

THE UNITY OF COMMUNITY IN CEMETERY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE ISLAMIC BURIAL RITUALS IN ACEH, INDONESIA

Abdul Manan
Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Aceh, Indonesia
email: abdul.manan@ar-raniry.ac.id

Kamarullah
Universitas Muhammadiyah Mahakarya, Aceh, Indonesia
email: kamarullah@kampusummah.ac.id

Husaini Husda
Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Aceh, Indonesia
email: husaini.husda@ar-raniry.ac.id

Rasyad
Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Aceh, Indonesia
email: rasyad@ar-raniry.ac.id

Fauzi
Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Aceh, Indonesia
email: fauzi68@ar-raniry.ac.id

Abstract

Our study portrays burial rituals practiced by Aceh Province, Indonesia, as this ethnic group has distinctive traditions for burying deceased members of society due to the intertwining of cultures and religions in Aceh. The intertwining of the Islamic tenet with the local cultures has constructed the burial rituals in Aceh differently from any Islamic community in Indonesia. To discover the ritual's distinction as this study's focus, we explored three aspects of the rituals: processes, meanings, and implications. We integrated a qualitative approach through an ethnographic study by observing three burial rituals and interviewing 45 informants across the province. As a result, the processes covered initial meetings, grave cleansing, ceremonious announcement, feast, and pilgrimage. Regarding the ritual's meanings, we revealed that the Acehnese people practiced the burial rituals to expect God's blessing and forgiveness for the deceased, represent gratitude and homage toward the left family, affirm the local customs, and consolidate kinship relations. As for the implication, the series of rituals in burying a dead person in Aceh serves as a way to establish a vertical relationship from people to God, along with a horizontal relationship, from person to person, which contains local wisdom representing the identity of Aceh. The urgency of burial rituals reflects communities' harmony and adherence to cultural and religious beliefs regardless of any condition.

Keywords: *Aceh; Islamic burial rituals; community perceptions; cultural diversities; death rituals; Indonesia; kinship relations.*

* Corresponding author, email: abdul.manan@ar-raniry.ac.id

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Abstrak

Studi kami menggambarkan ritual penguburan jenazah yang dilakukan di Aceh, Indonesia, yang memiliki tradisi khas disebabkan jalinan budaya dan Islam. Jalinan telah membangun ritual penguburan di Aceh secara berbeda dari komunitas Islam di Indonesia. Untuk menemukan kekhasan dari ritual tersebut, kami mengeksplorasi proses, makna, dan implikasinya. Kami mengintegrasikan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi etnografi dengan melakukan pengamatan langsung terhadap tiga ritual penguburan dan wawancara dengan 45 informan di seluruh Aceh. Sebagai hasilnya, proses ritual meliputi pertemuan awal, pembersihan kuburan, pengumuman upacara, kenduri, dan ziarah. Terkait dengan makna dari ritual tersebut, kami menemukan bahwa masyarakat Aceh melakukan ritual penguburan untuk mengharapkan berkah dan pengampunan Allah bagi jenazah, mewakili rasa terima kasih dan penghormatan kepada keluarga yang ditinggalkan, menegaskan adat istiadat setempat, dan mempererat hubungan kekerabatan. Kemudian sebagai implikasinya, rangkaian ritual penguburan di Aceh ini berfungsi sebagai sarana untuk menjalin hubungan vertikal antara manusia dengan penciptanya, serta hubungan horizontal antar manusia, yang mengandung kearifan lokal yang mewakili identitas Aceh. Urgensi pelaksanaan ritual penguburan mencerminkan kerukunan dan kepatuhan masyarakat terhadap keyakinan budaya dan agama dalam kondisi apa pun.

Kata Kunci: Aceh; Ritual penguburan Islam; persepsi masyarakat; keberagaman budaya; ritual kematian; Indonesia; hubungan kekerabatan.

مستخلص

تصور دراستنا طقوس الدفن التي تمارسها مقاطعة آتشيه في إندونيسيا ، حيث أن هذه المجموعة العرقية لها تقاليد مميزة في دفن العضو المتوفى في المجتمع بسبب تداخل الثقافات والأديان في آتشيه. أدى تداخل العقيدة الإسلامية مع الثقافات المحلية إلى بناء طقوس الدفن في آتشيه بشكل مختلف عن أي مجتمع إسلامي في إندونيسيا. استكشفنا عملياتها ومعانيها وآثارها لاكتشاف تمييز الطقوس. لقد قمنا بدمج نهج نوعي من خلال دراسة إثنوغرافية من خلال إجراء ملاحظات مباشرة لثلاث طقوس دفن ومقابلات مع 45 مختبراً في جميع أنحاء المقاطعة. وشملت العمليات الاجتماعية الأولية ، وتطهير القبور ، والإعلان الاحتفالي ، والعيد ، والحج. وكشفنا عن أن شعب آتشيه مارس طقوس الدفن انتظاراً لبركة الله ومغفرة المتوفى ، وتمثل الامتنان والإجلال للعائلة اليسرى ، وتأكيداً للعادات المحلية ، وترسيخاً لعلاقات القرابة. تعمل سلسلة الطقوس في دفن شخص ميت في آتشيه كطريقة لتأسيس علاقة عمودية من الناس إلى الله ، جنباً إلى جنب مع علاقة أفقية ، من شخص لآخر ، تحتوي على حكمة محلية تمثل هوية آتشيه. تعكس الحاجة الملحة لإجراء طقوس الدفن انسجام المجتمعات والتزامها بالمعتقدات الثقافية والدينية بغض النظر عن أي ظروف.

.الكلمات الرئيسية : آتشيه. طقوس الدفن الإسلامية. تصورات المجتمع؛ تنوع ثقافي؛ طقوس الموت إندونيسيا؛ علاقات القرابة

A. Introduction

Cultural diversity owned by Indonesia appealed, which is different from other countries. The existing culture is a heritage passed down through generations of ancestors and has many values. The culture derives from the large number of ethnic groups that inhabit the territory of Indonesia. There are about 300 tribes or ethnic groups having different cultural

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forms. Meanwhile, the Central Bureau of Statistics of Indonesia successfully discovered 1,128 tribes inhabiting the islands of Indonesia¹.

The cultural diversity in Indonesia has spawned its various manifestations of customs, ceremonies, and traditions. The ethnicities in Indonesia still maintain those manifestations. Those rituals include marriage, customs, birth, death, and others. A ritual symbolizes concepts containing the belief system². Manan³ portrays those as he examines the calendrical ritual of people in South Aceh; the Acehnese people living there had developed social values based on the intertwining of the importance of Islam and local values, which in turn, shaped a distinctive Islamic society than any other Islamic society in Indonesia. In the view of anthropology, a ceremonial ritual is a form of behavioral manifestation of religious humans energized and imbued by the emotion of religion. There are procedures to treat something concerned as sacred⁴. The ritual is the disclosure to declare a unique and blessed relationship. It combines various elements such as the ritual of prayer, sacrifice, having a feast, and organizing the customary event⁵. Besides, according to Nasution⁶, the functions of the ritual are to strengthen unity, enhance *silaturahmi* (friendship) in daily life, and build a sense of togetherness based on the principle of *gotong royong* (cooperation). Commonly, regular cultural events in Indonesia last in a series of events or stages that require people's participation. Hutchinson and Aragon⁷ believe that the mortuary or burial ritual is the most apparent cultural event where kinship and social relationships become the main foundation.

Moreover, people are also proud of their rituals related to the functions. A communication forum between the older and younger generations frequently conveys a message about a better future life. Fostering traditional values, which restrain against the rain and heat, is associated with the forum. It reflects that ritual functions in human life, explicitly strengthening their relations.

¹ Hildred Geertz, *Aneka Budaya dan Komunitas di Indonesia [The Variety of Cultures and Communities in Indonesia]* (Jakarta: Yayasan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial, 2001).

² Jack Goody, "Religion and Ritual: The Definitional Problem," *The British Journal of Sociology* 12, no. 2 (June 1961): 142, <https://doi.org/10.2307/586928>; Aaron C. T. Smith and Bob Stewart, "Organizational Rituals: Features, Functions and Mechanisms," *International Journal of Management Reviews* 13, no. 2 (June 2011): 113–33, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2010.00288.x>.

³ Abdul Manan, "The Ritual Calendar of South Aceh, Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 5, no. 1 (2017): 59, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v5i1.120>. <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v5i1.120>

⁴ Hadikusuma H. Hilman, *Antropologi Agama [Religion Anthropology]* (Bandung: Aditya, 1993).

