



Corn Theology: The Actualization of Corn in the Life of Atoen Pah Meto

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ABSTRACT

This research on corn theology: the actualization of corn in the life of atoen pah meto in Noebaun, South Amanatun" explores the role of corn as a cultural and spiritual symbol in the Atoen Pah Meto community. The main focus of this research is how corn can be actualized in the context of local theology to strengthen spiritual values and traditional wisdom. Using a descriptive qualitative method involving participatory observation and in-depth interviews with traditional elders and community members in Noebaun to explore the symbolic meaning of corn in various rituals and traditions. The results of the study show that corn has a deep meaning in the life of the Atoen Pah Meto community, functioning as a symbol of life, abundance, and social unity. The actualization of corn in local theological practices strengthens cultural identity and community solidarity. Practices such as the ceremony of lifting and lowering corn into the attic show a strong integration between corn and the spiritual life of the community. This research fills the gap in previous research that focused more on the agrarian and economic aspects of corn, by offering a new perspective on the importance of integrating local theology in cultural preservation and spiritual revitalization. The integration of corn theology is expected to be a model for cultural preservation efforts in facing the challenges of modernization

INTRODUCTION

Atoen Pah Meto in Noebone, East Nusa Tenggara, have unique beliefs that are reflected in their daily lives. The lifestyle of this community is different from other groups, especially in how they understand and treat corn as an important element in life. Corn is considered a source of life, like humans, because of its careful care from planting to harvest (Selan, 2023). In mythical beliefs, corn is believed to be able to 'communicate' with its owner in the garden. If not properly cared for, corn is believed to 'cry' in the middle of the garden, especially when exposed to continuous heat and rain or when attacked by wild animals. If this happens, Atoen Pah Meto farmers in Noebone will perform a prayer ritual to find the source of the problem that caused the corn to 'cry'. (Selan, 2023) This ritual is an important part of their lives as a form of respect and concern for the plants that are a source of livelihood. Corn has a very important role for the Atoen Pah Meto in Noebone. The people there consume it as a staple food every day, whether in the morning, afternoon, or evening. Corn is not only a favorite food, but also has a strong cultural value because it is always used in various meaningful traditional events. In addition to being the main food source, corn also plays an important role in the traditions and customs of the Atoen Pah Meto community (Selan, Pandie, et al., 2024). Moreover, corn is considered to have a life value that must be maintained properly, respected, and protected from all forms of threats, including attacks by wild animals, in order to remain safe and sustainable.

The Atoen Pah Meto community in Noebone has a close relationship with corn, both as a staple food and as an important part of spiritual and cultural life. Corn plays a major role in various traditional ceremonies and rituals related to the life cycle and agricultural calendar of the local community. The symbolism of corn reflects the idea of life, fertility, and wealth, which are at the heart of the Atoen Pah Meto cultural identity.

This study aims to examine in depth the role of corn from a theological perspective, especially in the view of Christian faith and the rituals carried out by the Atoen Pah Meto in Noebone Village. By making corn a spiritual and cultural symbol, it is hoped that the identity and traditional values of the Atoen Pah Meto community can be further strengthened. Through a contextual theological approach, this study seeks to explore the deeper meaning of the role of corn in people's lives, while exploring how these values can be reapplied in everyday life. Therefore, this study not only aims to increase understanding of the role of corn in the Atoen Pah Meto culture, but also to present an approach that can be used to preserve and revive local culture. In addition, it is hoped that the incorporation of the concept of corn theology into everyday life can be an example for other communities facing challenges in maintaining their cultural heritage amidst the changing times. This study also seeks to straighten out the understanding of corn ritual practices that are contrary to biblical teachings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In conditions of increasingly rapid modernization and social and economic change, traditions and cultural values face serious threats. Lifestyle changes, urban growth, and external influences contribute to the loss of local knowledge that has been passed down from ancestors from generation to generation (Tanesab & Tanesab, 2023). Currently, many young people are increasingly moving away from ancestral cultural values, including corn culture. This situation raises concerns about the possible loss of identity and cultural richness of the Atoen Pah Meto community.

