongkal Holi* is a celebration that is also used to strengthen clan ties among the Toba Batak people, also known as *Daliha Na Tolu*. According to Silalahi, et. al. (2019: 153), the accomplishment of the Toba Batak people's primary aims in life—namely, *hagabeon* (many offspring), *hamoraon* (rich prosperity), and *hasangapon*—can also be seen in the clans' application of this practice (high degree). *Mangongkal Holi* also has performance arts aspects that shown in gondang and tortor performance (Ikhwannudin, 2003). Ritual

which has performance values or art can be developed as cultural commodities (Caturwati et al., 2023).

The Toba Batak people in Jakarta maintain a connection to their ancestral areas through *Mangongkal Holi* in order to preserve their identity. However, perserving Batak identity in a city like Jakarta is not an easy feat. The *Mangongkal Holi* ritual cannot be carried out haphazardly because it requires quite a large amount of money not only to go to the ancestral lands but also to 'prepare' quite a large amount of land and expensive accommodation to build *saring saring* houses which serve as communal graves. Thus, the *Mangongkal Holi* ritual for the Toba Batak people in Jakarta is an effort to build family prestige by mobilizing the capital resources they have.

Problem arises when the prestige of the event or ritual takes precedence over its intended function. Additionally, those who are reluctant to help with secondary burial ceremonies may find it difficult to live up to the beliefs or standards of the Batak Toba community, which emphasise respect for parents. As a result, Toba Batak tribal members occasionally feel pressured by the splendor of *Mangongkal Holi* to save money so they can participate in the event.

The transformation that occurs in the *Mangongkal Holi* cannot be separated from custom and religion. This is demonstrated by the clan members' unwillingness to participate in the *Mangongkal Holi* celebration while maintaining their belief that rites thought to have their roots in paganism are still useful and preserve Toba Batak identity. This phenomenon is in line with the opinion of Watson-Jones and Legare (2016: 43) which states that ritual serves as a tool to identify group members, demonstrate commitment to group values, facilitate cooperation with social coalitions, and increase social group cohesion.

*Mangongkal Holi*, according to the explanation of the socio-historical context, cannot be understood as a ritual that merely serves to unite the Toba Batak tribe. It also suggests that there is a variation in Toba Batak ethnic identity from the standpoint of the Toba Batak ethnic unity. The myth of *Mangongkal Holi* can be described generally in accordance with Ernesto Laclau's theory, according to which myth serves to present discourse so that specific explanations regarding an occurrence in human life arise, and its existence cannot be separated from the interests of particular groups (Laclau, 1996). This study emphasizes how individual view of *Mangongkal Holi* is related to the reconstruction of

the Toba Batak people's identity in Jabodetabek. In connection with this, the primary issue in this study is how the *Mangongkal Holi* ceremony helps the Jabodetabek Toba Batak people restore its identity.

There have been several investigations of funeral rites in various cultures. So-Han (2019) investigates how South Korean funeral customs have changed over time. So-Han comes to the conclusion that, in addition to the socioeconomic background, the media also plays a role as an agency that promotes changes to the South Korean people's culture of memorialization and respect for the ancestors toward Western funeral culture. The Japanese burial custom known as *Soushiki*, which is still practiced in modern Japanese society, is examined by Tsuji (2006). Tsuji came to the following conclusions: 1) There are several contradictions and ambiguities in the discourse on funeral traditions, making it impossible to come to a consensus; and 2) There is a struggle between acceptance, negotiation, and personal resistance to tradition.

Another study on funeral practices was carried out by Handayani, Ahimsa-Putra, and Budiman in 2020. This study focused on how the aristocratic class in Toraja may continue to dominate the lower class in terms of funeral practices for Rambu Solo tradition. Handayani, et. al. came to the conclusion that the Toraja aristocrats were able to preserve their hegemony through three stages: forging new alliances, showing support for those who opposed ritual life, and achieving consensus among classes to uphold ritual existence.

According to Watson-Jones and Legare (2016: 43), ritual serves as a tool to identify group members, demonstrate adherence to group principles, facilitate cooperation with social coalitions, and increase social group cohesion. This phenomenon is consistent with their theory. They said that by streamlining ceremonies and distributing mangosteen in large quantities, issues encountered during the implementation of *Mangongkal Holi*, particularly financial ones, might be resolved. The issue of cemeteries in Indonesia may be resolved by *Mangongkal Holi*, according to a different research by Sibarani et al. (2020).

