



Article

## Historical Analysis of Rejection and Acceptance of the Values of Parmalim Beliefs

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Article Information	Abstract
Received : March 18, 2024 Revised : April 20, 2024 Accepted : May 26, 2024 Published: June 27, 2024	Parmalim is a belief system of the Batak people that predates the arrival of Islam or Christianity. This belief system was once prominent in the resistance against colonialism during the era of Sisingamangaraja XII, known as the Parhudamdandam movement. This paper aims to examine how Parmalim, which has cultural ties to the Batak people, was once prominent in its historical reality and well-established by 1920 but faced rejection since independence despite not being critical of its traditions. The method used is the historical method. The collection of sources comes from the colonial and post-colonial periods. Verification is done by testing the validity of these sources. Meanwhile, interpretation is done through discourse analysis to reveal the meaning of various sources. The results show that there are differences in viewing Parmalim; that as followers of a belief system, they are rejected by adherents of Abrahamic religions, but their cultural traditions are recognized as a pure form of Batak culture.
Keywords Parmalim; Batak; belief system; colonial resistance; cultural tradition.	
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## INTRODUCTION

The people of North Sumatra, especially Batak, are no strangers to Parmalim. A traditional school originating from the Batak tribe with teachings on belief in the power of the universe. In a subjective academic understanding, this belief is often translated as animism or dynamism. So that Parmalim is seated from the perspective of pagan understanding as if it violates religious beliefs and beliefs; considered heresy and as if it needs to be "saved". In practice, they are judged and forced to follow the religion recognized by the state. Usually for the sake of the smooth administrative process in running the state, because it is in this part that the marginalization of the Parmalim group occurs.

Parmalim—institutionally Ugamo Malim—is actually protected by the 28e Paragraph (2) and Article 29 Paragraph (2) UUD 1945 and its position in state administration is strengthened in Putusan MK Nomor 97/PUU-XIV/2016 which is followed up through Permendagri No. 118 Tahun 2017 Tentang Blangko KK, Register dan Kutipan Akta Pencatatan Sipil. So there is no real reason to consider Parmalim as something foreign, let alone as a false belief. Because the Indonesian state has not yet adhered to the theocratic state. It's just that the social system in Indonesia, which has a majority-minority nuance compared to multicultural nature, makes Parmalim unable to do much. This school of belief "must" follow the policy of the majority, even though the majority in question can also be a minority in this country. Moreover, the tendency of labeling tribal identities against religion can lead to identity politics in Indonesia (Anwar, [2022](#)).

Not many people know that Parmalim is the embodiment of Indonesia's original culture when it comes to Batak culture. Its activities have been traced since the 19th century when colonialism began to grip the Batak land. Parmalim is an anti-thesis of the Islamization movement of priests and missionaries who want to change the social system of the Batak community. In the era of Si Singamangaraja XII, this belief is better known as the Parhudamdandam movement, a traditional movement with the same concept in worshipping God (*Mualajadi Na Bolon*) and putting nature as the foundation of life. However, Parhudamdandam is better known as a movement against Dutch colonialism. According to Monang Naipospos (2017), Parmalim has been known since 1921 when the school was well institutionalized. On June 25, 1921, Parmalim officially became an institution of Ugamo Malim through the decree of Controleur van Toba No. 1494/13 based in Hutatinggi and allowed to build Bale Pasogit as its house of worship. According to Gultom, since 1913 this institutionalization effort has begun, but it was only carried out around 1920 (Gultom, [2017](#)).

As a traditional teaching, Parmalim has a typical Batak cultural device. For example, the use of red, white, or black colors called *tigabolit* it is often used in various ceremonies. The worship was carried out on the 2nd day of *Samisara* (Batak calendar) which falls on Saturday (Gregorian calendar). This makes it seem as if Parmalim is influenced by Christianity. Including the monogamous system or taboo on eating pork which is often equated with Islam. In fact, Parmalim is clearly completely different from the two heavenly religions mentioned. This difference makes Parmalim adherents not recognized as a school of faith. Meanwhile, at the same time, the concept of culture in Parmalim is agreed as a characteristic of pure Batak culture, both from a Christian Batak and an Islamic Batak.

