

## A Local Wisdom in East Flores and the Shift: The Transition of the Lamaholot Religion to the Catholic Religion

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### ABSTRACT

**This study aims, firstly, to determine the factors that led to the conversion of the Lamaholot religion to the Larantuka Catholic religion. Second, to find out the social impact upon religious conversion of Lamaholot to Catholicism on the daily life of the people in Larantuka. And how this will gave us the basic understanding upon the history of the transition and how Catholic religion still thriving till nowadays. This study uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. The research locations are spread across three sub-districts, namely Larantuka, Lewolema, and Ilemandiri. Sources of data obtained through document analysis, interviews focused on key informants, direct involvement, observation and introspection. The research results were analyzed using domain, taxonomy, and componential techniques. The theology paradigm used on this writing is the Theology of the Incarnation. How God humanizes and enters the local culture, illuminates it with divine light so that the adherents of the culture can see into the depths of themselves the truth that comes from that light.**

**Key words:** Lamaholot, Religion, Religiosity

### INTRODUCTION

One of the characteristics of traditional people who live in a particular culture is to have a belief in the existence of Supreme Being. Anthropologically, the Supreme Being is seen as the Almighty Creator, Origin and Destination of the universe, and the Divine Person. Due to the existence and power of the Supreme Being, people tends to respectfully gave their obedience, submission, worship and devotion to their God. Everything that is done or experienced by traditional people were always associated as divine intervention; both good and bad things. In this context then traditional society lives in the belief in the existence of blessings and curses from the Divine. If people live according to the commands of the Divine, their lives will be blessed. If on the other hand people oppose His orders, they will be cursed in the form of disease, disaster, and death.

The same belief can be found in the traditional communities of East Flores. Based on the sources of oral tradition through *the tutu maring usu asa* (the stories of origin), beliefs like this have existed and grew since the beginning of the formation of the traditional East Flores community, called the Lamaholot community (Ritan, 2015:16). This term is specifically intended for the traditional people who inhabit mainland East Flores, Adonara, Solor, and Lembata. This society

lives in a monarch system, which is estimated to have existed since the 13th century (Soemargono, 1992: 9).

Since the beginning, Lamaholot community has believed in the Supreme Being, which is called *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*. This entity is recognized as the Lord of heaven and earth, the Source and Destination of all things. To build interpersonal relationships with Lera Wulan Tana Ekan, the community build a traditional house, which is called *korke* or *koke bale*. *Korke* is believed to be the inhabitation of *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* in the world. Because of this, the *korke* was made as the center of the world of the Lamaholot community. In this house, *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* is the center of community way of life, and become the spirit of the people to builds community life and togetherness.

The belief in the existence of Lera Wulan Tana Ekan has been passed down from generation to generation and has been deeply rooted in the Lamaholot community. In this case, it can be said that this is the original religion of Lamaholot, because it was born and grew up in the Lamaholot community itself. This religion then shapes all aspects of people's lives.

In further developments, around 1556, when Portuguese Catholic missionaries arrived in Larantuka, the Lamaholot religion slowly faced challenges. Historical evidence shows that precisely in 1665, the King of Larantuka was baptized into Catholicism, so that officially Catholicism became the official religion of the people of Larantuka (Fernandez and Tukan, 1997: 13-14).

Since then, the Lamaholot religion has been slowly abandoned and Catholicism has become a new universal religion in there. When it compared to other regions, this transition is mostly experienced and carried out by people who live in Larantuka City, which geographically stretches from San Dominggo to Lewerang, and is added to Lebao. There is a total shift from the Lamaholot religion to Catholicism, both in terms of rites, symbols, and values.

Since the baptism of the King of Larantuka at that time, Catholicism flourished in Larantuka City and continues to grow to till nowadays. Not a single *korke* building left and there are no longer any Lamaholot rites which are celebrated as the center of community life in the city of Larantuka. In the researcher's observation, there is no syncretism of the Lamaholot religion and Catholicism in the religious life of the people of Larantuka City. Catholicism is celebrated and lived without mixing with the Lamaholot religion. What happened was the inculturation of the Lamaholot culture into Catholicism, in some aspects.