⁵ Muhammad Nur, *Antropologi Agama [Religion Anthropology]* (Banda Aceh: Ar-Raniry Press, 2007).

⁶ Harun Nasution, *Falsafat Dan Mistisme Dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 2014).

⁷ Dale L. Hutchinson and Lorraine V. Aragon, "Collective Burials and Community Memories: Interpreting the Placement of the Dead in the Southeastern and Mid-Atlantic United States with Reference to Ethnographic Cases from Indonesia," *Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 11, no. 1 (June 2008): 27–54, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ap3a.2002.11.1.27>.

This article explores a burial-relating ritual in Aceh Province called *khanduri jeurat* (having a series of ceremonies in a graveyard). The province is located on the western tip of Sumatra Island, Indonesia. This province is famous for its Sharia law, as it regulates almost all communities' activities related to Islamic teachings. We try to discover the local burial rituals that fuse culture and religion. The locals commonly hold the ceremony after Eid al-Fitr since many still gather with their families. It also happens on days before Eid al-Adha. The burial rituals are carried out for notable figures or even commoners. Besides, the timing of the practice is also based on consideration of *uroe buleuen* (the day of the moon). The community believes that Eid is a *buleuen geut* (good month) to carry out the ritual concerning the slight potential of bad weather. This consideration becomes the priority and a solid reason for the community figures to implement the event. As a result, there will be no bad weather during the ritual, which can hinder the performance. However, we note another typical attempt by requesting rain handlers to avoid bad weather on special occasions, like the tsunami commemoration in the capital of Aceh Province⁸ and even a global event, Mandalika MotoGP 2022, in the country⁹. Still, this condition cannot be separated by the cosmological belief within Indonesian communities, including Aceh, although they cannot deny that such practice may contradict Islamic teachings.

Furthermore, in Aceh, where the Islamic tenet entangles with local values, we uplift an interesting notion based on the long history of Aceh, "*Adat ngon hukom lagee zat ngeun sifeut*" (the tradition and the Sharia law resemble the relation between a thing and its characters). It proves that Acehnese cultures claim every Acehnese tradition within the scope of the Islamic tenet, which has inspired the local government to promote its Halal tourism to sound the Sharia¹⁰. However, the former values of Hinduism, a majority religion before Islam, are still available in the Acehnese community. The exciting notion is how both values intertwine and adapt to Islamic values. To this matter, we highlight *khanduri jeurat* as it promotes the infused cultures.

The condition above leaves a gap as the practice of *khanduri jeurat* is strongly associated with preparing a communal feast in the locals' circles as well as to 'aid' the deceased to have a better deed in the hereafter. This ritual assembles another ritual, *tulak breuh* (pushing rice), to pay the debt of the dead regarding his or her absence of prayers

⁸ Adi Warsidi, "Pawang Hujan Di Peringatan 10 Tahun Tsunami Aceh [Rain Handlers in the 10 Years Commemoration of Aceh Tsunami]," *Tempo.co*, 2014.

⁹ Indonesia Expat, "The Rain Handler of Mandalika MotoGP 2022," *Indonesia Expat*, 2022.

¹⁰ Abdul Manan et al., "Halal Tourism: A Proposed Sharia Model for Implementation," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 11, no. 1 (January 2023): 81–100, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v11i1.784>.

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during their life¹¹. This concept is still preserved in this Sharia-based region, which in some ways, resembles other non-Islamic rituals, where the deceased's soul may appear and 'observe' within during the ritual procession¹². Therefore, an in-depth investigation must explore the ritual's values, processes, meanings, and implications.

Several studies examined this ritual's existence and its meaning within the community. Andriansyah¹³ and Muliana¹⁴ focus on the ceremonial practices engaged during the annual feast held in the graveyard by the people of Aceh and portray its meaning to them. A similar study by Iqbal and Mahmuddin¹⁵ explores the case study in Southwest Aceh Regency, Indonesia, which merely focuses on the time procession of *khanduri jeurat* and its meaning towards divinity. Further, our study offers a different scope of discussion from the previous studies. We center our research objectives on discovering how kinship relations are made in burial rituals by elaborating on their processes, meanings, and implications. We also relate the tradition with the previous global challenge, the COVID-19 pandemic. By analyzing such, a concept of harmonious community can be magnified. This study is significant for Islamic studies in Indonesia, which is substantial since it is the most Islamic-populated country in the world. Additionally, our article may enrich cultural, social, and cosmological study knowledges.

Symbolical Meanings in Cultural Diversities

A symbolic definition in the cultural study is part of a trend concerning a culture as a study of meanings. At the same time, anthropologist examines the code and message system humans receive through the interaction of humans and the natural world. It has a relationship

¹¹ Abdul Manan et al., "Tulak Breuh as Paying Fine within Muslim Communities in Aceh: The Practice, Perspectives, and Debate," *Contemporary Islam*, November 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-023-00547-4>; Lukman Hakim and Ahmad Sunawari Long, "The Tradition of Tulak Breuh as a Fidyah of Prayer in Aceh Besar Society: A Study of Law Theology," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 5, no. 1 (June 2021): 191, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjkh.v5i1.8817>.

¹² Jeff Clyde Corpuz, "Death and Food Offering: The Ilocano 'Atang' Ritual from a Contextual Theology," *Recoletos Multidisciplinary Research Journal* 8, no. 1 (June 2020): 113–26, <https://doi.org/10.32871/rmrj2008.01.08>; Saifur Rashid, "Meaning and Rituals of Death: An Insight into Selected Ethnic and Religious Communities of Bangladesh," *Vietnam Social Sciences*, no. 5 (2020): 75.

¹³ Dedi Andriansyah, "Tradisi Khanduri Kuburan Pada Masyarakat Aceh Di Desa Pulo Tengah Kecamatan Darul Makmur Kabupaten Nagan Raya [The Acehese Tradition of Burial Ritual in Desa Pulo Tengah, the Sub-Regency of Darul Makmur, the Regency of Nagan Raya]" (Universitas Negeri Medan, 2012).

¹⁴ Nova Muliana, "Tradisi Khanduri Jeurat Di Desa Alue Ambang Kecamatan Teunom [The Tradition of Khanduri Jeurat in Alue Ambang Village, the Sub-Regency of Teunom]" (Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, 2015).

¹⁵ Bagus Iqbal and Mahmuddin Mahmuddin, "Kenduri Jirat Pada Masyarakat Gampong (Studi Kasus Di Gampong Lampoh Drien Kecamatan Susoh Kabupaten Aceh Barat Daya) [Burial Ritual of the Locals on Lampoh Drien Village, the Sub-Regency of Susoh, the Regency of Southeast Aceh]," *Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Fakultas Ilmu Saosial & Ilmu Politik* 4, no. 4 (2019), <https://www.jim.unsyiah.ac.id/FISIP/article/view/12972>.

since signs mark the whole universe. In another belief, a ceremony held around the cemetery reflects tradition and a firm intention for having a relationship among attendees. Valk¹⁶ describes how Christians living in Setomaa, a district in Estonia, perceive their tradition of having meals on the graves as more than a rooted tradition. It reflects three meanings; first, considering that the cemetery or grave is the destination of the dead; second, the graveyard becomes the meeting point between people who still live and the dead; third, the communication can likely occur during the right time in holidays. If the fact that human beings communicate with form, sign, and symbol is actual, real anthropologists conduct universal research in their scope¹⁷. The characters in a ritual may show all intents and purposes of a ceremony conducted by its community. It also contains the value of the culture of its ancestors and applies to symbols in religious rituals. All forms of commemorating a burial ritual integrated by a community are symbolic. In the tradition of indigenous customs, the symbolism is very noticeable in the practices of the indigenous hereditary¹⁸.

Studies of Burial Rituals

Conceptually, death rituals performed by certain believers in Southeast Asia countries share two common principles, namely the death remembrance and solidarity forum, regardless of their different ways of execution. To give a picture, we exemplify *atang*, a death and food offering ritual conducted by Christian Northern Philippines. It is believed to have the values to strengthen the fellowship between the living and the dead and develop the dogma of their Saints' communion¹⁹. Similarly, Lao Buddhist monks in Laos send offerings and prayers to good and lousy dead to guarantee their life hereafter²⁰. Too, Hindus and Muslims in Bali, Indonesia, build a sense of solidarity called *menyama-braya*. Each side prepares the funeral sites, carries the corpse, and offers other assistance while praying based on their beliefs²¹. We underline that when a death happens in amongst communities in certain

¹⁶ Heiki Valk, "Cemeteries and Ritual Meals: Rites and Their Meaning in the Traditional Seto World-View," in *Estonian Study of Religion*, ed. Anders Andr n, Kristina Jennbert, and Catharina Raudvere (Lund, 2019), 357–72.

