

# ART IN THE *RUMAGHES UMBANUA* OF LAIKIT VILLAGE: NEGOTIATING CHRIST TRANSFORMING CULTURE AND COLLABORATIVE PLURALISM

**Jekson Berdame**

*Manado State Christian Institute, Minahasa  
Bougenville Street, Tateli I, Minahasa, Indonesia  
Email: jeksonberdame@iaknmanado.ac.id*

**Alrik Lopian**

*Manado State Christian Institute, Minahasa  
Bougenville Street, Tateli I, Minahasa, Indonesia  
Email: alriklopian@yahoo.com*

**Febri Kurnia Manoppo**

*Hoseo University  
20, Hoseo-ro79beon-gil, Baebang-eup, Asan-si, Chungcheongnam-do, Republic of Korea  
Email: febrimanoppo@iaknmanado.ac.id*

**Tri Oktavia Hartati Silaban**

*Toraja State Christian Institute, Tana Toraja  
Poros Makale Street, Mengkendek, Tana Toraja, Indonesia  
Email: trioktaviasilaban@gmail.com*

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the cultural transformation of Rumaghes Umbanua in Laikit Village, North Minahasa, as a contemporary reconfiguration of the traditional Dumia Umbanua ritual into a public celebration of gratitude shaped by interreligious participation and artistic performance. While previous studies have explored Minahasan thanksgiving traditions from pastoral, culinary, and ritual perspectives, limited attention has been given to the role of art as a theological and social medium in pluralistic contexts. This research addresses that gap by analyzing how artistic expressions function as agents of contextual theology and collaborative pluralism. Using a qualitative descriptive–interpretive approach, data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, religious leaders, artists, and community members, as well as document analysis of cultural and historical archives. The findings indicate that artistic practices including Kabasaran dance, bamboo and kolintang music, interfaith choir performances, and traditional attire serve not merely as aesthetic components but as performative spaces in which theological meanings, cultural identities, and interreligious relations are actively negotiated. Through the lens of Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ Transforming Culture*, the study suggests that Rumaghes Umbanua represents a dynamic model of contextual theology in which Christian values transform cultural symbols without entirely erasing their historical significance. At the same time, the findings highlight the ambivalent nature of collaborative pluralism, in which inclusion is shaped by implicit power relations and negotiated boundaries of representation. This study contributes to the discourse on contextual theology by positioning art as an active theological mediator and a public instrument for social cohesion, identity reconstruction, and intercultural dialogue in multireligious societies*

**Keywords:** *Arts, Christ Transforming Culture, Collaborative Pluralism, Rumaghes Umbanua*

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is an archipelagic country characterized by highly complex cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. This diversity is reflected not only in social life but also in the ways communities practice their religious traditions (Hutabarat, 2023). Historically, religion in Indonesia has often undergone a process of acculturation and transformation that allows local traditions to meet religious teachings that came later (Widyawati et al., 2025). This process shows the existence of a dynamic relationship between religion and culture, in which both continuously influence one another and form distinctive social practices (Kasa, 2025). This incorporation of rituals and community values not only strengthens the collective identity but also reduces the potential for identity conflicts, highlighting the importance of this relationship in maintaining social harmony within a pluralistic society.

An important cultural phenomenon in Laikit Village, North Minahasa, is the emergence of *Rumaghes Umbanua* as a thanksgiving celebration grounded in prayer, communal worship, and interfaith participation (see Figure 1). This tradition emerged through a collective agreement between the village government and local communities to revitalize local cultural values within a more relevant and contextual framework. In its development, *Rumaghes Umbanua* evolved as a critical reinterpretation to *Dumia Umbanua*, a traditional ritual formerly dominated by animistic elements, including ancestor veneration, requests for blessings, ritual offerings, pig slaughter, and pilgrimages to *waruga* sites (see Figure 2) (Palar and Manua, 2023). As a public celebration, *Rumaghes Umbanua* encompasses not only spiritual dimensions but also artistic and cultural expressions that reinforce social diversity and communal solidarity. Art functions as a central element throughout the entire procession, ranging from interfaith worship and traditional performances to ritual dances and other artistic exhibitions held at the village hall. The celebration concludes with a communal

banquet that strengthens social bonds and intercommunal brotherhood among residents.