Currently, research on the role of corn in farming communities often focuses more on economic and agricultural aspects than on spiritual and cultural aspects. Previous studies generally emphasize corn production, farming methods, and its economic benefits for the community. Meanwhile, the religious aspect and symbolism of corn in Atoen Pah Meto culture have not received adequate attention.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative method with a literature study approach, which aims to analyze and understand various theories, concepts, and previous research results that are relevant to the topic being studied, namely Timorese Theology and Culture. (Apriliawati, 2020) The approach aims to examine academic sources, such as scientific journals, books, and official documents, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding and build strong arguments. This study uses literature studies in research to identify patterns, relationships, and trends in the field of study, and to provide a theoretical basis that supports the research findings. The data collected is analyzed descriptively and critically to find a synthesis that can enrich the understanding of the phenomena being studied. Thus, this approach not only provides in-depth insight into the issues discussed, but can also be the basis for further empirical research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Ritual of Lifting and Placing the Corn and Carrying it to the Attic

The ritual of lifting and lowering corn to the attic in the context of Atoen Pah Meto in Noebone, South Amanatun, reflects a deep belief in the spiritual power contained in corn. Corn is considered to have special powers that can affect the welfare and survival of the community. Therefore, this process is accompanied by prayers and offerings to ensure blessings and protection from Uis Neno and uis pah (Selan, Dwi Harti, et al., 2024). This practice not only involves prayers when planting and lifting corn to the attic, but also when the corn is lowered for use. Offerings in the form of money or animals reflect the sacrifices made to maintain balance and harmony with nature and ancestors. The measurements of corn lifted and lowered must be precise, and if there is a discrepancy, Atoen Pah Meto in Noebone will immediately seek the cause and solution through internal discussions and confession rituals, showing the importance of togetherness and collective responsibility in maintaining this tradition. In depth, this ritual shows how spiritual beliefs and practices are integrated into the daily lives of the Atoen Pah Meto community. The success of

the prayer ritual is measured by physical signs, such as the state of the heart of the sacrificial animal, which is believed to indicate that the prayer has been accepted by the divine power. The process of confession and sacrifice shows how important it is to maintain a harmonious relationship with spiritual and natural forces. When something does not go according to plan, people not only look for physical causes but also spiritual causes, emphasizing the importance of introspection and self-correction (Sona & Taek, 2025). This ritual serves as a reminder of human responsibility in maintaining balance and harmony with nature and the spiritual forces that are believed to govern their lives. This practice also teaches values about respect for nature, collective responsibility, and the importance of maintaining ancestral traditions and beliefs. The ritual in Noebone, South Amanatun, which involves lifting and placing corn and transporting it to the attic shows the close connection between spiritual life and agricultural activities in the Atoen Pah Meto community. This process is not only about physical activity but is also full of spiritual and symbolic meaning. The process of lifting corn to the attic begins with reciting special prayers as a sign of gratitude to God and ancestors for the abundant harvest. These requests also serve as an effort to ask for protection so that the corn harvest is maintained from pests and disasters. (Sona & Taek, 2025) Offerings of money or animals are often made as part of this ritual, showing respect and gratitude to spiritual powers that are believed to provide blessings and maintain happiness.

The traditional system of lifting and lowering corn to the attic also shows local wisdom in food resource management. Corn that is moved to the attic must be measured carefully to ensure the amount is correct, this shows a commitment to implementing the principles of justice and caution in managing the harvest (Neonbeni et al., 2023). When the corn is taken from the attic, a prayer ritual and strict inspection are also carried out to ensure that nothing is less than the amount it should be. If there is a discrepancy, the community will immediately reflect on themselves and find the root of the problem, both physically and spiritually. This emphasizes how important it is to maintain integrity and honesty in all aspects of life, as well as appreciate the results of the hard work that has been done by Atoen Pah Meto in the village of Noebone Amanatun Selatan.

This ritual also serves as a social system that strengthens the relationship between Atoen Pah Meto members in Noebone Amanatun Selatan village. By participating in the ritual together, Atoen Pah Meto learn about spiritual meanings, shared obligations, and the importance of preserving customs. Young people are encouraged to gain a genuine understanding of traditional wisdom, and are taught the proper procedures for carrying out traditional ceremonies. This process ensures that cultural heritage and traditional values are maintained and preserved from one generation to the next. In this way, the tradition of lifting and lowering corn into the barn not only preserves the cultural and religious heritage of the Atoen Pah Meto community but also strengthens unity and cooperation within the Atoen Pah Meto community in Noebone Amanatun Selatan village.