¹⁷ Achmad Fedyani Saifuddin, *Antropolog Kontemporer: Suatu Pengantar Kritis Mengenai Paradigma [Contemporary Anthropology: A Critical Introductory of Paradigm]* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2006).

¹⁸ Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021).

¹⁹ Corpuz, "Death and Food Offering: The Ilocano 'Atang' Ritual from a Contextual Theology."

²⁰ Vanina Bout , "Good Death, Bad Death and Ritual Restructuring: The New Year Ceremonies of the Phunoy in Northern Laos," in *Buddhist Funeral Cultures of Southeast Asia and China*, ed. Paul Williams and Patrice Ladwig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 99–118.

²¹ I Gst. Pt. Bagus Suka Arjawa and Zulkifli Zulkifli, "The Social Integration of Hindu and Muslim Communities: The Practice of 'Menyama-Braya' in Contemporary Bali," *Studia Islamika* 28, no. 1 (April 2021), <https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v28i1.10914>.

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cultures, people will help each other, no matter the deceased's religion, considering the values they believe in.

As the most populated Muslim country globally, Indonesia has integrated Islam into various communities' activities. Historical and contemporary Islamic cultures are vibrant in the four big Indonesian islands – Sumatra, Java, Borneo, and Celebes, while only Papua Island dominates with its Christianity. Though the domination of Islam spreads in society, Indonesians do not obliterate the indigenous beliefs and practices by giving up all their old customs²². When we mention the cultural manifestation, we refer predominantly to the life-cycle rituals by fusing the local beliefs and the scope of Islamic teaching. For instance, marriage rituals in East Java feature the interplay between Hindus and Islamic law to negotiate a hybrid ceremony merging both beliefs²³.

Similarly, Dayak communities in West Borneo receive a religious identity transformation as they preserve their local Christian-based interbreeding with the Islamic context²⁴. In Java, the famous *wiwitan*, the product of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic cultures, serves as a cultural space for religious and humanitarian values²⁵. Regardless of the population's majority or minority, as long as communities are not banished from their native land, in nature, they may conserve their cultural identity, as reported by Wiryomartono²⁶ within Toraja Christians in South Celebes.

For specific communities, praying in a particular graveyard serves to request favors. An ethnographic study by Sanusi²⁷ reveals that traditionalist Muslims in East Java visit the demigod's grave on Fridays to cope with their religion, orthodoxy, culture, and even economic issues. This condition is not applicable in urban areas due to the sociocultural

²² Muhammad Ali, "Muslim Diversity: Islam and Local Tradition in Java and Sulawesi, Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 1, no. 1 (June 2011): 1–35, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v1i1.1-35>.

²³ Muh. Fathoni Hasyim, Liliek Channa AW, and Moh. Mufid, "The Walagara Marriage Ritual: The Negotiation between Islamic Law and Custom in Tengger," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 14, no. 1 (June 2020): 139–62, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2020.14.1.139-162>.

²⁴ Abdul Halim, Abd. Basyid, and Prihananto Prihananto, "Religious Identity Transformation: Cultural Interbreeding Between Dayak Indigenous Culture and Islam," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 15, no. 1 (June 2021): 171–92, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2021.15.1.171-192>.

²⁵ Agus Maimun, Agus Indiyanto, and M. Mujab, "Educating Islamic Values Through Wiwitan Tradition," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 14, no. 2 (December 2020): 359–86, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2020.14.2.359-386>.

Bagoes Wiryomartono, "The Rituals of the Smoke: Power, Ethnicity, and Architecture in Tana Toraja, Indonesia," in *Perspectives on Traditional Settlements and Communities* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2014), 49–67, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4585-05-7_4.

²⁷ Burhanudin Sanusi, "Jum'atan in the Graveyard: An Anthropological Study of Pilgrims in the Grave of Sunan Gunung Jati Cirebon, West Java," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 4, no. 2 (December 2010): 317–40, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2010.4.2.317-340>.

pressure on cemeteries²⁸. Meanwhile, as a part of death rites, a burial ritual becomes a means of economic practice. As observed by Sudarmoko²⁹, communities in West Sumatra view the rituals as both consecrated and profane compulsions, where they manage funds for the dead's event as a support form.

Burial Rituals in Aceh

Death rituals in Aceh depict the significance of people's way of life. Acehnese culture reflects social values that grow from society, which will turn into customs, traditions, and behavioral practices that are respected, acknowledged, recognized, and preserved by its community³⁰. Aceh has a diverse culture and tradition where the practices and performances are regulated and influenced by the values of Islam. Ahmad³¹ believes that much or less, the cultural activities of the Acehnese people are derived from the acculturation and mixture of Islamic and Hindu beliefs. This perception is supported by Arifin dan Khambali, where one of the burial activities, *rah ulei* (washing head), is a cultural acculturation of both³². Manan³³ mentions that they primarily perform certain cultural rituals such as birth, death, circumcision, and marriage to maintain their ethnicity's religious and educational values. From many traditions, the death ritual is considered one of the practices influenced by other religious beliefs (Hindu or Buddhist) implemented in socio-life Acehnese activity. The habit became the most common rite practiced by the Acehnese people. It has undoubtedly been preserved and believed to carry religious and good deed values. Those who do not follow or participate in this ritual may bring disgrace to their social life as being negligent of their ancestors' tradition.³⁴.

The burial rituals are distinguishably performed in almost all areas of Aceh, including the time and techniques of their implementation. *Khanduri jeurat*, the local name for burial

²⁸ Raditya Hari Murti, "Sociocultural Pressure on Cemeteries in Jakarta, Indonesia and Its Impact," *World Review of Science, Technology and Sustainable Development* 18, no. 2 (2022): 159–75.

²⁹ Koko Sudarmoko, "Fundraising Management in Death Rituals in Indonesian Society," *Asia-Pacific Journal of Business* 1, no. 2 (2010): 47–63.

³⁰ R Khalsiah et al., "An Analysis of Culture Value in Adat Bak Poe Teumeureuhom, Hukom Bak Syiah Kuala, Qanun Bak Putro Phang, Reusam Bak Binatara," *Indian Journal of Public Health* 9, no. 12 (2018).

³¹ Kamaruzzaman Bustamam Ahmad, *Acehnologi* (Banda Aceh: Bandar Publishing, 2012).

³² Muhammad Arifin and Khadijah Binti Mohd Khambali, "Islam Dan Akulturasi Budaya Lokal Di Aceh (Studi Terhadap Ritual Rah Ulei Di Kuburan Dalam Masyarakat Pidie Aceh)," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 15, no. 2 (February 2016): 251–84, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v15i2.545>.

³³ Abdul Manan, "Islamic Educational Values in Life-Cycle Rituals: An Ethnographic Study in Kluet Timur Community, Aceh, Indonesia," in *Global Perspectives on Teaching and Learning Paths in Islamic Education*, ed. Miftachul Huda et al., Advances in Educational Technologies and Instructional Design (Hershey: IGI Global, 2020), 118–34, <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-8528-2>.

³⁴ Abdul Manan and Muhammad Arifin, "Cultural Traditions in Death Rituals Within the Community of Pidie, Aceh, Indonesia," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 43, no. 1 (2019): 130, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v43i1.670>.

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rituals, is mainly known for its feast or banqueting. Muhammad³⁵ defines *khanduri* as a communal feast of Acehese communities. People visit places like houses, *meunasah* (small mosques), or open fields to gather and have a meal together. In Javanese culture, *khanduri* has a close meaning with *slametan*, distributing meals conducted communally as social and moral support for the dead and deceased family³⁶. In a broader context, *khanduri* may assemble as a *kondangan* (invitation), a specific event with payers and feasts. We can underline that this ritual serves as a food banquet to commemorate certain events, asks for Allah's blessing, and strengthens the sense of brotherhood. Islamic prayers and blessings are often part of the *khanduri* and include Islamic elements in the ritual meals to make it an Islamic festivity³⁷. Acehese people generally conduct *khanduri* during events such as birthdays³⁸, naming babies³⁹, circumcision, marriage⁴⁰, first infant bathing⁴¹, and death⁴². Meanwhile, the second term, *jeurat* is the hole of a grave used to bury the bodies. Thus, *khanduri jeurat* is a proper meal enjoyed together in a cemetery, carried out hereditarily and annually.