The worship of *Mualajadi Na Bolon* as the creator himself is still alive in the midst of the Batak community, although this influence is found in the Batak people who live in North Sumatra or who still adhere to Batak culture purely outside the region in the form of religions other than Parmalim. They generally understand *Mualajadi Na Bolon* as a representation of the Almighty. Including Batara Guru, Soripata, and Mangalabulan which are related to the creation of the Batak King. The last subject is still considered a figure that really exists and will later spawn various Batak clans.

The representation of oral tradition begins with the concept of creation and the gods showing a state of mind that is not completely lost even though various Batak communities adhere to various other beliefs and religions. But that does not mean that Parmalim who is clearly part of the representation is formally recognized as a trust, even though the protection of them is clearly regulated. The activities of adherents of the Parmalim faith must still refer to the provisions and rules that have been set by the state related to the administrative affairs of the state itself. Maintaining Parmalim values in every formal affair will actually experience obstacles that lead to rejections. His affairs can be bad because in the end it becomes a never-ending humanitarian issue, because of the dualism of the state in viewing Parmalim as an exotic, traditional school of belief, but not part of the citizens who need to be protected for their rights.

Actually, Parmalim is an inseparable concept of Batak culture. The mention of it has changed slightly, where it was initially referred to as Parhudamdandam. This school is classified as relational dignity, that the dignity of belief is based between humans and non-humans (nature). Including the inherent rights based on the relationship. Meanwhile, for human dignity, Parmalim is not fully considered to be part of society that has adhered to other beliefs and has become the majority.

Parmalim beliefs have the status of believers in accordance with Article 28e, paragraph (2) UUD 45, everyone has the right to freedom to believe in beliefs, express thoughts and

attitudes, according to their conscience. Using the interpretation of the article presents no issues. However, according to the Handbook published by the Directorate of Belief in the One Almighty God and Indigenous Communities in 2021, adherents of indigenous beliefs have a strong assertion that followers of beliefs such as Parmalim are directed towards recognized religions. For example, the term 'adherent' refers to those who believe in and uphold the values of belief in the One Almighty God. Henceforth, they are referred to as Adherents of Belief (Hasworo & Turido, [2021](#)). This gives rise to the assumption that believers are directed to recognize the religions that have been recognized.

In contrast to spiritual culture, the Handbook on Belief in the One Almighty God and Indigenous Communities states that spiritual culture is the expression of spirituality in various forms such as oral traditions, behaviors (ritualistic), and material (symbols). These forms represent the creativity of the owners and preservers in communicating spiritual experiences/knowledge, emphasizing harmonious relationships among the entities of the cosmos, or for the harmony of the cosmos/world; for example, relationships with God, relationships with fellow humans, and/or relationships with nature. Creativity in the context of spiritual culture is the intelligence of the owners or preservers in conveying spiritual ideas/knowledge to be understood, practiced, developed, and utilized in socio-cultural life in accordance with the context and developments of the times (Gultom, [2017](#)).