Of course, these descriptions raise some central issues that must be explored. Among them are the reasons for the shift from the Lamaholot religion as the original religion to Catholicism which seems so easy to happen. In addition, there is the possibility of the emergence of interesting and memorable things contained in Catholicism, for example related to religious practices that affect the lives of the people of Larantuka. The next question is it true that the transition happened at that time was really a total transition from the Lamaholot religion to Catholicism. The last one is how is the positive impact of the transition on the life of Catholics until now. According to researchers, observing the survival of the Catholic religion in the life and appreciation of the people of Larantuka since the 12th century, of course, Catholicism is believed to be a means that leads the Larantuka people to live their faith and belief in God.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Larantuka People's Indigenous Culture and Religion

Historically, the original Larantuka tribe was the *Ile Jadi* Tribe. The ancestor of this tribe is *Lia Nurat Nura Nama* with her two sisters, namely *Watuwele* and *Watowele*. These two women are often called *Watoweling* (jewels) and *Tonu Wujo* (*Dewi Sri*). These three twin brothers are called *Ata Ile Jadi* who was born from inside *Mount Ile Mandiri* (Lemba, 2019). From these three brothers, the Lamaholot culture was originally born.

In subsequent developments, immigrants began to arrive on Larantuka from various regions. From the east emerged the *Keroko Puken* Tribe and the *Seran Goran* Tribe. From the west emerged the *Malacca Jawa* or *Sina Jawa* tribes. The same thing happened when Portuguese missionaries came to Larantuka who brought new tribes, who joined the indigenous tribes and other immigrant tribes to form the Larantuka community.

According to the findings of historians, long before the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries, since around the 13th century Larantuka had become a kingdom (Ritan, 2015:16). The founder of the Larantuka Kingdom was *Pati Golo Arakiang*, an immigrant from the Sina Javanese tribe. Under the rule of this king, the people of Larantuka began to form a more orderly system of government. With this kingdom, the king and the community have strengthened the Lamaholot culture as the original ancestral heritage of Larantuka.

Lamaholot comes from two syllables, namely *lama* and *holot* (Bebe, 2018: 53). *Lama* means village, tribe or village. *Lama* is synonymous with the words *lewo* (village), *riang* (sub-village), *sukuwungu* (marga or tribe), and *nuba* (brotherhood). The meaning of *lama* and its synonyms are villages and related tribes. While the word *holot* means to continue, to survived from a disaster. If the phoneme 'h' is omitted, it will means sticking. The main meaning of the word *holot* is to unite from disintegration. Thus, the word *Lamaholot* can be interpreted as a village, tribe, village, island whose people always sticks in unity as brothers.

Based on oral sources passed down by many generation (*tutu maring asa-usu*), since the beginning of its birth, Lamaholot culture already has elements that make up culture, such as: knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morals, and habits (Bebe, 2014: 1). Each of these elements contains values that are used by the community to interpret their experiences and then guide their life behaviors. One of the strong elements that influenced the life of the Lamaholot community in the early days of its existence was the belief in the Supreme Being, as a Divine Person, Creator of all universes, Source and Destination of universe life, Ruler of heaven and earth.

In the Lamaholot community, anthropologically the Supreme Being is called *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*. Literally, *Lera Wulan* means the sun and moon, and *Tana Ekan* means earth and soil. According to Amanue (1989:59), symbolically and metaphorically, *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* is the ruler both of the sun-moon and earth-soil. This expression shows the belief of the Lamaholot people that *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* is truly an Almighty Being, who is far above (sun-moon, or sky) but at the same time also close to humans (earth-earth). The sun-moon is represented as God who is above the clouds and sky, and the earth-soil is below, near and close. The sun-moon that is in the sky is a symbol of Allah, the God who is far, high, noble, majestic, there is nothing

more than Him, who is worthy of worship. Earth-land is below, the near, low, familiar and nothing is beyond His reach.