Corn Planting Ritual by Atoen Pah Meto Noebone

The corn planting ritual is a stage carried out by Atoen pah Meto in Noebone when entering the rainy season, where corn must be planted. The process of planting corn in the garden generally requires the corn owner to ensure that all the corn harvested can fall perfectly. In order for the corn to be lowered from the barn safely, it is important to perform the prayer ritual carefully. Otherwise, the corn that should be abundant can be reduced because it is considered stolen by unknown people. However, by performing a clear prayer ritual, the corn lowered from the barn will remain intact, and we can prepare to plant corn in the garden (Neonbeni et al., 2023). Planting corn in the garden must be accompanied by a religious ceremony called teke-tulu or taiti-tulu, which can be done by donating money or animals such as chickens, ducks, and goats. When performing a ritual with animals, it is important to always pay attention to the feelings of the animals being offered. Pay attention to the reactions and answers of the animal, because the answer to the prayer can be seen from the animal's feelings. If the answer to the prayer is clear, then the ritual can be continued. However, if it is not clear, continue to perform the ritual with patience and perseverance until you get a good and clear answer.

Research related to the practice of planting corn by the Atoen Pah Meto community in Noebone, South Amanatun, shows that this activity has a very important significance in spiritual aspects and also social relations. According to the research results, planting corn is not only an agricultural activity, but also a traditional ceremony that strengthens the connection between the community and the natural environment and their ancestors. The tradition begins with saying prayers and giving offerings to the ancestors and the creator, asking for the land to be blessed and fertile. This gift, which can be in the form of money and animals, shows gratitude and optimism for an abundant harvest. Saying prayers is not only to ask for positive results, but also to protect the plants during their growth process.

From a spiritual perspective, corn is valued as a sacred gift. This study shows that the Atoen Pah Meto community believes that every corn seed planted carries blessings and strength from their ancestors. This belief enhances the traditional activity of planting corn, where every step of the planting process is accompanied by prayers and wishes (Liubana & Nenohai, 2021). This ceremony is also used as a means of communicating with nature and ancestors, emphasizing that corn plays an important role in the lives of the Atoen Pah Meto. Carefully selecting the best corn seeds to plant and making accurate calculations when planting show great respect for life and the environment.

In addition to the spiritual aspect, the results of the study also show that the corn planting ritual strengthens social ties in the Atoen Pah Meto community. The participation of all community members in this ritual creates a strong sense of togetherness and solidarity. This ritual often involves cooperation between families and neighbors, strengthening social networks and relationships between residents (Liubana & Nenohai, 2021). The process of mutual cooperation in preparing the land, planting corn, and holding joint prayers shows the importance of collaboration in maintaining traditions and ensuring shared

prosperity. These values of togetherness and mutual assistance are internalized in every member of the community, especially the younger generation, who are taught to appreciate and preserve ancestral traditions.

This study also reveals the challenges faced by the Atoen Pah Meto in Noebone, South Amanatun in maintaining the corn planting ritual amidst modernization and social change. Nevertheless, efforts to maintain this ritual remain strong, driven by an awareness of the importance of maintaining cultural and spiritual identity. The older generation plays an important role in transmitting traditional knowledge and values to the younger generation, ensuring that the ritual remains relevant and carried out meaningfully. Overall, the results of this study confirm that the corn planting ritual by Atoen Pah Meto is not just an agricultural activity, but also a symbol of cultural and spiritual resilience that binds the community in harmony with nature and their ancestors.