**Figure 1.** Rumaghes Umbanua



Source: Laikit Village Archives

**Figure 2.** Dumia Umbanua



Source: Laikit Village Archives

In the perspective of Richard Niebuhr's typology, especially the concept of Christ Transforming Culture, *Rumaghes Umbanua* illustrates how Christian values interact with local culture by reforming existing cultural elements without entirely eliminating their original essence, including art as a medium of expression. This celebration demonstrates that diversity is reflected not only in religious differences but also in the ways each religious community expresses its spiritual values through culture and artistic performance. In this context, art within *Rumaghes Umbanua* functions as a bridge connecting faith, cultural expression, and interreligious diversity, making it a significant cultural phenomenon worthy of further scholarly examination.

Several previous studies have discussed *Rumaghes Umbanua*, although their approaches remain limited and fragmented. Kapoh et al. (2024) highlight the pastoral aspects of the thanksgiving tradition but do not

specifically examine how cultural transformation functions within the framework of contextual theology. Sondakh and Yoesoef (2022) analyze transformations in thanksgiving traditions in relation to food culture and ethnic identity, yet they do not explore these cultural changes from a theological perspective. Meanwhile, Naray and Jura (2022) discuss the role of Christian education in preventing syncretism among congregations, but their study does not investigate how the theology of cultural transformation may serve as a theological framework for managing such changes.

Although previous studies have acknowledged the presence of artistic performances within the *Rumaghes Umbanua* procession, no in-depth research has specifically examined how art functions as a medium for expressing and negotiating diversity. This gap indicates that diversity is often understood primarily from a religious perspective, despite the fact that cultural expressions also undergo transformation alongside the incorporation of religious values. Therefore, a more comprehensive analysis is needed to examine how artistic elements, such as dance, music, and traditional attire, play significant roles in the process of cultural transformation.

This article seeks to address that gap by exploring how the cultural transformation embodied in *Rumaghes Umbanua* represents a concrete form of contextual theology. The novelty of this study lies in its analysis of art as a cultural bridge that not only preserves local heritage but also integrates spiritual values within a pluralistic society. In *Rumaghes Umbanua*, art functions not merely as a ritual component but also as a performative medium through which diversity is visually, symbolically, and socially expressed and celebrated. Accordingly, this study offers a new perspective by arguing that theology in pluralistic societies functions not only as a system of belief but also as a mechanism for fostering social harmony and balance through distinctive artistic and cultural expressions.

## Literature Review

A number of studies have examined the Minahasan thanksgiving tradition from various perspectives. Sondakh and Yoesoef (2023) emphasize thanksgiving as a form of culinary performance that preserves the collective memory and cultural identity of the Minahasan people, in which food and dining practices function as symbols of togetherness. Although their study primarily focuses on culinary culture and identity formation rather than art as a theological medium, the findings remain significant because they demonstrate that ritual transformation has direct implications for collective identity. Building upon this perspective, the present study introduces an artistic dimension by positioning art as a mediating link between theology and culture. Similarly, Kumowal et al. (2024) describe how *Dumia Umbanua* transformed from an animistic ritual tradition into a thanksgiving celebration characterized by prayer, interfaith worship, and the values of religious moderation. Although their study offers a strong contextual theological analysis, the role of art is mentioned only briefly and without deeper exploration. This limitation provides an important foundation for the present research, which specifically highlights art as an active agent of theological and cultural transformation.