The concept of *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* contains with many ideas and meanings. *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* is also a symbol of fathers and mothers who give birth, raise, care for, educate, nurture their child with love. In this regard, specifically the people of Lamaholot fully refer to the Supreme Being by the name of *Ama Lera Wulan, Ina Tana Ekan*. Means, the Father of the sun and the moon, Mother of the land of the earth. This illustration aims to show the rich understanding and appreciation of the life of the Larantuka people towards the Supreme Being as a combination of two inseparable elements, which unite, strengthen, and enlive.

*Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* symbolizes the Supreme Being whose power embraces and protects the entire earth. People believes in the direct involvement of *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* in all human life, which is experienced in the form of sunlight and the moon shining on the earth, rain that falls from the sky that fertilizes plants, which in turn become the source of human life.

Based on some of the ideas above, the early Larantuka traditional people positioned themselves in a certain way in front of *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*. Departing from the view of *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* as a Person who is simultaneously far from humans (transcendent) and at the same time close to humans (immanent), the concept of *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* was considered both as a "scary" and "amazing" Entity at the same time. As a "scary" Entity, *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* is believed to be able to punish anyone who does not live according to His orders. Humans who are free from His punishment are humans who obey His commands, who build a harmonious life with Him, themselves, others, and the surrounding environment. This attitude of life will granted the blessing and protection of *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*. Meanwhile, the concept of *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* as an "amazing" Entity is related to the public's view that *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* is really close, loving, forgiving, who has the power to save humans from disaster and disease or all other forms of misfortune.

To build a harmonious relationship with *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*, the Larantuka traditional community uses rites and symbols that contain certain meanings. In this regard, there are many types of rites that are celebrated as a means of building a relationship with *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*. These rites are, for example, the rites for building traditional houses, agricultural rites, marriage rites, death rites, reconciliation rites, family banquet rites, rites for naming children, and many more. These rites are carried out by rite leaders who have been determined for generations, with native religious prayers that are unique and adapted to the type of rite, and are equipped with rites and procedures that have been passed down from the start (Bebe, 2012: 29).

Usually the rite is celebrated in a sacred place called a *korke* or *koke bale*. In a broader traditional perspective, *korke* is seen as a symbol of the presence of *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*. In fact, the *korke* itself is the traditional house of the Lamaholot community and is a heritage of the Lamaholot culture. However, *korke* also has a unified meaning with the original belief or religion of Lamaholot, namely the residence of *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*. Therefore, the Lamaholot culture is integrally lived in an inseparable relationship with the people of Larantuka appreciation of *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*. *Korke* is a sacred place, the center of indigenous religion,

the center of culture, and the center of the world (*axis mundi*) of the Lamaholot traditional community.

In Lamaholot society, the *korke* supposed to be seen as a holy house. In this house, Lamaholot people as a humans then relate vertically to *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* and the spirits of their ancestors. The relationship is built through the rites that are celebrated. In addition, the *korke* is also the center of unity for the whole community. Through the *korke*, humans build reciprocal relationships, which of course cannot be separated from their relationship with *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*. *Korke* is also seen as a source and center of protection for the community. It is a source of blessing for the whole society. *Korke* is also used as a source of inspiration for the moral life of the community. This is not just a place, but more than that, it is the spirit of life that influences the whole attitude and behavior of the traditional people of Lamaholot.