Studies with diverse paradigms and focuses are presented, and it is clear that neither the *Mangongkal Holi* ritual nor other death rites from other cultures use Laclau's contingency as a theory or perspective. This study is important because it demonstrates how the *Mangongkal Holi* ritual shapes the Toba Batak people's identity. According to Laclau (2010), analyzing identity through personal issues is

necessary to demonstrate the existence of political issues that are frequently disregarded in subjects of a general nature. According to Laclau, politics is an interest that certain groups have that sets them apart from other groups, resulting in conflict that fosters the development of identity (Haekal, 2019: 117). According to Laclau, identity is the outcome of the interactions between preexisting discourses and the development of circulating discourses.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study is to comprehend the Jakarta Toba Batak tribe's perspective on the *Mangongkal Holi* tradition. The major data utilized, namely the regions of Jakarta. In addition to field research, the study followed documentation and information on the *mangokal holi* rite that was disseminated in print, social, and electronic media. In-depth interviews employing recording equipment, photos, and notes marked the completion of the data collecting process.

In order to gather in-depth information about the potential role of Toba Batak identity in the *Mangongkal Holi* ritual, interviewees for this study were chosen based on a set of criteria. Traditional actors for *Mangongkal Holi*, priests, specialists in the festival's oral history, and members of the Toba Batak tribe who relocated to Jakarta served as the study's informants. Before being presented in the study, the acquired data is subsequently processed in accordance with the research goals.

In order to uncover nodal points concerning *Mangongkal Holi*; 1) Laclau's discourse analysis is to trace the numerous articulation processes that are present in *Mangongkal Holi*. By capturing the conversational dynamics that take place in public, articulation tracking is carried out. information gleaned through publications, papers, and laws; 2) The subject's place in the discourse is tracked and examined next. According to Laclau, the subject is an integral element of the discourse and as such, its position is defined by the discourse's field; 3) The third stage is to identify the oppositional stance in each discourse articulation. 4) The next phase is to sharpen the attention on the dynamics of the discourse with other discourses. According to Laclau, antagonists are not fixed and rely on the environment and conditions of discourse development.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Various Forms of Articulation Mangokal Holi**  
***Mangongkal Holi* executor's articulation as Kafir**

Tradition is legislation for the Batak people, according to *Mangongkal Holi* specialist Charles David Marudut Silalahi in an interview from 1 September 2022. The worldview and customary rites of the Toba Batak tribe have persisted to this day thanks to the viewpoint that adat is law. However, the Toba Batak tribe's dynamics are mostly based on beliefs, which has led to a distinct controversy. In Toba Batak community, which is now dominated by Christianity and Islam, the *Mangongkal Holi* rite carries a bad reputation because to its pagan origins. Because they identify their spouses with God through ancestor worship, those who perform the *Mangongkal Holi* rite are seen negatively because they are considered infidels. Despite the fact that the modern *Mangongkal Holi* festivities make no attempt to worship ancestral spirits as is done in the Pagan Batak Toba tradition.

#### ***Mangongkal Holi* articulation as unity**

The Batak Toba tribe's notion of identity is impacted by the prevalence of Christian discourse, which leads some to regard the *Mangongkal Holi* ritual as being beyond the scope of identification. Resistance to the spread of Islam in the coastal region of Sumatra served as the first confirmation of Batak identity [Reid \(2009, p. 155\)](#). Similar sentiments were voiced by Azhari, who claimed that this edifice was constructed by foreign ethnographers in order to ease community mapping in Sumatra (Hidayat & Damanik, 2018, p. 72). This identity frame was reinforced when the Padri invaded the northern part of Lake Toba in an effort to end Sumatra's heritage of spirit worship and other practices that were incompatible with Islamic principles. The Toba people are no longer bonded by their shared religious beliefs. The purpose of the *Mangongkal Holi*, as explained by Pastor Ance, is that the Toba Batak secondary burial rite aids in bringing the clan's dispersed members back together. In the Toba Batak tribe, *Mangongkal Holi* is a gathering or time for clan members to reconnect. The similar idea was also put out by [Nainggolan \(2006: 245\)](#), who said that the purpose of the *Mangongkal Holi* rite and the monument's building was to reinforce the bloodlines that had become distant owing to the migration of the Toba Batak. The rite therefore demonstrates the presence of a focal point of unification for the Toba Batak.

#### ***Mangongkal Holi* articulation as prestige and respect for ancestors**

*Mangongkal Holi* has a religious motivation as one of its causes. The monument was built in the 1960s to perform the *Mangongkal Holi* rite, which was performed to promote respect for parents (*asa sangap natuatua i*). This justification is thought to

be the Toba Batak people's interpretation of the Christian instruction to "respect your father and mother." However, the construction of the monument is really a form of ancestral worship. This phenomenon is cited as proof that even though the Toba Batak people are today classified as urban, Christian, and educated people, believe in the benefits of the ancestors is still prevalent ([Nainggolan, 2006: 244](#)).