Another study by Sondakh and Yoesoef (2023) examines the thanksgiving procession through the lens of performance studies, highlighting the presence of traditional dances, music, traditional attire, and artistic performances within the ritual procession. However, their analysis remains largely descriptive and does not sufficiently connect artistic expressions with theological functions or the discourse of religious moderation. This gap creates an opportunity to analyze art as a medium of contextual theology that unites spiritual values and cultural diversity. Naray and Jura (2022) emphasize the importance of Christian education in maintaining doctrinal integrity while respecting local wisdom. However, their study does not discuss how Christian education may integrate the arts into liturgical practices or contextual mission. These

findings provide an important foundation for the present study to position Christian education as a formal pathway for directing artistic practices toward the promotion of interfaith harmony.

In the pastoral context, Rimate et al. (2024) examine *Foso Rumages* and identify therapeutic values such as togetherness, respect for ancestors, and communal healing. Nevertheless, their focus on psychosocial dimensions leaves the aesthetic role of art in healing and reconciliation insufficiently explored. This study expands that perspective by examining art as a pastoral medium that strengthens social cohesion and intercommunal relationships. Furthermore, Kumowal et al., (2024) employ Richard Niebuhr's *Christ Transforming Culture* typology to analyze the interaction between faith and culture. However, their application of the framework remains largely normative and static, without examining how art translates theological values into visual and performative expressions. Therefore, the present study extends Niebuhr's framework by relating it to artistic practices within *Rumages Umbanua* as a dynamic and living form of cultural transformation.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study employs an interdisciplinary conceptual framework that combines contextual theology, cultural transformation, and the role of art in pluralistic societies. The framework is used to analyze how *Rumages Umbanua* functions as a socio-theological space in which faith, cultural identity, and interreligious relations are negotiated through artistic expressions. Accordingly, this study is structured around three main concepts: contextual theology, Richard Niebuhr's concept of *Christ Transforming Culture*, and art as a medium of diversity and social cohesion.

### **Contextual Theology**

Contextual theology is a theological approach that fundamentally rejects the separation of the Christian faith from socio-cultural and historical reality. According to Leonard (2025) and Marjani (2023), contextual

theology seeks to bridge faith with the social and cultural contexts in which it is lived and practiced.. This thought is further reinforced by influential scholars such as Richard Niebuhr, through his typology of Christ and Culture; Robert J. Schreiter, who emphasizes the importance of local narratives; and Stephen B. Bevans, who articulates contextual theological models. Collectively, these scholars argue that theology cannot function as an isolated entity but must engage in active dialogue with social and cultural contexts in order to remain relevant and meaningful. This approach is not merely theoretical but also serves an important practical function by analyzing and facilitating processes of cultural transformation (Mawikere and Hura, 2025). One of its primary concerns is identifying significant shifts in community belief systems. For example, contextual theology may be used to examine how societies with historical animistic traditions interact with Christian teachings, producing forms of faith that are distinctive and culturally relevant (Nendissa et al., 2026). In this perspective, cultural transformation is understood not simply as the replacement of old beliefs with new ones, but as a complex and continuous dialogue that generates new syntheses between faith and culture.

### ***Christ Transforming Culture***

The second conceptual foundation of this study is Richard Niebuhr's concept of *Christ Transforming Culture*. This framework is particularly relevant because it emphasizes how Christian values reform and reinterpret existing cultural elements rather than completely rejecting them. Within this perspective, culture is not viewed as inherently opposed to faith but as a domain that can be renewed and reoriented through Christian values. In this study, Niebuhr's framework is employed to analyze how artistic and cultural expressions within *Rumages Umbanua* function as visual and performative media that translate theological values into social practice. Through artistic performances, traditional music, ritual dances, and cultural symbols, theological meanings are communicated, negotiated, and embodied within everyday communal life. Thus, art

becomes not merely a cultural ornament but an active medium of contextual theological transformation.