This burial ritual is also widely held in several parts of Aceh Province. The communities typically perform burial rituals by reciting *tahlil* (prayers for asking blessings from Allah and Prophet Muhammad) or *samadiyah* (praying for death) led by a *teungku* (religious leader). The merit of the prayer is addressed to the dead in the grave on which the ritual takes place. It differs from other practices, such as the ritual of *bungong kayee* (wooden flower)⁴³, the ritual of *laot* (sea)⁴⁴, and the ritual of *apam* (name of local cake in Aceh Province)⁴⁵, which respectively take place in houses, the beach, or even at the rice fields.

³⁵ Muhammad Nur, *Antropologi Agama [Religion Anthropology]*. (Banda Aceh: Ar-Raniry Press, 2007).

³⁶ Muhammad Yusri Yusof and Mohd Anuar Ramli Salleh, "Local Wisdom in Agony of Death among Malay-Muslim Society in Malaysia," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 9, no. 9 (2019), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/IJARBSS/v9-i9/6308>.

³⁷ Howard M Federspiel, *A Dictionary of Indonesian Islam* (Ohio Univ. Center for Internat. Studies, 1995).

³⁸ Abdul Manan, "Pregnancy and Childbearing in Aceh, Indonesia: An Ethnographic Study," *Mankind Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2021): 10–31, <https://doi.org/10.46469/mq.2021.62.1.2>; Manan, "Islamic Educational Values in Life-Cycle Rituals: An Ethnographic Study in Kluet Timur Community, Aceh, Indonesia."

³⁹ Abdul Manan, "Naming Acehese Babies," *Mankind Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (2022): 687–711, <https://doi.org/10.46469/mq.2022.62.4.7>.

⁴⁰ Abdul Manan, "The Ritual of Marriage," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 2, no. 2 (2014): 17–44.

⁴¹ Abdul Manan, "The Ritual of First Infant Bathing in Aceh: An Ethnographic Study in West Labuhan Haji, South Aceh," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 3, no. 2 (2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v3i2.5466>.

⁴² Abdul Manan and Muhammad Arifin, "Cultural Tradition in Death Rituals within the Community of Pidie, Aceh-Indonesia," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 43, no. 1 (December 2019): 130, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v43i1.670>.

⁴³ Abdul Manan, "The Ritual of Khanduri Bungong Kayèe (An Ethnographic Study in West Labuhan Haji-South Aceh)," *Antropologi Indonesia* 34, no. 2 (2014): 88–100, <https://doi.org/10.7454/ai.v34i2.3965>.

Prayer is the most prominent spiritual material in worship and religious rituals; in Islam, even prayers become the center of activities as any ‘earthly’ activities are merely considered intermezzo prayers⁴⁶. There are the tiers of prayer that are most widely implemented. First, prayer manifests the need for something like solving problems or suffering. Second, the prayer has a form of gratitude upon Allah for all His mercies. At last, it is a form of asking forgiveness for all sins and mistakes.⁴⁷ Bernard⁴⁸ also argues that the religious ritual has a social function in identifying the community’s solidarity. Some believers obey their religion earnestly, but not a few of those who only do it not noticeably. However, they keep carrying out the ritual since it is a social obligation. The implementation is employed in some places. One of them is carried out in tombs. The tombs are considered sacred places⁴⁹. Death has long been interestingly discussed in several disciplines, namely sociology, theology, philosophy, and anthropology since its inevitable occurrences are perceived differently throughout the era⁵⁰.

Moreover, funeral rites have been worldly done as a response to the event of death. Everything associated with foods or meals served during the ceremony would emphasize the cultural identity, invigorate kinship and familyhood, and allow a sense of soothing and emotional support for the mourning event⁵¹. Thus, attending a funeral, commonly known as *ziarah* (pilgrimage), has been considered a habit and need, specifically praying to those who died and getting lessons from life. Even though the Islamic tenet suggests *ziarah*, how people perform it differs from one Islamic community to another. For instance, most Arabic communities practice *ziarah* by merely visiting the graveyard.

⁴⁴ Abdul Manan, “The Ritual of Khanduri Laot in Lowland Aceh: An Ethnographic Study in South, Southwest and West Aceh,” *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 40, no. 2 (October 2016), <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v40i2.300>.

⁴⁵ Abdul Manan, “The Ritual Calendar of South Aceh, Indonesia.” *Wissenschaftliche Schriften den WWU Muenster* 2015. <https://repository.ar-raniry.ac.id/id/eprint/3104> and <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v5i1.120>

⁴⁶ M Ashraf Al Haq et al., “Islamic Prayer, Spirituality and Productivity: An Exploratory Conceptual Analysis,” *Al-Iqtishad: Journal of Islamic Economics* 8, no. 2 (July 2016): 271–86, <https://doi.org/10.15408/aiq.v8i2.3160>.

⁴⁷ Muhammad Nur, *Antropologi Agama [Religion Anthropology]*.

⁴⁸ L L Bernard, “The Sociological Interpretation of Religion,” *The Journal of Religion* 18, no. 1 (1938): 1–18.

⁴⁹ Bustanuddin Agus, *Agama Dalam Kehidupan Manusia [Religions in the Human Life]* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2006).

⁵⁰ Toffa Akuetey Bernard, Mawuli Adzei, and Alberta Aseye Ama Duhoe, “The Irony in Funeral of Two Religious Sects in Ghana: A Comparative Study in Islam and Christianity,” *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities* 1, no. 3 (2020): 59–71.

⁵¹ Jacqueline S Thursby, *Funeral Festivals in America: Rituals for the Living* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

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In contrast, in the Islamic community in Indonesia, the practice may differ as some rituals exist, such as spreading flowers on the grave, as practiced by the Javanese Muslim community⁵². Such ways, which depicted an intertwining between Islamic tenets and local traditions, make the traditions relating to death in Indonesia unique, thus requiring further studies. Our article may contribute to the knowledge that a demise transmits and strengthens a bond of community's brotherhood by particular customs in rural areas, which we see increasingly disappear within communities' metropolises.

We conducted this descriptive approach utilizing ethnographic studies as we attempted to explore and share the process and implication of the burial ritual carried out by the Acehnese people. The research board of the faculty of Adab and Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh, Indonesia, approved the ethical consideration of this article. After the consent of the proposal and research protocols, we started the fieldwork in 2021 for ten months; in the meantime, we have listed interview items from related literature and extensive fieldwork.

We considered an ethnographic study appropriate as it might depict a complex societal phenomenon and its values toward them⁵³. We transmitted empirical evidence of the ritual by implementing observation and interviews. Using observation as field notes was to analyze the factual practice of burial rituals in the study universe. We have observed three burial rituals – two men and one female, in the southern and western regions of Aceh Province. We could not share the visualization of the burial ritual as the communities prohibited it and might offend the deceased's family.

Additionally, to verify the recorded data, we interviewed 45 informants across Aceh; the central research area was southern, western, and eastern Aceh; the ethnic Aceh inhabits those three main areas. We selected them using a snowball sampling of community leaders, local religious teachers, traditional practitioners, families, and key informants. In this interview phase, we focused on their critical views on the “values in the burial ritual's participation” conducted by the Acehnese people. As most informants could not speak English, we delivered the interview questions in the Acehnese language and Indonesian. Before completing the observation and interview, we confirmed with all participants who could intently agree that their data would be published. We also retrieved the confirmation

⁵² Subri Subri, “Ziarah Makam Antara Tradisi Dan Praktek Kemusyikan [Pilgrimage Between the Tradition and Polytheism],” *Edugama: Jurnal Kependidikan Dan Sosial Keagamaan* 3, no. 1 (2017): 67–87, <https://doi.org/10.32923/edugama.v3i1.684>.

⁵³ Loshini Naidoo, “Ethnography: An Introduction to Definition and Method,” *An Ethnography of Global Landscapes and Corridors*, no. November (2012), <https://doi.org/10.5772/39248>.

from a related institution called Majelis Adat Aceh (the Board for Acehese Cultures and Traditions). Each informant spent seven to ten minutes answering the questions, where most locations depended on their preferences and availability.

Furthermore, we transcribed and analyzed the data in three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing⁵⁴. During the data reduction, we detached responses or information from the interviews and focused on the significant arguments for the data display. Next, we transcribed it into descriptive narrative form. In the second stage, we drew the data, which were narrative descriptive, after we selected substantial ideas from the interviews. We chose the reduced transcriptions in the first stage of this article, displaying the most related ones. In a conclusion drawing, we concluded the informants' views on the values of the burial rituals they conducted⁵⁵. Besides, the data we presented in this article was from narratives from interview excerpts (marked by E followed by a number to ease readers). We also inserted the narrative description based on field note-taking, particularly for the ritual processes.