### **When The Larantuka's Native Religion Meet with Catholicism**

The Lamaholot religion is the original religion of the people of East Flores, including the people of Larantuka. The existence of the Lamaholot religion shows the awareness and recognition of the Lamaholot people for the One Above, from which human comes and will return to Him when they dies. This religion has been adhered to for centuries. However, in the course of history, the Lamaholot religion was faced with a completely different challenges in the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese arrived in Larantuka. Precisely in 1556, Portuguese missionaries visited Solor and stopped at Larantuka, and began to introduce Catholicism to the people of Larantuka (Fernandez and Tukan, 1997:13). This is the time when the Catholic religion first entered Larantuka, which in the process had a great influence on the king of Larantuka and the people around the kingdom. History proves that missionaries used an adaptation mission approach, namely by studying local culture (Fernandez, 1984:12). The principle they held at that time was to enter through the door of local culture and exit through the door of Christianity. They tried to approach the king of Larantuka at that time. This effort comes with great outcome which led to the baptism of King *Sira Pain* and his son, Laurentius. Since then the Catholic religion began to grow, and from time to time had an increasing number of Larantuka of people who's gave themselves to be baptized into Catholicism. This continued until it reached an important point in the history of Catholicism in Larantuka, namely with the baptism of the King of Larantuka into Catholicism, namely King Ola Ado Bala in 1665.

According to oral tradition, since the baptism of King Ola Ado Bala, the Kingdom of Larantuka has officially become a Catholic Kingdom, although many of its residents have not yet become Catholics (Fernandez and Tukan, 1997:14). Even after that, King Ola Ado Bala – who because of baptism was given the new name King Don Francisco Ola Ado Bala DVG – handed over a golden-headed scepter to Bunda Maria Reinha Rosari – Mother of Jesus Christ – and laid down the tradition for his descendants by placing Maria Reinha Rosari as king. Larantuka and the king and his successors are representatives in the world.

### **Integration of the Lamaholot Religion and the Catholic Religion of the Larantuka People**

The existence of Catholicism as a new religion has replaced the Lamaholot religion as the original religion in Larantuka. In the early days of their presence, Catholic preachers applied one of the principles of that time, namely that any religion other than Catholicism was pagan. Including the Lamaholot religion is seen as infidel, and therefore must be cleaned and the Catholic faith must be planted (Amanue, 2013:14). Of course, this very revolutionary change

gave birth to clashes in society. However, because of the Catholic missionaries had “mastered” the kingdom through the baptism of the king at that time, the situation was muted.

Based on the results of an interview with Mr. Fransiskus Resiona – one of the community leaders, descendants of the Resiona Tribe whose ancestors were seen as one of the important figures during the transition from Lamaholot to Catholicism – at that time the missionaries were serious about “eliminating” the Lamaholot religion from Larantuka City. One of the methods used is to influence the king to “destroy” all *korokes* in Larantuka City (Lemba, 2019:1). In this way, there is a strong impression that this new religion was forced to replace the original religion of the people of Larantuka. However, the turning point that occurred at that time through the baptism of the king of Larantuka cannot immediately generalize to justify the situation that occurred at that time. Indeed, no written evidence has been found for the reason for the baptism of the king of Larantuka at that time. However, when examined more deeply related to the teachings of the Catholic religion about baptism, it usually goes through a series of processes. The process begins with the catechumenate period, which is the period of preparation for the candidate of baptism before being baptized. During this time, the candidate of baptism learns about the Catholic religion. When related to the position of king Ola Ado Bala at that time, as king he was an authoritative and intelligent person, who had certain reasons for becoming a Catholic. The teachings of this new religion are understood and considered for further decisions. As king, he saw that there was truth, precisely the true faith contained in this new religion. Therefore, he decided to be baptized into Catholicism. Furthermore, as king, he directed his people to embrace Catholicism.

Thus, there was a great influence from Catholicism on the Larantuka community as followers of the Lamaholot religion, so that a religious conversion could occur at that time. To see precisely the position of the Larantuka community in ,the conversion of Lamahot to Catholicism, Subagya's view (1979, 15-17) can be used as a reference for assessing it.