### **Art as a Medium of Diversity and Social Cohesion**

Art also constitutes an integral component of this conceptual framework. In this study, art is understood not merely as a ritual element but as a medium for expressing diversity that connects spiritual values with diverse cultural practices (Shah, 2023). Through traditional dances, music, and cultural attire, art functions as a social medium that fosters cohesion and communal solidarity. Artistic expressions also reflect how theology may operate within everyday cultural practices to promote harmony, balance, and intercommunal relationships in pluralistic societies.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive–interpretive design to analyze cultural transformation and theological meaning within the *Rumaghes Umbanua* tradition in Laikit Village, North Minahasa (Timulak and Creaner, 2022). This approach was selected to capture the dynamics of meaning, social practices, and processes of cultural negotiation within a multireligious social context. Primary data were collected through participatory observation of the entire *Rumaghes Umbanua* procession and in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, religious leaders, artists, and community members directly involved in the celebration. Secondary data were obtained from relevant academic literature, cultural documents, and local historical archives. To ensure data trustworthiness, source and method triangulation were applied by cross-checking findings from observation, interviews, and documentation.

Data analysis was conducted thematically using performative and visual approaches, with artistic expressions such as dance, music, and traditional attire serving as the primary units of analysis (Adelliani et al., 2023). This analytical

process not only identified patterns of cultural practice but also interpreted how theological meanings are represented, negotiated, and constructed within the public sphere. Accordingly, this method enabled a deeper understanding of the relationship between artistic practices, the expression of faith, and the formation of social cohesion in a pluralistic society.

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Art Aspects in *Rumaghes Umbanua* Culture as a Celebration of Gratitude**

The results of participatory observation and in-depth interviews indicate that art in *Rumaghes Umbanua* functions not only as an aesthetic element but also as the primary medium for articulating the collective gratitude of the people of Laikit Village. However, the meaning of art as an expression of gratitude is neither singular nor neutral; rather, it emerges from a process of social construction involving the negotiation of meaning, interests, and power relations among the actors involved. In practice, the entire *Rumaghes Umbanua* procession is framed by artistic expressions that produce a sensory and participatory religious experience (see Figure 3). The *Kabasaran* dance, which has historically been a symbol of war and courage, has been reinterpreted as a symbol of victory over life and an expression of gratitude for divine providence. Similarly, *kolintang* and bamboo music ensembles perform not only traditional repertoires but also integrate interfaith religious songs. Traditional Minahasan attire has likewise undergone transformation by combining local and modern elements (Schouten, 2025). From an anthropological perspective, this practice reflects the function of ritual art, in which art serves as a means of articulating communal values within a sacred context.

**Figure 3.** Art in Rumaghes Umbanua



Source: Laikit Village Archives

However, this process of transformation does not occur in a linear or frictionless manner. Field data reveal the presence of resistance, particularly from groups who perceive that the reinterpretation of traditional symbols may obscure their original meanings or even contribute to cultural desecralization. At the same time, several religious actors have expressed concern regarding the potential for syncretism, especially as interfaith artistic expressions increasingly enter spaces previously regarded as theologically exclusive. These tensions demonstrate that art, as an expression of gratitude, functions not only as a space of cultural expression but also as an arena for negotiating meaning between preservation, reinterpretation, and theological legitimacy (Susanto and Nabilunnuha, 2025). Within the framework of contextual theology, this phenomenon may be understood through the creative model proposed by Stephen B. Bevans, in which faith is not manifested in an abstract form but is incarnated through contextual and experientially grounded cultural expressions (Hahn, 2026). Biblical traditions likewise demonstrate that art constitutes an integral part of expressions of gratitude, as reflected in the Psalms and in David's ritual dance (Lippe-Cohen, 2025).

In the context of *Rumaghes Umbanua*, however, the meaning of artistic expression has expanded beyond a purely vertical relationship between humans and God to encompass social practices involving horizontal relationships among communities of different religious backgrounds. Furthermore, art within *Rumaghes Umbanua* functions as a public

language that enables communication across religious and cultural identities. Nevertheless, this inclusivity is not entirely free from hierarchical structures. The dominance of a Christian theological framework within the broader narrative of the celebration reflects the existence of symbolic power relations that shape and regulate artistic expression. Other religious groups continue to participate, yet their involvement operates within socially and culturally negotiated boundaries. Consequently, art functions not only as a medium of social integration but also as a reflection of the distribution of authority in determining the meanings and forms of cultural expression.