The data we retrieved further exposed the gender and age of the informants. The majority was male. Among 45 informants, the more significant population was the aged 31-40 (53%). Then, 36% of the informants were aged 41-50 years, while those aged 51-60 were 7% of the total. The rest, informants, aged 20-30 years, were only 4%.

Meanwhile, the data also displayed the informants' relatives staying in the same village. The results varied. Forty percent of them had four families or more who resided near their neighborhood. Other informants had three families (22%) and two (18%) within their community. Six informants (13%) admitted having only one relative nearby, while only three (3%) had no family.

In addition, we also retrieved other information related to the burial rituals carried out by the informants and their families. In terms of duration, most of them (33%) had conducted burial rituals twice, three times (22%), four times or more (18%), and once (16%). The rest (11%) had never implemented the ceremony. Further findings we discussed below as we also related those with the theories and previous studies.

⁵⁴ Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed. (London: SAGE, 2018).

⁵⁵ Miles, Huberman, and Saldana.

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B. Discussion

1. The Values of Conducting Burial Rituals

Every indigenous ritual performed contains meaning and purpose in it. This article found its three objectives in exploring the values of the local burial ritual called *khanduri jeurat*. First, the practice aims to remind the Muslims of death, so they visit their relatives' graves. Allah has promised to animate beings that death will come upon them. Thus, by the existence of *khanduri jeurat*, the community may strengthen their faith values. Secondly, it is a form of respect toward dead people. The ancient people honored the dead by holding a proper funeral. At the same time, the locals expressed concern and care towards the deceased family through a communal ritual like a feast ceremony at the funeral⁵⁶. Culturally, the Acehnese people appreciate everyone, especially older people coming to their home or even their family's tomb to align their known, proudly maxim, *peumulia jamee adat geutanyoe* (our tradition is to honor guests coming). In the view of Islam, *khanduri jeurat* is a form of glory for the dead. We witnessed it from the prayer done together by the family members. Besides, the ritual is considered a form of the last offering sent by the family relatives. Thirdly, it represents the tradition of praying together. Legally, *khanduri jeurat* has become the tradition of the Acehnese ancestors. Though its process seems crowded, it is not considered debauchery.

From the interview results shown in Figure 1, we found that most informants decided to participate in the ritual burials because of religious practices (51%), cultural norms (29%), and a sense of brotherhood (11%). The representative excerpt is as follows.

E1: The burial ritual is compulsory since it is Fard al-Kifayah (a must-filled obligation). It is inevitable due to its tradition. Then, we also can strengthen our brotherhood with our neighbors. In the meantime, we may entertain the dead's families.

Another personal reason was to feel reluctant if they did not participate in the tradition (7%), while only 2% had no choice but to join.

E2: I feel disinclined with the villagers if I do not attend the ceremony.

E3: I go to the place because I have nothing to do.

⁵⁶ K E Hollewand, "Funeral Consumption and Social Distinction in the Early Modern Netherlands," 2011.

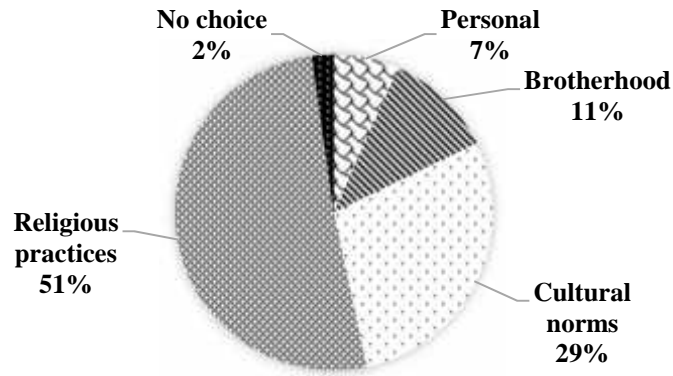


Figure 1: Informants' Reasons for Participating in the Burial Rituals

On the contrary, the burial ritual in Aceh is a mere tradition of praying together. The community can gather at the grave to perform the prayer with other community members. At last, it establishes a sense of togetherness and belonging within society. The ritual means togetherness and unification for the locals, seen from the initial process to the end of the ritual performance. The community leaders acknowledged that the event would not be run if there were no bits of help from each resident. They expected the subsequent offspring to inherit togetherness and cohesiveness. Hence, they seemed upset at those who did not participate in the ritual and disrespected the established unity. Below, one informant revealed this argument.

E4: If people do not join the ritual, they do not want to make a loss, whether money or physical help. In reality, they have to go all out.

Indeed, eventually, the phases of the ritual burials, like sending a prayer to the whole spirit of the family who has died, introducing the dead's relatives, and cleansing the public cemetery establish the sense of *gotong royong* within the residents since they help and share each other. This ritual has become a benchmark of togetherness in the life of the Acehnese people. Meanwhile, for the Acehnese people, a custom is identical to religion. Therefore, tradition within societies gets a unique position.

Accordingly, Acehnese people tend to firmly believe in the spiritual conception embedded in the practice of *khanduri*, done explicitly for the burial ritual. The moment of death is the closest path faced by humans. The mortuary event became the media for maintaining the continued dialogue between the living and the dead, seeming to share the

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deceased's spiritual strength⁵⁷. We retrieved that 88% of the informants believed the burial rituals were necessary. Most of their reason was that the tradition served the media for continuously flowing the merit to the dead through the meals served for the orphans or guests⁵⁸, as represented by one informant below.

E5: If we do the burial rituals, we can send the values of praying to the deceased. We may also share food with our neighbors, who transmit prayers to the dead.

Even some people might be worried by the mindset that the spirit would be in grief and tortured if the family did not hold the *khanduri*, as exposed by one informant below.

E6: The dead will feel misery inside the grave if we do not conduct the ritual.

They also believed that the service prepared by the deceased family at home could represent the last dish for the dead spirits to cease their hunger because they thought the spirit of the dead may still be in the house⁵⁹.

E7: The feast may cure the dead when he (the deceased) visits the house.

That reliance becomes the primary foundation to encourage people living in Aceh, especially in Southwest regions, to perform the *khanduri* for affluent and low-income families.

2. *The Processes of the Burial Ritual*

The burial ritual has been conducted by inheritance from the past. It has existed for a long time. This ritual initially remains unknown since no historical record relates to this tradition. In Aceh, the locals perform the burial rituals annually but are not limited to certain occasions when the specific persons die; the exact time is uncertain, yet most serve it after the Eid al-Fitr celebration⁶⁰. While the burial rituals have a distinct religious foundation in Islam, their practice in Indonesia dramatically differs from those practiced by the people in any other

⁵⁷ Hutchinson and Aragon, "Collective Burials and Community Memories: Interpreting the Placement of the Dead in the Southeastern and Mid-Atlantic United States with Reference to Ethnographic Cases from Indonesia."

⁵⁸ Abdul Manan, "The Ritual of Khanduri Bungong Kayèe (An Ethnographic Study in West Labuhan Haji-South Aceh)," in *Antropologi Indonesia*, ed. Laila Prager, Michael Prager, and Guido Sprenger, vol. 34 (Berlin: LIT VERLAG GmbH & Co. KG Wien, 2014), 354–376, <https://repository.ar-raniry.ac.id/id/eprint/3164/>.

⁵⁹ Abdul Manan and Muhammad Arifin, "Cultural Traditions in Death Rituals Within the Community of Pidie, Aceh, Indonesia."

⁶⁰ JKMA, "Reusam Khanduri Jeurat Ureung Aceh [The Acehese People's Burial Tradition]," *Jaringan Komunitas Masyarakat Aceh* (banda Aceh, 2018).

Muslim community. It is a rendezvous between the Islamic tenet and the local wisdom; the influences of animism, dynamism, Hinduism, and Buddhism also infuse the practice of burial rituals in Indonesia⁶¹. Despite the debate about the tradition in Indonesia, the experts in Islamic studies agree that the burial ritual has become a distinctive and essential ritual for the Muslim community in Indonesia⁶².

Based on the field notes we recorded in the tree burial rituals, the practice consisted of several phases. It started with a village meeting, cleaning graves, event notification, *khanduri*, pilgrimage, and the closing speech or appreciation conveyed by the village committee. The following are the detailed ritual processes held in the three areas.