The monument's construction serves to demonstrate the clan's international achievement. Success is regarded as being represented by the monument's expensive construction. According to [Nainggolan \(2006: 243\)](#), the enormous and splendid monuments in North Tapanuli were typically erected by migrants who were wealthy and had high economic class position in Jakarta, which led to social jealousy from other clans and the motivation to erect a monument for their own group. Therefore, it can be said that the monument's creation represents an effort to achieve or preserve status within the Toba Batak community.

#### **Subject Position in *Mangongkal Holi* Discourse**

It can be inferred from the prior discussion of the articulation process that there is a fight for meaning in the *Mangongkal Holi* discourse field. The interactions between myth, migrants, *Hasipelebeguan* religion, and Christianity demonstrate the emergence of nodal points, including reverence for ancestors, infidelity, prestige, and unity. Different terms can be utilized in the form of other metaphors, but stating them clearly in nodal points can help with explanation in analysis even though nodal points are not required in discourse studies ([Chronaki & Kolloosche, 2019: 462](#)).

The position of the subject in the debate surrounding *Mangongkal Holi* will be examined in this section. Individual Batak Toba immigrants to Jakarta are the subjects of this section's study. This section looks at two people in particular. An investigation of the subject positions of the two people, who are divided into two different generations, will be done in order to develop the discourse on Toba Batak identity through the *Mangongkal Holi* rite. Aron, a member of the Silitonga clan who was born on July 19, 1967, in South Tapanuli, served as the first informant. Based on the phenomena of monument construction by the Toba Batak in the 1960s, the first informant was chosen. Isak, the second informant, was born in Pematang Siantar on June 28, 1990. He belonged to the Siahaan clan.



Aron teaches as a lecturer in one of university at Jakarta. In July 2022, Aron participated in the *Mangongkal Holi* ceremony. Aron realized how important the secondary funeral ceremony is to the Toba Batak people's cultural life after taking part in the *Mangongkal Holi* celebration. Prior to this, Aron had no idea why the *Mangongkal Holi* rite was performed. After taking part in the *Mangongkal Holi* ritual and several traditional gatherings, Aron claimed that his comprehension of adat had improved.

Aron claimed that the younger Toba Batak tribe members in Jakarta were unaware of the *Mangongkal Holi* ritual's role in Batak culture as a means of bringing clans together. The younger Toba Batak generation's lack of comprehension is due to their inability to personally participate in the *Mangongkal Holi* rite. Aron also mentioned how the younger generation's impression of the *Mangongkal Holi* tradition was exacerbated by outside causes. The young Batak Toba generation in Jakarta is thought to have been prompted by outside forces to perceive the *Mangongkal Holi* rite as a deviance, particularly in light of religious beliefs. Aron was aware of the stigma attached to the *Mangongkal Holi* custom as a social outlier. Aron declared that while he was not against the existence of unfavorable opinions or individual dissatisfaction among the Toba Batak over the practice of the *Mangongkal Holi* rite, he was not in favor of it either.

The kaffir nodal point, one of the nodal points in the sphere of debate on the *Mangongkal Holi* rite, is referenced in Aron's statement. This demonstrates that even though the Toba Batak tribe's representative of Christianity, HKBP, has permitted rites to be performed, Toba Batak people still hold differing opinions. The major issue in the discussion of *Mangongkal Holi* that the rejection of this rite is not stated openly. It may be difficult to express opposition to the *Mangongkal Holi* custom because of the Toba Batak tribe's adat, which holds a position that is both equal to and sometimes even greater than that of religion (Tobing, 2020: 49).

*Mangongkal Holi* ceremony establishes the identity of Toba Batak people. According to Aron, *Mangongkal Holi* is a manifestation of Batak philosophy. Aron's perspective might be described as a counter-hegemony to the Batak Toba discourse hegemony in Jakarta. Additionally, it is said that the *Mangongkal Holi*, which is performed among the Toba Batak tribe, strengthens family ties by demonstrating respect for one another through customary presents and dinners. During the *Mangongkal Holi* tradition, donating to one another

strengthens the relationship between the participants. The Toba Batak tribe may be able to reunite and realize their familial links through the *Mangongkal Holi* tradition, according to Pastor Ance Sihotang, who was recently the subject of another interview. The *Mangongkal Holi* tradition can help Toba Bataks overcome their propensity to move, which could potentially put strain on family relationships.