In Homi K. Bhabha's perspective, this condition may be understood through the concept of the *third space*, a hybrid space in which cultural identity is not fixed but continuously negotiated and reconstructed (Bhandari, 2022). However, it is important to emphasize that this space generates not only harmony but also ambiguity. On the one hand, it creates opportunities for collaboration across identities; on the other hand, it preserves latent tensions concerning the boundaries of representation, legitimacy, and cultural authority. From a sociological perspective, art within *Rumaghes Umbanua* also plays a significant role in fostering social cohesion through collective emotional experiences. When music is performed and community members engage in spontaneous dances and collective responses, what Émile Durkheim describes as *collective effervescence* emerges, a condition in which individuals experience an intense emotional connection with the wider community. Nevertheless, these experiences remain performative and temporary in nature (Rimé and Páez, 2023). Although they may strengthen solidarity during moments of celebration, they do not automatically eliminate underlying social tensions, conflicts, or inequalities within everyday communal life. In addition, art within *Rumaghes Umbanua* functions as a mechanism for both the reproduction and transformation of cultural identity. Through dance, music, and traditional attire, the collective memory of the Minahasan

community is not only preserved but also renegotiated to remain relevant within the context of contemporary pluralism. At the same time, this transformation raises critical questions regarding authenticity: to what extent does the transformed tradition continue to represent the “authentic” character of Minahasan culture, and to what extent has it become a new cultural construct adapted to contemporary social and political needs?

Thus, art within *Rumaghes Umbanua* cannot be understood simplistically as either an expression of harmony or a mere aesthetic symbol. Rather, it constitutes a complex socio-theological practice in which gratitude is expressed through ongoing processes of negotiation, resistance, adaptation, and power relations. In this context, art functions not only as a unifying medium but also as a mechanism of selection and boundary-making; it is not only inclusive but also socially negotiated and constrained; not only transformative but also marked by ambiguity. It is precisely within this complexity that the significance of *Rumaghes Umbanua* emerges. Art as a celebration of gratitude does not exist as a static ideal but as a dynamic social process that is continuously negotiated, reconstructed, and reproduced by the community. This condition demonstrates that cultural transformation within multireligious societies is never fully complete. Instead, it remains an ongoing process of becoming, in which harmony and tension coexist simultaneously within the same cultural space.

### **Culture in Collaborative Pluralism Perspectives**

Based on field data, *Rumaghes Umbanua* in Laikit Village functions not only as a space that accommodates religious and denominational diversity but also as a social arena in which interactions among communities continuously generate new cultural expressions. Through participatory observation and in-depth interviews, this study demonstrates that pluralism in this context is not merely a matter of coexistence; rather, it involves continuous processes of interaction, adjustment, and mutual understanding among

religious groups. The village consists of diverse religious communities, including Christians from various denominations such as GMIM, GPDI, Maranatha, and Seventh-day Adventists, as well as Catholics, Muslims, and Buddhists, all of whom actively contribute to the formation of shared cultural practices.

This diversity does not lead to division or open conflict. On the contrary, it indicates that religious moderation has been effectively practiced within everyday social life (Mahsusi et al., 2023). Each group is able to maintain its own religious convictions while simultaneously demonstrating openness and respect toward others. This is reflected in their willingness to collaborate, participate in shared cultural spaces, and adjust the public expression of their religious identities within communal settings. In this context, religious moderation functions not merely as a formal concept or policy but as a lived social practice that sustains communal harmony (Wagiu et al., 2023). Nevertheless, this shared cultural space is neither entirely equal nor free from structural influences. Participation continues to be shaped by implicit social norms, collective expectations, and culturally negotiated boundaries. Religious identity remains important in cultural expression; however, its public representation is often adapted to fit a broader cultural framework considered acceptable to all participating groups. This condition demonstrates that religious moderation is an active and negotiated process shaped by social dynamics, cultural sensitivity, and a collective commitment to preserving social cohesion within a pluralistic society.