The Parmalim belief system of the Batak is a more deep-seated syncretism, representing the fusion of indigenous practices with external influences of religion. In many ways, syncretism, according to Rosalind Stewart and Charles Shaw, bears a negative term: it implies that local versions of world religion are "mixed in" and, thus, somehow lesser and artificial than the natural or authentic religious version. This perspective makes apparent how syncretism was. It is, very contested as an issue where indigenous belief systems, such as Parmalim, are perceived through a lens of hybridity and cultural blending most of the time, judgment being done against the perceived purity of established world religions (Shaw & Stewart, [2003](#)). Jonathan Z. Smith speaks on religious identity, dealing with how religious identities are formed, sustained, and challenged within specific social and historical environments. Smith's insights into the formation of religious identity could be beneficial to the Parmalim community in their quest to retain cultural heritage amidst modernity and diversification of spiritual influences. His work underlines the fundamental nature of understanding religious practices in their unique socio-historical contexts and the realization of a dynamic character in spiritual identity (Smith, [1998](#)). As explained by Anita Maria Leopold and Jeppe Sinding Jensen, "the development of syncretism becomes the strategy of shaping or re-shaping the religious, power, legitimacy, and social strategies in a given culture. This is best typified by the syncretistic Parmalim belief system that arose, bearing in mind resistance to colonial powers, a feature that has historically deeply characterized its cultural resilience and social cohesion (Leopold & Jensen, [2016](#)). Similarly, this approach agrees with Magdalena Lubańska, who testifies that the modern understanding of syncretism relates to diverse approaches affected by cultural and historical factors (Lubanska, [2016](#)). Svetlana A. Bezklubaya underlines religious syncretism as a multi-leveled, complicated process of increasing cultural creativity and decreasing interreligious tension. It is hence this confluence of Batak indigenous practices with Islamic and Christian ideas in the case of Parmalim that forms a religious identification that transcends beyond known parameters and forms a social accord (Bezklubaya, [2021](#)). So, accepting syncretism by the Parmalim community, therefore, does not deny the community its cultural heritage but, instead, shapes it into a frame that advocates for religious tolerance in Indonesia as part of promoting diversity in artistic expressions. Overall, the study of syncretism in this Parmalim belief system has proven invaluable in rendering other indigenous religions resilient and adaptable. Knowledge of history and culture in Parmalim is essential for the appraisal of

its importance in bringing about social cohesion and fostering cultural diversity; it makes a dynamic play among religion, identity, and cultural heritage.

After considering the meaning of adherents of belief and spiritual culture, Parmalim is more appropriately categorized under the latter. However, according to existing laws, Parmalim is categorized as adherents of belief. This categorization is also experienced by other adherents. The term 'adherent'—implying a belief in the One Almighty God—seems to fall under a universal category characteristic of a religion. However, its local nature positions adherents as a unique belief system based on location, climate, and other factors (Harari, [2017](#), p. 250). Meanwhile, spiritual culture tends to be normative, not specifying the uniqueness of adherents of belief, in this case, Parmalim, as a distinct system from other beliefs. Nevertheless, this is not a significant issue because the concept of religion itself originates from a cultural product (Geertz, [1981](#)). The terms religion and belief are deliberately mentioned together to refer to all types of belief in the One Almighty God, whether institutionalized or not, such as local religious beliefs or those not recognized as religions (Dja'far & Nur'ani, [2016](#)).

The Parmalim belief system of the Batak people has historically played a significant role in challenging colonial authority while preserving indigenous values. According to Masashi Hirose, the Parmalim movement was instrumental in resisting colonialism by maintaining Toba-Batak cultural values and navigating European power structures. This historical resilience has continued into the modern era as the Parmalim community reconstructs their beliefs amidst the pressures of civil-state religion and government policies in Indonesia (Hirose, [1994](#)). Irwansyah Harahap highlights the community's efforts to preserve their local religion despite longstanding oppression. In the contemporary context, social dynamics in regions like Pardomuan Nauli Village, Laguboti, demonstrate how Parmalim, Christian, and Islamic adherents can coexist harmoniously (Harahap, [2000](#)). This social sedimentation, as observed by Mispa Sulastri Tambunan and Rama Tulus Pilakoannu, fosters unity and reduces religious tensions despite differences. However, the Parmalim community still faces significant challenges. Tonny Pangihutan Situmorang and Fikarwin Zuska note the pervasive discrimination and limited access to civil rights, including education, employment, and health services, due to a lack of state recognition. Despite these challenges, the Parmalim belief system positively influences the psychological well-being of its adherents. In fact, Nenny Ika Putri Simarmata et al. report that 25.9% of Parmalim believers experience higher psychological well-being, showcasing the community's resilience and the personal benefits of maintaining their cultural and religious identity.