Organizing a Gampong Meeting

This phase involved the *gampong* leaders such as *keuchik* (the village chief), the village secretary, *tuha peut* (the village advisor), the youth chief, religious leaders, *teungku imum* (the praying leader), and all *gampong* committees or figures. The meeting discussed the execution schedule of the ritual, the manifestation, the necessity of cost, the cost sources, the invitations, and other issues related to the ritual performance. As it is socially managed, many invitees and neighbors gathered in one specific place to discuss the possible ritual and arrangement of burial⁶³. More importantly, the meeting aimed to reach an agreement on the fundamental elements of *gampong* and establish a responsible committee for the ritual. Similarly, in Malaysian culture's agony of death, the Malays always respect the eldest's presence in the local society in managing all the ritual processions, starting from the pre-burial phase until post post-burial phase⁶⁴.

Cleaning the Grave

After agreeing on the ceremony schedule, cleaning the graves became the next phase. Cleaning the graves is viewed as a way to honor and appreciate the dead, and this practice can be seen to be done by most religions⁶⁵. Two parties, namely the ritual committees and the local community, did the cleaning part. First, the committees cleaned the area of the public

⁶¹ Mohammad Takdir Ilahi, "Ziarah Dan Cita Rasa Islam Nusantara: Wisata Religius Dalam Bingkai Kearifan Lokal [Pilgrimage and Islamic Image of Indonesia: Religious Tourism Framed with Local Wisdom]," *Akademika* 21, no. 1 (2016): 117–32.

⁶² Subri, "Ziarah Makam Antara Tradisi Dan Praktek Kemusyikan [Pilgrimage Between the Tradition and Polytheism]."

⁶³ Ani Chénier, "Bones, People and Communities: Tensions between Individual and Corporate Identities in Secondary Burial Ritual," *NEXUS: The Canadian Student Journal of Anthropology* 21, no. 1 (July 2009), <https://doi.org/10.15173/nexus.v21i1.214>.

⁶⁴ Yusof and Salleh, "Local Wisdom in Agony of Death among Malay-Muslim Society in Malaysia."

⁶⁵ Ebenhaizer I Nuban Timo, "The Tradition of Visiting the Graveyard: A Theological Study on the Ways of Timorese Christians Honoring and Remembering the Dead," in *International Conference on Religion and Public Civilization (ICRPC 2018)* (Atlantis Press, 2019), 16–21.

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cemetary, such as its fence, giant trees, the gateway, and other zones around the graves. They also cleaned the entrance path to the cemetery site and the spot for the ritual. Next, the locals cleaned the graves of their family members. This phase was more personal compared to the initial cleaning. This phase occurred a week before the day of the ritual, so no people were cleaning the area one day before. As we noticed, the community consisting of young and older people was excited to clean their family's graves during this phase. The presence and involvement of youth were necessary since young people would be the next generation where the traditions and values could be preserved and passed down. We recorded that almost all attendees were young people (20s to 40s) involved in this activity.

Additionally, they prepared themselves by bringing various equipment to clean the tombs. While clearing the grave, we observed that they discussed a particular matter. One informant, a youth figure, admitted as follows.

E8: We strengthen our brotherhood in this ceremony. When youths gather, a non-formal forum is indirectly created, where we suggest certain youth activities.

The above excerpt supported our observation as many youths engaged with their fellows to strengthen their relationships, participate in the ritual, and discuss specific issues. Nonetheless, the adolescents also involved the older people in the conversation. The re-emergence of their smoking habit after the cleaning served to cement their connection and open up lines of communication⁶⁶.

Announcing the Ceremony to People

The next phase was the committee's announcement to the community's residents. They also accepted the contribution of funds from each house. There was no standard for paying the fund. The residents gave money as much as they wanted; the critical point here is sincerity, as only sincere alms receive rewards from Allah. Thus, people gave various amounts of money, yet, middle-class people usually gave IDR 50.000 to IDR 200.000. One female informant from Great Aceh claimed as follows.

E9: For the burial rituals, our family gave IDR 50.000; those who were richer even gave more, ranging from IDR 100.000 to IDR 200.000.

The donation applied to all people living in the village, including newcomers, as emphasized by an informant.

E10: New neighbors also should donate together. They present a small amount if they cannot contribute much.

⁶⁶ Abdul Manan et al., "Masa Lalu Masalah Lu: A Semiotic Study in the Myths Hidden within Cigarette Billboard Ads in Indonesia," *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication* 39, no. 1 (March 2023): 182–99, <https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2023-3901-11>.

In our view, the donation management was unstructured, as Sudarmoko⁶⁷ found in West Sumatra, the same island as Aceh. The fundraisers directly distributed the money to the deceased's families without detailing its amount and the donors. Donating goods like sugar, eggs, noodles, and water cups could dominate the cash donation.

Conducting Khanduri

We perceived that this phase became the main ceremony containing several community activities. The locals might come to the place along with their family members. The event began with reciting the Quran from morning until afternoon (8 to 11 AM) and continued with the *tahlil* done by the residents. A *teungku* from the local *dayah* (traditional Islamic school) or *pesantren* (modern Islamic school), whom the committee intentionally invited, led the *tahlil*. Furthermore, having lunch together became the next activity, where each house nearby delivered food in the morning. In the means of the Acehnese people, this *khanduri* is identical to having a feast and praying together. This feast also occurs in the locals' routine activity, yielding paddy.⁶⁸

Having a Pilgrimage

The most significant ritual conducted by the locals during the burial rituals was *ziarah*, which took place after having a feast and praying together. They gathered with their family members and prayed to the deceased next to the grave. During the process, a different atmosphere occurred. Many locals seemed to feel emotionally sad, even crying. In addition, they also repeatedly watered and put flowers from one tombstone (head) to another (feet). These conditions correspond to the informants' feelings when participating in burial rituals. We retrieved the data that 40 to 42 informants felt sad and touched by the burial rituals. Four persons, mostly young ones, felt excited, while only one felt nothing.

After the pilgrimage, they went to their homes, confirming that the burial rituals had finished. The practice committee expressed gratitude to the invited *teungku* and the local people who had contributed something to the event. The team also apologized for the imperfections and publicly reported the costs used for the ritual.

When we asked the informants about their involvement in burial rituals, as shown in Figure 2, almost all informants participated in *khanduri*, pilgrimage, and meeting phases. Meanwhile, out of 45, 32 informants joined the meetings, and only 12 admitted their involvement in announcing the ceremony. No informants excluded themselves in any phases.

⁶⁷ Sudarmoko, "Fundraising Management in Death Rituals in Indonesian Society."

⁶⁸ Abdul Manan et al., "Paddy Cultivation Rituals in South Aceh, Indonesia: An Ethnographic Study in West Labuhan Haji," ed. Sandro Serpa, *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (December 2022): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2094075>.

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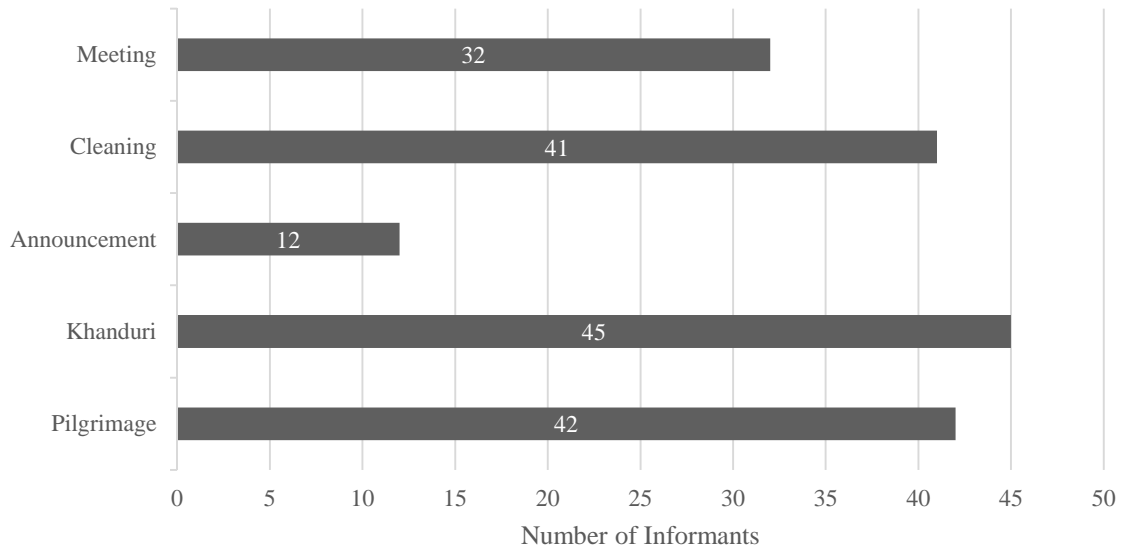


Figure 2: Informants' Involvement in the Burial Rituals

Furthermore, as displayed in Figure 3, around 30 informants agreed to donate their money and send prayers as a sign of contribution to burial rituals. Bringing food and helping physically also might contribute to the tradition. As asserted by Thursby⁶⁹, the informants also believed that attending *khanduri* and amusing the deceased's families might show their involvement in the rituals.