In *Rumaghes Umbanua*, art functions as an arena in which each community expresses and negotiates its identity. Diversity, therefore, is not static merely displaying differences but dynamic, involving continuous processes of mutual influence, adaptation, and negotiation. This dynamic can be observed in several artistic forms:

#### **a. Bamboo Music**

The bamboo music ensemble integrates traditional Minahasan songs with Christian spiritual music, melodies familiar to Muslim

communities, and even songs recognized by Buddhist participants. This musical fusion reflects a deliberate effort to create shared cultural resonance across religious boundaries. However, interview data indicate that such integration is not entirely unrestricted. Song selection is often carefully negotiated to avoid doctrinal exclusivity, demonstrating that artistic collaboration operates within culturally negotiated boundaries rather than through complete expressive freedom.

#### **b. Kabasaran Dance**

The reinterpretation of the *Kabasaran* dance by younger generations through the combination of traditional and contemporary choreography reflects ongoing cultural adaptation. Beyond aesthetic innovation, this transformation represents an effort to reposition Minahasan cultural identity within a pluralistic social context. At the same time, this reinterpretation raises implicit questions regarding authenticity and cultural authority, particularly concerning who possesses the legitimacy to redefine traditional symbols within a shared cultural space.

#### **c. Interfaith Choir**

The use of Indonesian, Minahasan, and Arabic languages in interfaith choir performances symbolizes inclusivity and interreligious recognition. Nevertheless, interview findings suggest that the inclusion of Arabic often functions more as a symbolic representation of Islamic presence than as a full expression of Islamic liturgical identity. This indicates that pluralism within *Rumaghes Umbanua* is performed through selective representation, in which cultural and religious elements are incorporated in ways that remain socially acceptable within a broader communal framework.

#### **d. Traditional Clothing**

The transformation of traditional clothing reflects processes of both cultural preservation and adaptation. While some groups continue to maintain traditional motifs and styles, others incorporate modern elements to increase relevance among younger generations. In

certain contexts, clothing also functions as a marker of religious identity; however, its public presentation is often moderated to align with collective social expectations. This condition suggests that even visual expressions of identity remain subject to negotiation within the shared cultural space.

#### **e. Unprecedented Cultural Expressions**

One of the most striking cultural phenomena within *Rumaghes Umbanua* is the inclusion of *Barongsai* performances by the Buddhist community. This performance serves as a strong visual expression of minority presence and cultural recognition. Nevertheless, interview findings indicate that such participation is also perceived as situational and conditional. In other words, inclusion is experienced not as an entirely unrestricted right but as a negotiated opportunity operating within a predominantly Christian social environment.

The phenomenon of *Rumaghes Umbanua* aligns closely with the concept of the *third space* proposed by Homi K. Bhabha, in which cultural identities are not fixed but continuously negotiated through social interaction. However, the empirical findings of this study suggest that this space is not entirely neutral. Rather, it is shaped by existing social structures, including majority-minority dynamics that influence both the extent and the form of participation. Furthermore, participatory observation reveals that collaborative pluralism within *Rumaghes Umbanua* is sustained through ongoing social processes, including joint rehearsals, intergroup discussions, and symbolic adjustments. These processes involve not only creative exchange but also strategic negotiation aimed at balancing cultural expression with social sensitivity. Practices such as simplifying cultural symbols, avoiding potentially contentious elements, and aligning performances with collectively shared values demonstrate that harmony is actively produced through continuous negotiation rather than emerging naturally or automatically.

These findings further highlight the presence of asymmetrical social relations within the practice of collaborative pluralism.