Through the explained local context, Parmalim fits into the concept of relational dignity. Its teachings tend toward harmony with nature, emphasizing respect for nature as a cornerstone of life and maintaining gratitude toward *Mulajadi Na Bolon* as the Creator, as well as respect for various other beliefs. However, in terms of human dignity, Parmalim followers do not receive full respect from outsiders. They often encounter both covert and overt rejection.

Parmalim is a belief system of the Batak people that has existed since the colonial era. In reality, this belief system is both rejected and accepted as part of Batak society, albeit to varying degrees. The questions that arise are: why is Parmalim rejected as a belief system? What forms does this rejection take, and what does the acceptance look like? Are there other realities that cause rejection and acceptance to occur simultaneously?

## METHOD

This study is a historical analysis, so the sources and methods carried out are also historical. The historical data that has been collected is in the form of a list of traditional schools approved

by the colonial government, such as *Delische kunstkring* in 1919 (Adam, [1919](#)), the economic activities of the Parmalim community in *Jaarboek Van Het Departement Van Landbouw, Nijverheid En Handel in Nederlandsch-Indië 1915* (“Jaarboek Van Het Departement Van Landbouw,” [1917](#)), several ethnographic and anthropological records at that time, namely *Beschreibung der Battalander* in 1847 by Junghuhn, *Die Religion der Batak* in 1909 by Werneck (Werneck, [1909](#)), and *Die Toba-Batak auf Sumatra in gesunden un kranken Tagen* in 1925 by Winkler (Winkler, [1925](#)). The source of the past with a new taste comes from Loeb's essay which was republished in 2013 titled *Sumatera: Sejarah dan Masyarakatnya* (Loeb, [2013](#)) is an important description to see the Batak belief stream in the colonial period. On the other hand, official government publications are also trying to see the development of Parmalim. This can be seen through analysis *Memorie van Overgave* and *Koloniaal Verslag* as well as re-reading (text analysis) in *Soeara Batak*, *Die Batakländer*, and *Batakspiegel*.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Tondi*

The Batak culture recognizes the concept of *tondi*. *Tondi* refers to the soul or spirit that is inherent in a living person. *Tondi* can temporarily leave the body and can return through various summoning ceremonies (Loeb, [2013](#)). This situation typically occurs when a person is afflicted by illness or other ailments. However, when a person dies, the *tondi* departs permanently.

According to Werneck, the concept of *tondi* is fundamental to the traditional religion of the Batak people (Werneck, [1909](#)). Essentially, the concept of *tondi* or the soul is a crucial element in Indonesian religions, more so than the concept of *mana* (supernatural power) (Loeb, [2013](#)). This concept influences and determines a person's life. Actions and deeds are associated with the *tondi*. A person's fate and strength are believed to stem from the influence of the *tondi* residing within them. Therefore, the *tondi* holds a significant role in both individual and social life within Batak society. Furthermore, *tondi* does not only dwell in human bodies but also in plants and animals (even in rice, iron, and other useful tools) (Werneck, [1909](#)).

Every living being or object is believed to possess only one *tondi*. When a person dies, their *tondi* leaves for various reasons. It could be due to incompatibility with the body, being deliberately expelled from the body, or being stolen by a *begu* (ghost). The concept of *begu* is essentially the opposite of *tondi*. *Begu* is a spirit that does not have a fixed place or location. Often, if a *begu* is believed to have stolen a *tondi*, it is because the *begu* needs a companion. In other words, the *begu* is the antithesis of the *tondi*. Nonetheless, *tondi* is the central concept of the soul and the most important aspect of the belief system within Batak tradition.