According to Subagya, there are two forms of external influence that can bring change to the original religion. The first form is the influence of religious understanding originating from other regions. The original religion that is still pure meet other religions. Adherents of the original religion, rooted in the distinctive features of the spirituality of their religion, are open to respecting other religions as more appropriate and correct. Religion from the outside is recognized as the fulfillment of previously unfulfilled spiritual hopes, and is perceived as progress. Other religions can be ingrained on the original foundation and experience solid integration. If the adherents of the original religion accept the new religion like that so their spiritual values guaranteed. They would try to live correctly values brought by the new religion. This first influence can bring about change in the form of religious conversion (Hendropuspito: 1983:79). Religious conversion can be understood in two senses. First, an act in which a person or group of people converts from their religion to a new religion. The transfer includes the transfer of symbols and rituals, and moreover the transition to new values. Second, an, act in which a person or group of people make a profound change in their experience and level of involvement in their religion to a higher level. In this sense, people do not change religions. The change lies only in the person's will to be more perfect than the previous state by internalizing the valuable values of other religions.

The second influence is the influence of religion from outside which is not in line with, not in the same direction or soul with the spirituality of the original religion; even contrary to it. This new religion, although a prophetic and universal religion, may have developed within the horizon of a narrow mind, which was tied to the particular culture and language of another nation, thus making it impossible for open and free adjustment to the original religions. Thus, this new religion cannot straighten out the original religion. The originality of the original religion is suppressed, feels colonized, enslaved and only continues in tension, so that the perpetrators are ambiguous and alienated from the essence of their original personality. This means a setbacks. Genuine spiritual roots are exposed and they accept religion from outside only superficially, as a layer of varnish that is not impregnated with their spiritual power. Religion is no longer a as vital value that builds the human person. This second effect is more destructive. Any diversion involving the new religion will have implications for a shallow – not deep appreciation of the faith.

What happened in Larantuka was tend to be the first influence. The new religion, namely Catholicism, was accepted with full openness as the more appropriate and correct one. Like the king of Ola Ado Bala, the people of Larantuka in general also view Catholicism as a religion that puts true faith in God. The next consequence is the so-called conversion, as a form of transition from the original religion and revives Catholicism. With this transition, in Larantuka City there are no longer *korkes*, rites, and symbols of the Lamaholot religion. *Korke* has been demolished and replaced with a chapel and Church. The Lamaholot Rite is no longer the main community celebration, but a Catholic religious rite. The Lamaholot religious symbols are no longer used, most of which have been destroyed with the *korke*, and a small part is still preserved in tribal houses called *tori*, which have also been given a catholic color. The integration that occurred , for example, the shifting of the roles of the tribes in the Lamaholot religion to the Larantuka Catholic religion. as happened at the celebration of *Semana Santa*.

*Semana Santa* is a Portuguese cultural heritage, which is a special moment for all Larantuka Catholics to celebrate Holy Week, the week of the suffering of Jesus Christ and culminating in His resurrection. During this period, the role of the Lamaholot tribes before Catholicism appeared in Larantuka was integrated in the *Semana Santa* celebration. For example, the role of the *Pou Suku Lema* as a group accompanying the king who comes from the descendants of *Ata Ile Jadi* which on Good Friday, the day to commemorate the death of Jesus Christ, acts as a witness to the renewal of the surrender of the Larantuka royal scepter to Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ (Fernandez, 2005:5). ). In addition, there is a shift in the duties of the tribe in the royal palace into the Good Friday procession. For example, the Kabelen Tribe, according to their customary task of preparing a royal feast, proclaims information to the public at large about information from the kingdom. When diverted to religious activities, their task was to build a chapel for prayer. The Mulowato Lawerang tribe as the receptionist and gatekeeper of the Chapel during the Good Friday procession.