Minority groups tend to demonstrate greater flexibility in adapting their cultural expressions, whereas majority groups retain a stronger role in defining the boundaries of acceptable representation. Although these dynamics often operate implicitly, they reflect underlying power relations that shape the structure and practice of collaborative pluralism within *Rumaghes Umbanua*. From a sociological perspective, these interactions contribute to the formation of social cohesion through shared emotional and cultural experiences. Moments of collective participation generate a sense of togetherness that resonates with the concept of *collective effervescence* introduced by Émile Durkheim (Rimé and Páez, 2023). However, interview reflections indicate that such cohesion remains largely situational intensified during the celebration itself but not necessarily sufficient to eliminate underlying differences or latent tensions within everyday social life.

Accordingly, *Rumaghes Umbanua* represents a form of collaborative pluralism that is dynamic, negotiated, and contextually bounded. It should not be understood merely as a model of harmonious integration but rather as a complex social practice in which diversity is continuously managed through processes of adaptation, compromise, and implicit power negotiation. In this context, art functions not only as a bridge connecting communities but also as a regulatory space in which inclusion is facilitated while social and cultural boundaries are simultaneously maintained.

These findings reinforce the argument that pluralism within multireligious societies is not a fixed or completed condition but an ongoing social process. The strength of *Rumaghes Umbanua* lies not in the absence of tension, but in its capacity to manage difference through cultural practices that remain flexible, dialogical, and deeply embedded within communal social life.

### **Cultural Transformation and the Role of Contextual Theology**

Cultural transformation within *Rumaghes Umbanua* cannot be understood merely as the successful adaptation of tradition into a

contemporary religious celebration. Rather, it reflects a complex process of reinterpretation, negotiation, and selective reconstruction of meaning. In this context, transformation is not simply concerned with preserving cultural heritage in a new form, but also with determining which elements of tradition remain legitimate, which are modified, and which are excluded (Nicholas, 2022). This process demonstrates that cultural continuity is never neutral; instead, it is shaped by theological considerations, social interests, and communal authority.

The transition from *Dumia Umbanua* to *Rumaghes Umbanua* clearly illustrates this complexity. Historically, *Dumia Umbanua* functioned as a ritual deeply embedded in cosmological beliefs, ancestral reverence, and sacred territorial relationships. Its transformation into *Rumaghes Umbanua* did not occur through a smooth or linear theological evolution, but through a selective process in which certain ritual components were redefined while others were abandoned. This selectivity reveals that contextual theology does not merely “translate” faith into culture; rather, it actively filters culture through theological criteria. In this sense, cultural transformation is simultaneously constructive and exclusionary

Richard Niebuhr’s concept of *Christ Transforming Culture* provides an important framework for understanding this process (Chew Su Li, 2024). Niebuhr argues that Christian faith engages culture not by destroying it, but by reforming it from within. However, the case of *Rumaghes Umbanua* demonstrates that this reformative process is never entirely free from tension. Cultural transformation requires authority to determine which cultural elements are compatible with Christian faith and which are considered problematic. Such authority is not equally distributed, but is often concentrated among religious leaders, village elites, and dominant social actors. Consequently, theological transformation also functions as a social process shaped by power relations. These findings complicate the idealistic assumption that contextual theology naturally produces

harmony. Stephen B. Bevans' praxis model emphasizes theology as a lived social practice, yet praxis itself is always embedded within contested social realities. Within *Rumaghes Umbanua*, theological contextualization emerges through ongoing negotiations between preservation and reform, tradition and doctrine, inclusion and boundary-making. Accordingly, theology should be understood not merely as responsive to culture, but as an active force participating in the reconstruction of cultural legitimacy.

At the same time, the transformation of *Rumaghes Umbanua* reveals an ongoing tension between memory and modernity. Collective memory seeks continuity with ancestral heritage, whereas contemporary religious consciousness demands theological coherence. These two forces do not always operate harmoniously. Some community members perceive the transformation as a form of cultural revitalization, while others regard it as a rupture from ancestral authenticity. This divergence demonstrates that cultural transformation is not experienced uniformly; rather, it generates multiple interpretations and competing claims of legitimacy.