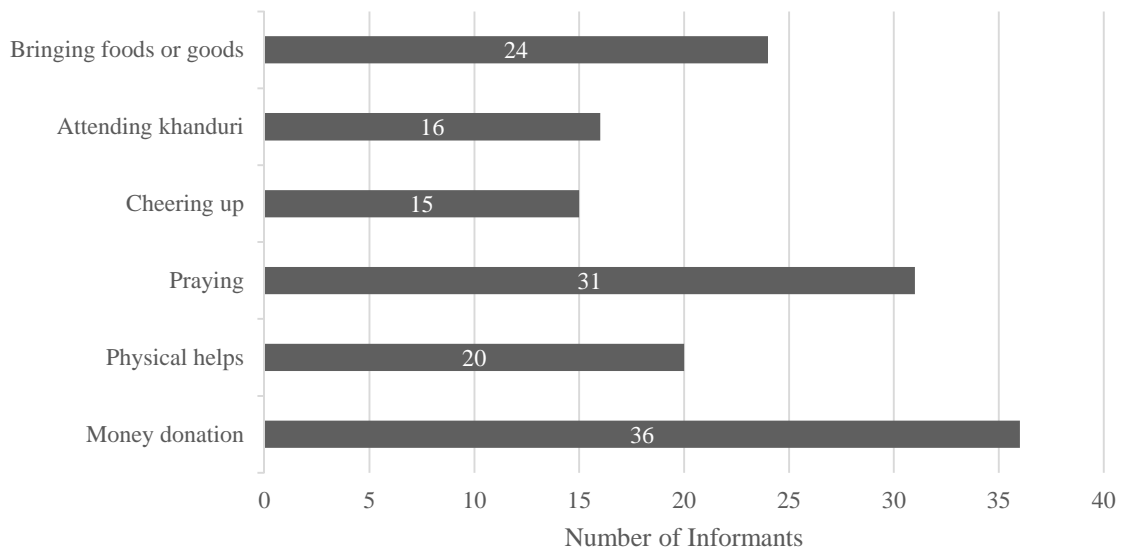


Figure 3: Informants' Suggestions to Contribute to the Burial Rituals

⁶⁹ Thursby, *Funeral Festivals in America: Rituals for the Living*.

3. Challenges of the Burial Rituals

The sense of togetherness in this burial ritual has decreased due to COVID-19. Some locals seem reluctant to visit the deceased's house for condolence as they fear the spread of the disease, particularly if the dead become Corona-suspected patients. Though Acehnese people have ways to manage outbreaks⁷⁰, including this virus, the deaths of suspected victims in their surroundings still haunt them to get involved in burial rituals, as the following informants' excerpts.

E11: We are afraid to participate in the ritual, particularly in the graveyard, if the outbreak still exists.

Besides busy activities, some only joined in the feast instead of being directly involved in the burial phases.

E12: I can visit the evening feast after finishing my work in the rice fields.

During the outbreak, several stages of the rituals were absent, except prayers for the corpse, which were done under strict rules and conditions. It followed the government protocol for burying corpses of COVID-19⁷¹. Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Board of Indonesian Islamic Scholars) suggested that the burying process for COVID-19 victims follow strict medical quarantine to prevent the spread of the virus. Thus, Acehnese people also followed the suggestion from Islamic scholars of avoiding the mass gathering⁷², including the mass gathering for *khanduri jeurat*, even though some locals feel discomfort with this current condition.

E13: It is unfortunate not to be able to help my relatives or other people in this village if one of them dies. I feel sad about this since people are gradually decreasing to attend the ceremony as time passes.

We believed that the ritual might redesign its pattern as Imber-Black's views⁷³; this pandemic condition forces the burial ritual to lose its meaningful function, strengthening the kinship between the locals. One informant shared the same argument as follows.

⁷⁰ Abdul Manan et al., "Tulak Bala as an Outbreak Prevention Within Sharia-Based Community," in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Science, Technology, and Modern Society (ICSTMS 2020)* (Langsa: Atlantis Press, 2021), 145–50, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210909.034>.

⁷¹ Kementerian Kesehatan Indonesia, "Protokol Penatalaksanaan Pemulasaraan Dan Pemakaman Jenazah Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)," 4834 Keputusan Menteri Kesehatan Republik Indonesia § (2021).

⁷² Abdul Manan et al., "Religious Perspectives on the Origin of the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Analysis of a Sharia-Based Community," *Mankind Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2023): 458–82, <https://doi.org/10.46469/mq.2023.63.3.6>.

⁷³ Evan Imber-Black, "Rituals in the Time of COVID-19: Imagination, Responsiveness, and the Human Spirit," *Family Process* 59, no. 3 (September 2020): 912–21, <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12581>.

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E14: We can strengthen our brotherhood with the communities if we help the dead's families.

Another informant repeated in E1 that the burial ritual is one of Fard al-Kifayahs, meaning it is the Muslims' responsibility.

E15: The burial is compulsory for Muslims, even for Acehese people.

4. *The Symbolic Meanings of the Burial Ritual*

Rituals within *khanduri jeurat* have their symbolism and meaning. The performance of *khanduri jeurat* is done after Eid al-Fitr, a noble day for Muslims. Then, *khanduri jeurat* may be an event for the people to maintain *silaturrahmi*. In Ghanaian culture, both Moslem and Christians, the funeral procession is commonly attended by friends, family, and neighborhoods far and near, as the critical aspect required in social values⁷⁴. The recitation of the Quranic verses by the invited *qori* (Quran reciter) also becomes a tradition in *khanduri jeurat*, meaning that the community asks for the blessing of Allah since the Quran entrusted to the Prophet Muhammad is the words of Allah that should be read, contemplated, and implemented in everyday life. In addition, this process also means praying to Allah for the spirits of the community's family members. One of the rituals, *tahlil*, was one form of praying together by the locals. It was a form of gratitude to Allah and asking for His mercy and guidance daily. Praying is also a form of the love of the community to the spirit of the dead. The existence of *bu khanduri* (the rice of feast) brought to the ritual spot and other foods symbolize togetherness and unification. The meal of rice makes the residents feel a bond among themselves. Besides, the fares are considered a form of gratitude towards the provision that has been obtained. Therefore, the community is more motivated to bring rice and food to the graves because they consider those as forms of alms and sharing with others. The pilgrimage has a meaning as a form of a visit to relatives who have died. It also acts as a form of homage and love toward the family who has passed away. In addition, *ziarah* presents a specific meaning to the local people. God promises that every human being will surely die. Bicer⁷⁵, who studies the Turkish death ceremony, concludes that the funeral ceremony contains moral values. All the prayers said become advice for the living who still can listen

⁷⁴Bernard, Adzei, and Duhoe, "The Irony in Funeral of Two Religious Sects in Ghana: A Comparative Study in Islam and Christianity."

⁷⁵Ramazan Bicer, "The Understanding of Funeral Rituals in Turkish Society and Its Reflection on Moral Teaching," in *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 7 (Istanbul, 2020), 263–70, <https://doi.org/10.18844/prosoc.v7i1.4881>.

and read rather than for the dead. All caring and respects are for the occupancy, not for the dead. Therefore, one should have the awareness to keep remembering the dead.

The ritual and customs performed within the community must be conducted by the established provision. A ritual's emergence in society appears because of the community's perceptions and views behaviorally and socially. This *khanduri* has been accepted for its meaningful symbolism among the Acehnese people, particularly in traditional ones. Although, in some thoughts, its performance cannot be taken; however, the ritual is kept alive and maintained by the Acehnese people in various places. The locals agree and support the multiple activities of tradition or custom performed. We believe that the existing activities are to regrow the local people's awareness of the cultural values entrenched in the community. According to them, the nowadays condition may erode and even eliminate the local cultures of the Acehnese people. We consider *khanduri jeurat* to strengthen the local custom for the next generation.

The community leaders believed that the various forms of *khanduri* have a positive meaning if carried out with good ways and intentions. One of them is to invite people to pray and eat together. This condition would strengthen the values of *silaturahmi*, gratitude, or prayer. *Khanduri jeurat* also aims for such an intention.