What appears in the Larantuka community today is their strong roots in Catholic life. However, if we look further, this rooting actually has its foundation in the Lamaholot religion. In other words, the Lamaholot religion opened the way, the initial seed for the growth of Catholicism in Larantuka. Through the Lamaholot religion, people get to know the Creator of the universe, who is called *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*, who later in Catholicism is called Allah. There is a common acknowledgment of the two religions for the existence of a Divine Entity, the Ruler of heaven

and earth, the Origin and Purpose of human life, or something who want to show His omnipotence. This is what prompted the Second Vatican Council through *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Attitude of the Church Towards Non-Christian Religions) no. 2 to acknowledge that in other religions, including the Lamaholot religion, there is a true and holy thing that reflects the Divine Truth, which illuminate all human beings. Therefore, the Church gives an honest appreciation of this Truth. The Church recognizes that there is something good and right in the hearts and minds and in the religious and cultural worship of nations, including the Lamaholot religion. In this regard, Mantovani (2016:139) argues that the diversity of values in various cultures and religions is God's way of speaking to the people there through everything around them, and their entire environment.

### RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in this research is a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. This research was conducted in Larantuka District, Lewolema District, and Ilemandiri District, East Flores Regency. In Larantuka Subdistrict, there are several key informants who become sources of information. In this sub-district, remains of the Lamaholot religion are also found, such as the preserved Lamaholot religious symbols, as well as the former location of the traditional house (*korke*). In addition, observations can be made at Catholic religious centers, especially in the chapels and *tori* (small tribal chapels) located in Larantuka and Lohayong villages, Larantuka sub-district.

Ethnography is a qualitative strategy, in which researchers investigate a cultural group in a natural environment for a long period of time in collecting primary data, participatory observation data and interview data. According to Spradley (1997:15) ethnography is a description of a culture to understand a view of life from the point of view of the natives. In ethnographic research, there is a process in which one culture studies another culture, to build a systematic understanding of culture from the perspective of people who have studied that culture. In this regard, ethnography emphasizes the importance of the central role of culture in understanding the way of the group is studied.

Ethnographic research prioritizes the researcher's sense of reality. It takes an in-depth and interpretive thinking process on the facts based on the concepts used, and develops them with a deep understanding and prioritizing the values studied.

According to Keesing (Bungin, 2011: 228), ethnography is understood as the making of documentation and analysis of certain cultures by conducting field research. It means, in describing a culture, a researcher also analyzes. Thus, ethnography is a systematic and analytical study of a cultural group, society or ethnic group collected from the field in the same period of time.

In connection with this research, the observations made are related to the rites, symbols, and meanings contained in both the Lamaholot religion and the Catholic religion. Researchers visited the former *korke* in Balela Village, which is in Larantuka City, and the *korke* in Lewolema and Ilemandiri subdistricts which are still used by the community as traditional houses to this day. Researchers will observe the *korke* building, as well as the function or role of the *korke* in the life of the Lamaholot community. Researchers also observed the rites and symbols contained in the Lamaholot religion which are still celebrated and passed down in the two sub-



districts. Meanwhile, interviews were conducted with Church leaders, traditional leaders, and community leaders who have knowledge of the Lamaholot religion and Catholicism, as well as the integration of the two which took place in Larantuka City.

## DISCUSSION

### Lamaholot's Overview

Before getting to know the Religions based on book or biblical such as Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism and Buddhism with their concepts of divinity, Lamaholot people has already their term of 'religious' because they already knew and believed in the existence of God. Tribal Religion or Native Religion recognizes God as a person who has enormous power. The existence of humans and the universe is the result of the creation of a great power that is outside of him. People call this power by the name of *Rera Wulan-Tana Ekan* (some people call it *Lera Wulan-Tana Ekan*).

*Rera* means Sun, *Wulan* means Moon, and *Tana Ekan* means Earth. These three elements of the universe are symbols of that great and mighty power. *Rera Wulan-Tana Ekan* became a symbol of the Creator and Provider of life, simultaneously as the greatest and most powerful force.

The indigenous people of Lamaholot imagine *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* as human persons (Arndt, 2003: 1). *Lera Wulan* is believed to be the ruler of the sky and *Tana Ekan* is believed to be the one who rules over the earth. However, they also believe that *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* is their parent because He has created, raised and given life for them (Arndt, 2003:34-35). Behind this belief, there is also a belief that there are other spirits that can affect their safety, peace of life, for example the spirits of their ancestors, *nitun lolon/ilé woka*, *nitun belatun*, *harin botan* or other names that describe the existence of spirits who's disturbing humans life (Kohl, 2009:120-121). *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan* and the other powers mentioned are always respected in the rites performed by the community and always offering sacrifices for them (Arndt, 2003:87).