Caring for the *tondi* is a crucial practice to ensure its comfort. The Batak community performs various ceremonies dedicated to this purpose. For instance, the *Boras Si Pir Ni Tondi* ceremony uses rice as the main material. The rice symbolizes plants that also possess *tondi*, thus creating harmony and mutual care between the *tondi* of plants and the *tondi* of humans (Amrul & Lubis, [2017](#)). Every ceremony, regardless of its purpose, is inherently connected to the *tondi*. In major celebrations such as *Sipaha Sada* or *Sipaha Lima*, which are the principal festivals for Parmalim adherents, the concept of *tondi* plays a significant role. These ceremonies reflect the integral connection between the spiritual well-being of the community and the nurturing of the *tondi*, reinforcing the importance of *tondi* in both individual and collective rituals within Batak society.

## Sinkretism

It is incorrect to consider Parmalim or Ugamo Malim as the original belief system of the Batak people. Equally erroneous is the notion that Parmalim is merely a pagan religion. Parmalim has been shaped into its current form by numerous external influences. In general, indigenous belief systems in Indonesia have experienced syncretism, with major world religions influencing their development. Parmalim is no exception to this influence.

Before being institutionalized as Parmalim or Ugamo Malim, Batak beliefs (even before the arrival of Islam and Christianity) followed patterns originating from India. Briefly, Hinduism had a significant impact on the development of Batak cultural beliefs, which eventually coalesced into Parmalim. The interaction between Hinduism and the Batak community has existed for thousands of years, marked by historical events such as Barus, the invasion of King Chola, and the construction of Portibi and Bahal temples.

In Batak belief, the nature of the world and its creation bears similarities to Hinduism. Like the Brahmins, the ancient Batak divided the world into three realms: the upper world, the middle world, and the lower world. The upper world contains the *debata* (derived from the Sanskrit word *deva*), the middle world is inhabited by humans, and the lower world is for the dead, *begu* (ghosts), and other spirits. The deities themselves are anthropomorphic, resembling human beings. The Batak refer to the highest deity as *Mula Jadi Na Bolon*, the origin of everything. Today, even though Christianity is the predominant religion, *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* still persists in the Batak collective consciousness as a great force synonymous with God or Allah. *Mula Jadi Na Bolon* is a personification of *Swayambhu* from Brahmanical tradition (Loeb, 2013). *Swayambhu* is the primordial origin that gave rise to the Trimurti: Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu.

In Batak mythology, *Batara Guru* represents Shiva, serving as the leader of the deities and the creator of the world. *Soripata* resembles Vishnu, tasked with being the guardian and bestower of blessings. However, *Mangalabulan* does not clearly correspond to Brahma, indicating a possible discontinuity in understanding, as syncretism does not adopt everything exactly from its origin. This partial adoption and adaptation are typical in syncretic processes, leading to unique interpretations and representations within the Batak belief system.

The teachings of *debata* form an integral part of Parmalim beliefs. Interestingly, the concept of *debata* and the creation of the world are also widely accepted among the general Batak population. Syncretism is unavoidable within Parmalim as well. This is evident in the use of terms with similar terminologies, such as *jahowa*, derived from Jehovah (God), or *alim* from the Arabic word meaning holy person, and *malim* meaning a religious scholar. According to Hirosue, the concept of Parmalim leans towards traditional values that pave the way to European sources of power, symbolized by Jehovah (Hirosue, 1988). The incorporation of these influences likely coincided with the establishment of Parmalim, which occurred relatively recently in the early 20th century when Parmalim became well-organized. The pertinent question is, why did the Parmalim belief system become institutionalized?