From a sociological perspective, this process may be interpreted through Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, in which dominant groups shape cultural meaning by legitimizing particular interpretations as socially acceptable (Ershadi, 2025). Within *Rumaghes Umbanua*, the Christian reinterpretation of traditional ritual gains symbolic legitimacy because Christianity occupies a dominant social position within the village. This dominance does not necessarily eliminate alternative perspectives, but it does shape the boundaries of participation and determine which forms of cultural expression are considered acceptable. Consequently, cultural transformation should not be romanticized as a purely dialogical process but rather understood as one structured by unequal distributions of cultural authority.

Furthermore, this transformation reflects what Stuart Hall describes as identity as a process of *becoming* rather than *being*. Minahasan identity within *Rumaghes*

*Umbanua* is not preserved in a fixed or original form but continuously reconstructed in response to contemporary social realities. Identity, therefore, becomes fluid, adaptive, and negotiable. Yet such flexibility simultaneously raises important questions regarding authenticity: at what point does adaptation strengthen cultural identity, and at what point does it risk dissolving historical distinctiveness? Within the broader context of globalization, *Rumaghes Umbanua* demonstrates that local traditions survive not by resisting change, but by strategically reconfiguring themselves. However, adaptation to contemporary pluralistic contexts also exposes local traditions to processes of commodification and symbolic simplification. Rituals that once carried deep cosmological significance may gradually become public cultural performances detached from their original sacred meanings. This ambiguity constitutes a central dimension of contemporary cultural transformation.

Accordingly, *Rumaghes Umbanua* should not be interpreted solely as a successful model of contextual theology, but rather as a dynamic site of theological and cultural contestation. Its significance lies precisely in its unfinished character: a tradition continuously negotiated between faith and heritage, authority and participation, continuity and change. In this case, contextual theology is not a completed synthesis, but an ongoing struggle to make faith meaningful within shifting cultural realities. These findings demonstrate that cultural transformation within multireligious societies is never concerned merely with harmony, but also with managing tensions, legitimizing meanings, and negotiating identities within an evolving social landscape.

## CLOSING

This study demonstrates that the transformation of *Rumaghes Umbanua* is not merely a process of cultural adaptation, but a complex socio-theological practice in which art functions as a mediating space for negotiating identity, belief, and coexistence within a multireligious society. Through the framework

of *Christ Transforming Culture*, this research shows that artistic expressions such as dance, music, and traditional attire operate not only as aesthetic elements but also as performative vehicles that translate theological values into public life. In this sense, art becomes a “third space” in which collaborative pluralism is enacted, enabling interaction across religious boundaries while simultaneously revealing implicit limitations shaped by power relations and majority-minority dynamics. The findings challenge the tendency to romanticize contextual theology as inherently harmonious. Instead, the case of *Rumaghes Umbanua* demonstrates that cultural transformation is always accompanied by negotiation, contestation, and selective reinterpretation. Inclusion within this context is neither absolute nor neutral, but socially constructed through continuous processes of adaptation, compromise, and symbolic regulation. Accordingly, this study contributes to the development of contextual theology by emphasizing its dynamic, contested, and praxis-oriented character, particularly within pluralistic societies.

At the same time, this research affirms that local traditions can remain relevant in the face of modernity when they engage in dialogical and adaptive processes without losing their social significance. *Rumaghes Umbanua* represents a form of culturally embedded public theology that fosters social cohesion and interreligious encounter while maintaining a flexible and evolving identity. However, the sustainability of this cultural-theological model cannot be taken for granted. Its continuity depends upon the capacity of younger generations to appropriate, reinterpret, and reproduce artistic practices within changing social contexts. Therefore, further research is needed to critically examine the mechanisms of artistic regeneration among younger generations, including the roles of education, digital media, and institutional support in sustaining cultural transmission. Comparative studies in other multireligious contexts may also deepen theoretical understanding of art as an agent of public theology and collaborative pluralism. In this

way, cultural transformation may be better understood not as a finished achievement, but as an ongoing process of becoming one that continuously negotiates meaning, identity, and coexistence within an increasingly complex social world.

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