The people of Lamaholot believe that *Rera Wulan-Tana Ekan* exists by itself and will never ends. This belief is shown in the following expression: *Bego naen puken take-weli ekan miten pai. Bego Rupan tala ladon, lera gere*, which means emergence without a source, from a dark realm, emergence like starlight, sunrise. Life belongs to Him and in the nuances of this life, he is called by the name Alapet (Alant or Ama Pu).

*Rera Wulan* (Sun and Moon) is a celestial body that is far away in a high place, cannot be reached by the human senses. In fact, this implies that God is in a high place, unreachable by human reason and must be given the highest place above everything else. In everyday conversation, when the people of Lamaholot mention *Rera Wulan-Tana Ekan*, they always point their finger at the sky. This finger pointing symbolizes that God is above or in a high place.

There are several expressions that indicate the acknowledgment of God's position on a high place. *Alapet Rera Wulan-Tana Ekan tobo tibuna teti kowa kelen lolon, pae gate lali use wato langu*. This expression comes from the Adonara Island inhabitant. Meanwhile, people from the Solor Island region expressed their inaccessibility at high altitudes with the words of *Bapa Kelake Rera Wulan, tobo teti kowa lolon, teti wan pulu pito, Ema Kwae Tana Ekan, pae lali pulu lema*. Meanwhile, people from mainland East Flores stated that the highest position was in the

words of *Ama Ratu Rera Wulan teti kelentukan, teti kowa lolon; Teti wan pulu pito, lali wade pulu lema*.

*Rera Wulan* is also the source of light and He is the light itself. He illuminates the earth and the universe. Without the light emitted by the Sun during the day and the Moon at night, life on Earth cannot run properly. Here, God is seen as the source of life.

From the sky, the blessings of life on earth come down. Blessings are present in the form of rain, wind, dew, change of seasons, and so on. This high position of God implies that God is the Giver of life as well as being the organizer of life on this earth. He is the ruler of the heavens and the earth, the ruler of the universe.

*Tana Ekan* is the place where all God's creatures live near and together with humans. This symbolization implies that apart from being in a high place far from humans, God is also near and together with humans. He is unreachable by human senses but reaches humans because His existence is near and together with humans. *Tana Ekan* received a blessing that came down from the sky. He also provides everything to meet the needs of human life and welfare.

In such context, it can be said that *Rera Wulan-Tana Ekan* is the Father who gives life power by pouring out His blessings. She is also seen as a mother who accommodates blessings from the sky while embracing humans with full of love. Therefore, the Lamaholot people greet God with the phrase: *Ama Ratu Rera Wulan* (Father) – *Ema Nini Tana Ekan* (Mother) [Muda, 2016:164-166; Boro Bebe, 2014:18-19].

This belief departs from their belief in the power possessed by nature. Nature is seen as something sacred. For example, high mountain peaks or large trees are believed to have spirits and as a residence of the ancestors spirits. In simple terms it can be said that their beliefs are cosmological. For them, nature has a power that contro humans so they run and take cover in nature. They believe that in nature (big rocks, big wood, mountains, seas and so on), live *nitun* (nature guardian spirit) and *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*. Nature is seen as the incarnation of the Supreme Being or spirits.

This belief finally moves people to bring sacrifices while asking for protection from Him. Thus, there is a prohibition on cutting down large trees or burning the forest around the location. If this prohibition is violated, then the human will be afflicted with misfortune or suffer from illness and even death. The rituals of sacrificial offerings are carried out regularly to this day and in many possibilities, the rites were made in a special place called *Koke Bale* in the Lamaholot language and sacrifices were offered to *Lera Wulan Tanah Ekan* as well as to the other spirits in *Nuba Nara*.