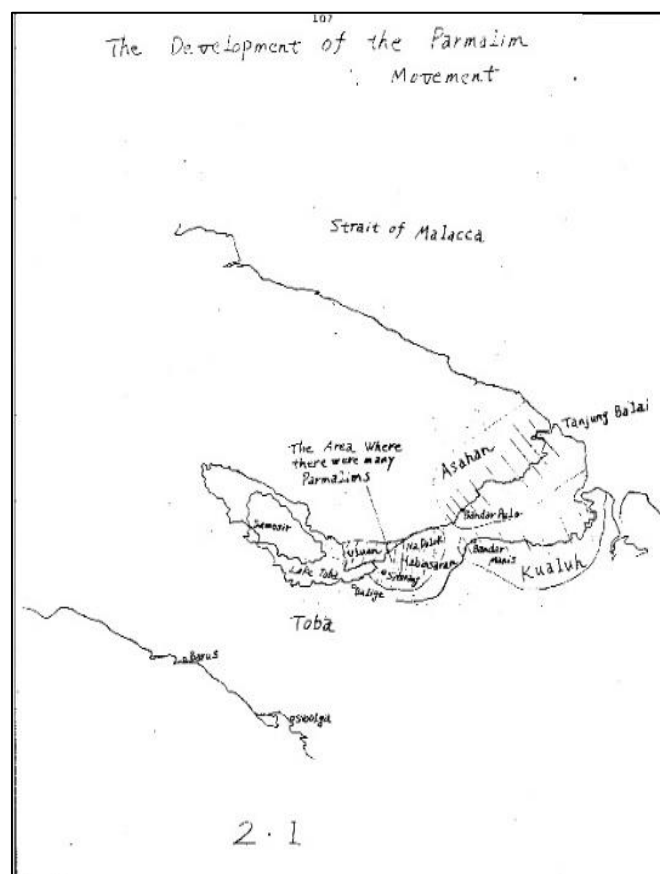
## Social, Political or Cultural Movements?

To understand the origins and development of Parmalim, it is essential to examine the social and political context of the time. In the early 20th century, the Batak region had just emerged from the Batak War (Batakoorlog) which occurred from approximately 1878 to 1907. This war was fought between the Dutch colonial forces and Sisingamangaraja XII. Historical accounts, such as those by Uli Kozok (Kozok, 2010) and Natalia & Aditya (Natalia & Aditya, 2020), indicate that the war was rooted in the rejection of missionary activities in the Batak land,

primarily to protect ancestral beliefs passed down through generations. However, the war had multiple underlying reasons, including economic and social factors.

The arrival of missionaries in the Batak region brought significant changes. Apart from converting to Christianity, the Batak people experienced shifts in their social and economic systems. The *Raja Naopat* in Silindung (*Controleur van Toba No. 1494/13, n.d.*), who previously ruled with the blessing of Sisingamangaraja, were now directly appointed by the colonial government with the endorsement of the missionaries (Tobing, 2008). Trade practices transitioned from barter to more monetized exchanges. Education became oriented towards Western teachings, and traditional healing (*dukun*) practices were replaced by modern medicine. Basically, this situation is heading towards a change in the direction of modernization, but this change has given rise to the seeds of refusal to maintain the status quo.

To incite resistance against colonialism, traditional elements became pivotal reasons. The teachings of ancestors had to be preserved from the onslaught of missionary activities. Silindung, which served as a missionary stronghold and the administrative center of Tapanuli Residency, was persistently disrupted by Sisingamangaraja's forces. This highlights that the conflict was not merely a clash between the Batak people and the colonial government but also against the missionaries themselves. Observing the movements of troops and the centers of Parmalim adherents further emphasizes this point (see **Figure 1**). Moreover, conflicts arose due to the strained relationship between Sisingamangaraja and Nommensen, exacerbated by the fact that Dutch troops arrived after being invited by Nommensen himself (Kozok, 2010). This disharmony likely stemmed from the Christian teachings introduced by Nommensen, which Sisingamangaraja vehemently opposed as they threatened his authority among the Batak people.



**Figure 1.** Map of the spread of Parmalim in North Sumatra in 1907 (Hirose, 1988)

In examining these historical relationships, it appears that the Batak people during that era were more resistant to Christianity compared to Islam. This sentiment is evidenced by Sisingamangaraja XII's relationship with the Aceh Sultanate. There is some confusion when considering these relations within the context of the Parmalim movement. Geographically situated closer to North Sumatra, if necessary, the Batak could have directly confronted the colonial administration of the North Sumatra Residency.