Corn Harvesting Ritual Atoen Pahmeto Noebone

Corn harvesting is a procedure carried out by Atoen pah Meto in Noebone when it is time to harvest corn. The process of harvesting corn from the fields usually requires the corn owner to ensure that it is time to harvest. All family members must be present at the corn harvest and perform a prayer ceremony together before harvesting. This is very important to ensure togetherness and family unity. Every year, corn is always brought to church as a sign of gratitude to God which is carried out routinely (Y. D. Manafe, 2011). Bringing corn to church as an offering is an act that must be carried out by the owner himself, without being represented by anyone else. This is done as the best expression of the harvest that has just been planted and harvested. After returning from church service, it is important to carry out a prayer ritual at home so that you can enjoy the ripe corn. When the corn is ripe or dry in the garden, the next step is to carry out the harvest process carefully after praying together with the family. It is important to ensure that the harvesting position is maintained properly so that the corn does not disappear from the garden easily (Y. D. Manafe, 2011). The owner of the corn who has the right to harvest must always be on the right, while everyone who participates in the harvest must do it without complaint or sincerely and wholeheartedly, to avoid attacks by corn lice and snakes, which can be fatal.

The harvest of corn from the fields must begin with a traditional ceremony called teke-tulu, taiti-tulu which can be done by donating money or animals such as chickens, pigs and goats. When using animal sacrifices, it is necessary to always pay attention to the body part of the animal, namely the heart that is offered because the answer to prayer is seen through the heart of the animal. If the answer to prayer is visible, the ritual can be continued, but if not, the prayer ritual must continue until the answer to prayer is clear and good.

Research related to the corn harvest ritual by the Atoen Pah Meto people in Noebone, South Amanatun, reveals the complexity and deep cultural and spiritual significance contained in the practice. The results of the study indicate that the corn harvest process is more than just an agricultural activity, but also has an important meaning in the spiritual happiness and social relations of the community. It was found that every step in the corn harvest process begins with

gratitude and respect for God and ancestors as an expression of gratitude. This is in accordance with the view of the theory of religious anthropology which emphasizes the role of traditional ceremonies as a means of communicating and interacting with forces beyond the universe, as well as human efforts to obtain gifts and protection. From the perspective of functionalism theory, we can see that the corn harvest ritual acts as a way to maintain unity and order in society. The full involvement of all individuals in the community in harvesting activities, including mutual cooperation, improves social relations and unity among them. By working together in this traditional ceremony, the Atoen Pah Meto community increases their sense of belonging and unity, which is essential for maintaining harmony in their life together.

However, the results of this study also show the difficulty in maintaining the corn harvest tradition amidst the ever-changing environment and social changes. The influence of modernization and urbanization has had an impact on the lifestyle and traditional values of the Atoen Pah Meto community, which threatens the continuity of the ritual practice. This reflects the theory of social conflict, which emphasizes the tension between long-standing values and the drive for modernization. The emergence of this challenge shows how important it is to implement appropriate adaptation strategies to maintain the relevance and sustainability of this tradition amidst the ongoing changes of the times.

Thus, the analysis of the research results shows that the corn harvest ritual by the Atoen Pah Meto community in Noebone, South Amanatun, has deep cultural, spiritual, and social life interests. By using the perspective of the theory of anthropology of religion, functionalism, and social conflict, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexity and significance of this ritual practice in the life of the local community, as well as the obstacles it faces in facing the changing times.

The Use of Corn in the Atoen Pah Meto Noebone Tradition

According to Atoen Pah Meto in Noenone, corn plays an important role in hereditary beliefs and must be well maintained because it has great power in controlling the lives of those who believe, which is usually called hawot. Corn remains the main food that is maintained and used as the main food of Atoen Pah Meto in Noenone. In addition to being a main food, corn is also closely related to an inseparable culture. Many people generally recognize corn as a plant with a uniqueness that cannot be equated with just the term "corn" (Y. M. D. Manafe, 2016). However, corn owned by Atoen Pah Meto cannot be mixed with other people's when planted or stored in the attic. Corn is often used as a symbol in customs, used in various prayer rituals to ask for blessings from God and ancestors, safety, and in wedding ceremonies. Research conducted on the use of corn in the Atoen Pah Meto culture in Noebone, South Amanatun, found the complexity and diversity of significance implied in this activity. Research shows that corn has more meaning than just being food, but also has a rich symbolic value in the culture and spirituality of the local community. In every part of the tradition, from planting to harvesting, corn is respected as a gift from nature and ancestors that needs to be appreciated and celebrated. From the perspective of symbolism theory, the use of corn in the Atoen Pah Meto tradition