The burial rituals also reaffirm the customary law of Aceh. If it is missing or dead, the Acehnese young generations will lose the long custom and history; as the saying goes, *mate aneuk meupat jeurat, gadoh adat hana pat tamita* (we can find a death of a child from his tomb, but we cannot trace the death of a custom). This proverb becomes vital for the locals to maintain their hereditary traditions.

In addition, the community leaders also revealed that *khanduri jeurat* was *warisan indatu* (a legacy from their ancestors). That is why the performance of this ritual is still being conserved for the current and future generations. The tradition has strengthened the Acehnese people's togetherness, especially in various social activities. Meanwhile, its prayers expressed also have their meaning and blessing in the life of the village. *Khanduri*, as mentioned before, is identically known for praying and having a feast together. The same thing also applies to *khanduri jeurat*. It is not a euphoric matter, but it is considered a form of gratitude for the prosperity gained. The foods presented are considered a charity over the plenty of sustenance attained.

On the other hand, the community figures in E16 acknowledged that the burial rituals might comply with the guidance of Islamic jurisprudence, precisely its purpose and implementation. The wrong objectives and ways negatively impact society, such as chanting

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sounds harshly at the recitation moment, draping something on foods or places of the ritual, and others. Those lead to *syirik* (associating Allah as a god). One of the participants, a member of Majelis Adat Aceh (The Board for Acehese Traditions and Cultures), was admitted.

E16: The burial rituals do not act as a worshipping ritual to the grave, yet, it is a ritual for remembering the ancestors.

Another informant, a religious leader from eastern Aceh, supported the above statement.

E17: The burial rituals refer to praying for the ancestor. We get a reward from God for praying to others.

Therefore, every ceremony performed must align with the values of the Islamic jurisprudence existing within the community. In this case, the community leaders have an essential role in conveying an understanding and implementing various rituals in the life of the Acehese people. They generally have advantages and capabilities in religion, education, and society⁷⁶. Besides, they are very influential in the development of society as it is for the sake of togetherness. They may act as coordinators and mediators among citizens in solving social problems. The community leaders can also influence the other members of society with the perception constructed towards the religious ritual.

5. *The Implications of the Burial Ritual*

The Cultural, Social, and Religious Construction

As a manifestation of cultural values and behavior in a community, culture is essential in determining how to interpret experiences and produce social behavior. This knowledge forms value creates attitudes, and influences behavior. Generally, Stasulane⁷⁷ mentions two main festival objectives held in the cemetery. First, it passes the cultural tradition to the next generation; secondly, it functions as a medium to maintain social interaction, predominantly amongst relatives. Society cultures condense the values, understanding, assumptions, and purposes learned from previous generations.

Implementing the burial ritual behaves the locals more solid and responsible for the village activities. They admit that the frequently conducted tradition might reaffirm a sense of

⁷⁶ Abdul Manan et al., "Educational and Social Constructions of the Sharia Implementation in Aceh, Indonesia," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 47, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v47i1.923>.

⁷⁷ Anita Stasulane, "Intersection of the Religious and the Secular: The Cemetery Festival in Latvia," *Religions* 12, no. 2 (2021): 69, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020069>.

togetherness. Rashid⁷⁸ agrees that some perceptions toward death, like the feeling of mourning, fear, and disruptive events, may reinforce social group cohesiveness and togetherness. Silverman, Baroeiller, and Hemer⁷⁹ indicate this condition as how an individual's emotional expressions and behaviors communicate and need due to the loss, as most informants convey. Moreover, the ritual also brings people's awareness of hygiene since it preserves and keeps the environment beautiful, comfortable, and enjoyable. It manifests from the cleaning area's execution around the cemetery's location, cleared jointly by the men. Thus, death is not always a somber moment but should be celebrated gratefully and joyously⁸⁰. The locals witnessed a distortion regardless of the pandemic, as shown in E11, E12, and E13. The brotherhood gradually lost its effect in the ritual as a few communities participated. However, in the name of heritage tradition, the locals need to restructure the ritual's technical processes without denying the existence of the epidemic.

The tradition of a society in conducting various custom activities collectively reaffirms a sense of caring and compactness within the Acehnese people, as proved in E1 and E8. The amount of indefinite money asked for the donation in E9 marks the system of togetherness. Besides, all social problems that occur in their life can be resolved together. This thing, of course, becomes a crucial thing for the sake of realizing social life within a community group. The performance of several rituals is also considered to fortify the local tradition against Western culture. The external culture can erode the local culture and *aqedah* of the Acehnese people. We perceive that the burial ritual is highly expected to be able to add faith value, unite the local people, introduce the Acehnese tradition to outsiders, and reaffirm the local customs institutions.

Furthermore, from the view of religion, the burial ritual has strengthened public awareness of the values of faith, as shown in E1, E15, E16, and E17. Everyone must remember and prepare for death. Based on the study conducted by Hutchinson and Aragon⁸¹ about the mortuary ritual in Indonesia, the providence of feasts and ceremonies is considered the moment for continuously remembering the dead. This issue certainly, creates positive

⁷⁸ Rashid, "Meaning and Rituals of Death: An Insight into Selected Ethnic and Religious Communities of Bangladesh."

⁷⁹ Gila S. Silverman, Aurélien Baroeiller, and Susan R. Hemer, "Culture and Grief: Ethnographic Perspectives on Ritual, Relationships and Remembering," *Death Studies* 45, no. 1 (January 2021): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2020.1851885>.

⁸⁰ Rashid, "Meaning and Rituals of Death: An Insight into Selected Ethnic and Religious Communities of Bangladesh."

⁸¹ Hutchinson and Aragon, "Collective Burials and Community Memories: Interpreting the Placement of the Dead in the Southeastern and Mid-Atlantic United States with Reference to Ethnographic Cases from Indonesia."

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behavior in community members to continue doing good deeds in their social life. The acts turn into a charity that will be brought up after death. The ritual values also became an Islamic propagation that brought its community to good behavior changes, not to mention the earthquake and tsunami in 2004⁸².

Nevertheless, the changes should be under the guidance of Islam. Meanwhile, the locals would reduce potential conflicts by regularly conducting burial rituals. The atmosphere of togetherness can be established when the practice involves the people's family or relatives. The relationship constructs the values of fraternity between them so that small quarrels will be minimized. Additionally, the atmosphere of closeness will be intense, mostly praying and making the pilgrimage center. The touch of Islam is demonstrated with the chanting *shalawat* (repeated invocation), and the recitation of the Quran triggers the visitor's emotional feelings. They seem to meet with their deceased family in such an atmosphere.

C. Conclusion

The primary purpose of the burial ritual is to remind human beings of death, show the glory of the community against the departed and establish kinship relations with the locals. They believe that the ritual is a positive vibe for them, considering its symbolic meanings – expecting the blessings of Allah, showing their gratitude, symbolizing respect to the deceased and family, and acting as a death reminder. Not only does the ritual reaffirm customary law, but it also builds a sense of brotherhood within the communities. Ultimately, this ritual's impact on the locals brings constructive results. It forms their togetherness and cohesiveness, changes their bad habits, and reduces the potential for conflict through the atmosphere of unity established during the ritual.

The interesting notion of this ritual is how Acehnese people consider the burial ritual within their lives. We witnessed directly its importance, which was portrayed by how Acehnese people enthusiastically prepared and were involved in every phase of this ritual. It emerges an understanding of the social pattern of the Acehnese Islamic community. In this case, we revealed their distinctive character, a harmonious way of life. While in many parts of Indonesia, the practice of the local way of burial rituals triggers debates from progressive parties. They claim that the values of animism, dynamism, and Hinduism contaminate such practices, leading to the *syirik* (shirk). In our view, the Muslim community in Aceh has successfully transposed local cultures to Islamic practice. This notion has become a principle

⁸² Irfan Zikri, "Social Transformation and the Change of Community Capacity of Post-Tsunami Aceh, Indonesia," *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities* 25, no. 3 (2017): 1297–1318.

in Acehese tradition as a local saying exists, “*hukom ngeun adat lagee zat ngeun sifeut*” (the Islamic rules and Acehese practices resemble a thing with its characters). Thus, such a condition becomes an essential study in Islamic studies; how people build harmonious relations between local traditions and Islamic tenets now becomes an urgent issue as the development of the progressive Islamic movement debated the customary rituals in Indonesia. Nevertheless, limitations existed within our study. The shift in the form of rituals is the main point here. It happens primarily due to the dynamic of society. We discovered that the ritual was being practiced by the community, however there were subtle alterations made to its structure, most noticeably in the persons who attended the event after the COVID-19 epidemic. While no such practice had previously existed, at that time certain funeral ceremonies were performed discreetly with just family members present. There must, therefore, be future research on this topic.

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