The Batak people historically had an unfavorable experience with Islam during the Padri War. However, they maintained strong ties with the Aceh Sultanate and had close relations with the Simalungun people. The Parmalim movement attracted small kings and leaders of traditional beliefs (*parbaringin*). Eventually, the Parmalim movement ceased to be merely a belief movement without confrontation when the Batak War ended with the death of Sisingamangaraja XII.

However, Parmalim's resistance to Christian missionaries during the colonial era significantly shaped its identity as a guardian of traditional Batak beliefs and practices. This resistance solidified Parmalim's role as a counter-movement to the cultural and religious changes imposed by colonialism. The conflict with missionaries led Parmalim to emphasize its distinct identity and to actively preserve and promote traditional Batak rituals, customs, and spiritual beliefs. Parmalim's subsequent interactions with Islamic practices, particularly during the Parhudamdandam movement, introduced new elements into its belief system. While Parmalim did not convert to Islam, it adopted certain Islamic practices like purification rituals and prayer forms. This syncretism reflects Parmalim's adaptability and openness to incorporating external influences while maintaining its core Batak identity. The integration of Islamic elements demonstrates Parmalim's ability to engage with the broader religious landscape and to adapt to changing social and political contexts.

### **Between Guru Somalaing, Nasiakbagi, and Jaman & Pangambe Jau**

How the teachings of Parmalim grew and developed can be traced through several key figures. The central figure of the Parmalim movement was Guru Somalaing, the spiritual advisor to Sisingamangaraja XII. A similar doctrine to Parmalim was Parsiakbagi, led by Nasiakbagi of Nagasaribu (Perret, [2010](#)). Lastly, there was the Parhudamdandam movement led by Jaman & Pangambe Jau. All these movements confronted colonial authorities, including missionaries in the Tapanuli Residency. They shared a common ideological root, emphasizing adherence to native traditions and messianism. However, Parmalim alone persisted and survived to the present day.

Parmalim initially emerged as a movement, followed by Parsiakbagi and concluded with Parhudamdandam. The Parmalim movement did not coincide directly with the onset of the First Batak War. Guru Somalaing, considered the initiator of Parmalim around 1890, several years after the outbreak of the Batak War, had interacted with an Italian traveler (Hirosue, [1988](#)). Since then, Parmalim developed its own doctrines, blending Batak traditions with elements such as the worship of God Jahoba, Jesus, Sisingamangaraja, King Rom, and King Stambul, alongside teachings on polygenism, prohibitions on consuming pork, and the burning of incense (Perret, [2010](#)). This syncretic nature accounts for various teachings within Parmalim. Nevertheless, traditional elements remained more predominant than external doctrines. According to Perret, the Parmalim movement represented the Batak people's response to Western influence, seeking to uphold their traditional values (Perret, [2010](#)). Despite the end of the Batak War with the death of Sisingamangaraja XII and the exile of Guru Somalaing, Parmalim did not completely disappear.



The continuation of Parmalim entered a new phase with the emergence of a similar movement under a different name, known as Parisiakbagi. This movement emphasized pure traditional teachings, particularly the worship of *Mualajadi Na Bolon*. However, Parisiakbagi was short-lived as it was suppressed in 1910 when its leader, Nasiakbagi, was captured. Nevertheless, the confrontation by traditional movements did not cease, as shortly thereafter, Parhudamdand emerged and posed significant challenges to the colonial government.

Following the demise of Parisiakbagi, Parhudamdand took over in resisting colonial rule starting from 1917. Parhudamdand can be seen as running parallel to Parmalim with some differences. Its leaders, Jaman & Pangambe Jau, were followers of Parmalim and even claimed to be the Just Ruler or the incarnation of Sisingamangaraja XII. However, the movement had a more nationalist appearance, and its teachings tended to align closer to Islam (Hirosue, [1988](#)). For instance, purification rituals and prayers were influenced by Islamic practices, such as reciting ratib to induce possession, without converting to Islam (Perret, [2010](#)). Parhudamdand, however, was specifically targeted towards the Batak people. This movement also ceased by the 1920s. Although both Parhudamdand and Parisiakbagi were short-lived, they left a significant impact on the subsequent development of Parmalim.