Isak opposes the practice of *Mangongkal Holi*, in contrast to Aron, who uses it to define the essence of Toba Batak identity. Due to his parents' professional commitments, Isak moved to Jakarta when he was still in primary school. He resides in East Jakarta and is a lawyer. According to Isak, the *Mangongkal Holi* tradition is no longer appropriate given the circumstances facing the Toba Batak clan. He argued that the Toba Batak tribe's migration, particularly in Jakarta, was the reason they were no longer able to congregate in the region around Lake Toba. If the Toba Batak tribe is present in their hometown, they can still carry out the *Mangongkal Holi* tradition. Isak claimed that the Toba Batak community in Jakarta's adoption of the *Mangongkal Holi* ceremony could result in brand-new issues that would affect the effectiveness of the pilgrimage. Due to pilgrimage activities, placing clan cemeteries in hometowns can result in financial issues. The *Mangongkal Holi* tradition is therefore no longer applicable to contemporary issues that prioritize efficiency.

When Isak discusses the discussion surrounding the *Mangongkal Holi* ritual, the feeling of being intimidated takes on a binding quality for him. It's interesting to note that the experience of intimidation led to a category of adat that the Toba Batak in Jakarta and their hometown correctly practiced. Isak claimed that the reality he faced at the time was that many people opposed the adoption of *Mangongkal Holi*, as well as a number of other traditions that he omitted to specify. Because the conditions of living in the village were different from those in Jakarta, it called for distinct techniques and customary practices. This was the basis for the refusal. The customs of birth, marriage, and death are those that must be observed in Isak's opinion.

Isak's statement that classifying rituals or adat can be associated with rites of passage concept. According to Arnold [van Gennep](#)'s Rites of Passage (1960), rites are utilized in society to signify the change in stages of a person's life. The custom Isak proclaimed necessary represents the stages of human life in the Toba Batak tribe's existence, including birth, adulthood, marriage, and death. However, the

Toba Batak tribe's life stages are separated into four categories with the *Mangongkal Holi* ritual: birth, adulthood, death, and post-death (Silalahi et. al., 2019:151). Isak's position on the *Mangongkal Holi* ritual detaches it from being a rite of passage, demonstrating that the persistence of secondary burial ceremonies does not define Toba Batak identity.

Isak defined Batak identity through family ties, in this case the clan. Isak claimed that the clan is evidence that a person belongs to the Toba Batak tribe. Thus, it's crucial to comprehend the kinship that the clan represents. A narrowing of the notion of Batak is indicated by the determination of Toba Batak identity through familial ties. The clan aspect has become a determinant of Toba Batak identity due to the flow of modernization, the influence of religion on the development of Batak society, and the usage of non-Batak languages in the Toba Batak tribe (Pardede, 1985: 125). Another factor in the construction of Isak's identity is the distinction he makes between traditions that belong in the village and those that are not followed in Jakarta. This is in line with other research that claim that although the second generation of Toba Batak in Jakarta is still Toba Batak, they no longer consider themselves to be migrants (Nainggolan, 2006: 214).

It seems that there is no provision that establishes the identity of the Toba Batak through the *Mangongkal Holi* discourse, based on the two interviews that were done. The lack of consensus suggests a meaning contingency. Politics is what gives the Batak Toba identity its ambiguity. Politics determines a subject's identity within the social order. Aron's experience with a shift in his perception of the *Mangongkal Holi* rite demonstrates the existence of a political objective to bring the clan's members together who were dispersed as a result of the Toba Batak tribe's propensity for migratory behavior. Isak, on the other hand, does not see the *Mangongkal Holi* ritual in terms of a political attempt to bring the clans together. Isak claims that the *Mangongkal Holi* rite can be understood in terms of its usefulness and applicability to daily living in Jakarta. Because of these contrasting political ideologies, the Toba Batak identity is not fully defined.

## CONCLUSION

This study discovered that the discourse surrounding the *Mangongkal Holi* rite does not have a consistent definition of Toba Batak identity. The Toba Batak tribe's varied perspectives about the ritual performance displaying divisions are what causes

the contingency of the sense of identity in the discourse of the *Mangongkal Holi* rite. Political disagreements about the practice of *Mangongkal Holi* stemmed from the Toba Batak tribe's migration and the disparity between the social realities encountered in Jakarta.

In the situations examined, discrepancies in the social ties between the two informants were the root of the political disparities. The growth of political knowledge of the *Mangongkal Holi* ritual's implementation is caused by informants who have a social connection to traditional institutions or traditional activities. On the other hand, informants with less knowledge of adat think that this tradition is not related and cannot be applied to the social reality of the Jakarta Toba Batak. The issue is that the two informants' divergent worldviews do not display the required hostility to create a cohesive dialogue thus makes common sense aspect in Laclau terms can't be reached about this tradition.

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#### List of Reseource person/Informants

Ance Marintan D. Sihotang, HKBP priest, interview on 30 Agustus 2022 by Zoom.

Charles David Marudut Silalahi, lecturer Universitas Methodis Indonesia, interview by Zoom.

Dickson Silitonga, lecturer, interview on 20 September 2022 by Zoom.

Joel Raymond Siahaan, law consultant, interview on 1 Novembber 2022 by Zoom.