### **The conversion of Lamaholot to Catholicism**

The conversion of the Lamaholot religion to Catholicism for the Larantuka people is a new way of building a life of faith. The Lamaholot religion is the foundation that leads the Larantuka people to reach the God who is believed in appropriate and correctly in the Catholic religion. Therefore, until now, although the Lamaholot religion has been abandoned, there are noble values that are still inherited and lived in the Catholic religion of the Larantuka people. Through rites celebrated in the tori, chapel, and church, the Larantuka Catholics maintain and develop

their faith. Likewise, through Catholic symbols, people experience God's presence and gain meaningful graces for the lives of the Larantuka Catholics. The very strong symbols that influence the lives of the Larantuka Catholics are the Tuan Ana (Lord Jesus) Chapel and Tuan Ma Chapel (Santa Maria, Mother of Jesus), in which there are statues and Catholic symbols inherited from Portuguese missionaries. For the Larantuka Catholics, the two chapels are the center of the Larantuka people's faith and social life. These two chapels then influenced all aspects of the lives of the Larantuka people.

### CONCLUSION

From the descriptions above, the author draws several conclusions as follows:

First, the symbolic ritual of the Lamaholot illustrates the epistemological ability of the indigenous people of Lamaholot in abstracting the entirety of its cosmology. The symbolism of God in the form of the sun, moon and earth is a typical symbolism of the Lamaholot community. Through this symbolism, people of Lamaholot understands the world and finds the meaning of his life in relation to the society that is lies between them and God who is far away and close to them at the same time. This is the reason why rituals are important and inseparable from their lives. One of the important values as a further consequence is the symbolic ritual which is a cohesive means between the 'divine' and the 'social' and between the 'social' and the 'social' itself. In other words, the symbolic ritual of Lamaholot brings two-dimensional social harmony, namely vertical by 'The divine' and horizontal by 'the social' for the people.

Second, the symbolic rituals of the Lamaholot people illustrate their view of the sacredness of the universe. The Lamaholot understands that between God, man and nature there is a very close relationship. *Rera Wulan* who lives far away in the sky is the form of a father who emits light, rain, dew, to illuminate and water the earth. Meanwhile, *Tana Ekan* is the form of a mother who gave birth to humans, various types of animals and plants, birds in the air, and fish in the sea. Everything exists and is intended to fulfill the needs of Lamaholot human life. Everything in nature can be managed by humans for their daily needs. The universe is also as a place of self protection and clan because the universe presents natural objects such as trees and large rocks as a place of refuge and is always guarded and controlled by the spirits of the ancestors. In this position, rituals become a means of confirming the sacredness of the universe and through this confirmation, communal relations, although coercive, have a cohesive nuance in the Lamaholot community.

The third, the later generation that did not know well the history of the transition from the Lamaholot Religion to the Catholic religion caused them to miss from the information on their original cultural richness and adopt a new culture as if nothing had changed in the current cultural order. Since Catholicism replaced the Lamaholot religion, Larantuka itself is no longer included in the Lamaholot tribe because all aspects characterized in the Lamaholot religion have been transferred to Catholicism. This has to be seen from two sides, namely reform and impoverishment: Impoverishment occurs because the missionaries adopt a negative perspective on the Lamaholot Religion which is actually rich in the appreciation of faith for the Most High, Lera Wulan, Tana Ekan; not pagan practices as the missionaries concluded who came at that time. The transition of Korke into Chapel by burning and destroyin,g the korke, it gave birth to a heart-wrenching "tabulla rasa" experience for generations in the past and for the younger generation who understand the importance of the, dignity of a culture's origin. Another perspective is that the Lamaholot religion has made it easier for the Larantuka people when

they are transformed into Catholicism. Everything related to the Lamaholot ritual was turned into Catholic religious ceremonies, including Semana Santa which became the unique celebration of the holy week in Larantuka.

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