reflects a deep understanding of the symbols of nature and life. Corn symbolizes fertility, abundance, and life itself. Practices such as lifting and lowering corn into the attic, as well as offerings made during the planting and harvesting process, contain spiritual messages that strengthen human ties with nature and supernatural powers. However, research also shows the difficulty in maintaining this heritage amidst ongoing changes. The ideas of modernization and globalization endanger the continuity of traditional customs such as the use of corn in the lives of the Atoen Pah Meto community. This shows the theory of social conflict, where long-standing values conflict with the demands of the modern era. However, local residents also try to adapt by integrating heritage values with modern life, showing the continuity of their culture. The results of the research analysis show that the use of corn in the Atoen Pah Meto customs in Noebone, South Amanatun, reflects the harmony between cultural heritage and adaptation to the times. By exploring the theory of symbolism and social conflict, we can understand how important it is to maintain the sustainability of traditions amidst the changing times.

Jangun Management Ritual in the Atoen Pah Meto Noebone Culture

The corn management ritual in the Atoen Pah Meto Noebone culture shows the existence of regular agrarian practices full of symbolic meaning. This comes from the beliefs and heritage of the traditions of the ancestors of the Atoen Pah Meto community. The research conducted shows that corn, the main source for the Atoen Pah Meto, not only has economic value but also has important religious and social aspects (Afi & Banamtuan, 2020). Corn planting to harvest involves a series of traditional rituals that aim to create a balance between humans, nature, and spirituality.

One of the main rituals in corn management is praying to nature, ancestors and God using animals such as pigs, goats and chickens which is done before planting begins. This ceremony involves prayers and offerings to ancestors and nature which are believed to be watching over the land and plants. The church, the owner of the garden, even the elders who will lead this ceremony play a key role as mediators between the human world and the spiritual world. This is in accordance with Clifford Geertz's religious theory which states that religion functions as a symbol system that helps humans understand and overcome the uncertainty of nature and life. In this context, the corn management system is a way for the Meto Noebona community to ask for protection and blessings for their corn plants, creating a sense of security and order in their agrarian life.

During the corn growth period, a ritual is carried out that emphasizes the importance of mutual cooperation and togetherness. At this stage, all members of the community work together to care for the corn plants, which includes activities such as cleaning grass, tidying up the garden fence. This ritual not only aims to increase agricultural productivity but also strengthen social ties among community members. Research shows that the ritual demonstrates the values of togetherness and mutual assistance which are the basis of the social life of the Meto Noebone community.

Furthermore, when the harvest season arrives, there will be a pre-harvest ritual as a thanksgiving ceremony and a form of expression of gratitude to ancestors and nature and God. In this ritual, the first harvest is offered to the church as a symbol of respect and gratitude. This offering is not only spiritual but also serves to strengthen the social structure and norms of the community. Emile Durkheim's theory of the social function of religion is very relevant here, where rituals function to strengthen social solidarity and ensure community integration. Through this ritual, the Atoen Meto Noebone community not only celebrates the results of their hard work but also strengthens social ties and collective commitment to their traditions and cultural values. Thus, it can be understood that overall, the corn management ritual in the Atoen Pah Meto Noebone culture reflects a deep integration between agrarian practices, belief systems, and social structures. This study shows that each stage in corn management is accompanied by rituals that are rich in symbolic meaning and social functions. Thus, corn is not only seen as a source of food but also as a medium for maintaining ecological, spiritual, and social balance in the lives of the Atoeh Pah Meto Noebone community. These rituals ensure that the relationship between humans, nature, ancestors, and God remains harmonious, creating a strong sense of connectedness and the sustainability of their agrarian culture.

CONCLUSION

Referring to the discussion above, it can be concluded that corn theology in the life of Atoen Pah Meto represents the close interweaving of spirituality, culture, and food security that forms the identity of the Timorese people. Corn is not just a food ingredient, but also a cosmic symbol that reflects the harmonious relationship between humans, ancestors, and God in a religious and social context. The actualization of corn in everyday life reflects the values of local wisdom, such as collective work (*natoni*), respect for the cycle of nature, and spirituality rooted in agrarian rites. Thus, Corn Theology is not only a reflection of faith, but also a strategy for cultural and economic sustainability, which continues to adapt to the dynamics of the times without losing its sacred essence.

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