Between the three figures considered pivotal to Parmalim, Guru Somalaing exerted the strongest influence. He integrated many Christian practices acquired during interactions with Italians. The doctrine of the Trinity appeared compatible with Batak customs such as Dalihan Na Tolu, alongside the belief in Debata Sitolu Sada (three gods in one), which was prominently featured. However, the influence of Islam, which began with the Parhudamdand movement, also colored Parmalim as a traditional religion seeking to engage with its surrounding world. This can also be seen as a stance of the Batak people no longer remaining isolated.

Recognizing the continuation of movements after the end of the war against Sisingamangaraja XII, the colonial government deemed it necessary to restrict or even eliminate similar movements. Banning teachings like "Parmalim" and its counterparts would not provide a solution. Therefore, it was deemed preferable to categorize these teachings into a form that could be controlled by the government. Thus, the name "Parmalim" was recognized as one of the institutions of indigenous spiritual beliefs in 1920. On June 25, 1921, Parmalim officially became an institution called Ugamo Malim through the decree of Controleur van Toba No. 1494/13, headquartered in Hutatinggi, allowed to build Bale Pasogit as its place of worship. Its headquarters in Hutatinggi was permitted to conduct various ceremonies and receive assistance for improvements. This move naturally faced opposition from the missions located in Silindung, as the mission's goal was to convert traditional beliefs into a universal religion. For political reasons, the colonial government maintained the institution of Parmalim and even encouraged its legalization, as this would facilitate control over beliefs that could threaten the government, as exemplified by Sisingamangaraja XII.

The first leader recognized after Parmalim's formal recognition by the colonial government was Raja Mulia Naipospos. According to various sources, Raja Mulia Naipospos was a direct disciple of Nasiakbagi, who had confronted the Dutch. The rapid extinguishment of Nasiakbagi's movement was apparently utilized by the colonial authorities by elevating his direct disciple to lead the Ugamo Malim institution, choosing him for its spiritual institutional apparatus rather than confronting the more nationalist-oriented Parhudamdand movement. Naturally, the control exerted was easier because its localized movement could be directed solely towards managing the religious system. This control was quite stringent, even extending to the materials used in rituals, ensuring their appropriateness, such as the use of hemp in a hamisara ritual ("Jaarboek Van Het Departement Van Landbouw," [1917](#)).

## The Contemporary Reality of *Ugamo Malim*

At the dawn of independence, Parmalim beliefs initially faced no issues. The government in its infancy facilitated them under Article 28e, paragraph (2) of the 1945 UUD 45, which states: "Every person shall have the right to freedom of religion, to declare his opinion and belief, according to his conscience." Parmalim, along with other indigenous beliefs, freely expressed their thoughts and beliefs in accordance with the conscience of Malim adherents. However, ironically, the Parmalim School established in 1939 had to be closed because its predominantly Malim students were required to attend government schools.

The Parmalim School was established to counterbalance missionary schools in the Batak lands. It has been noted that Sisingamangaraja XII rejected missionary teachings and colonialism in Batak lands. Despite Sisingamangaraja's defeat, Parmalim teachings persisted in the Batak lands. However, early nationalist policies during independence aimed not only to transform various colonial legacies into Indonesian culture but also to integrate local cultural elements into Indonesian identity. Parmalim was recognized as a belief system but was assimilated into Batak culture, rather than recognized as a separate entity from the widespread Christian faith in the Batak lands. The perception that Bataks were predominantly Christian was widespread among the coastal communities of eastern Sumatra due to the successful missionary efforts in Batak lands (Anwar, [2022](#)).

In the early independence era, Parmalim leadership was led by Raja Ungkap Naipospos, also known as Ihutan Bolon Parmalim. He was the only son of Raja Mulia Naipospos and a disciple of Nasiakbagi who continued Parmalim teachings from Guru Somalaing. Raja Ungkap Naipospos was unable to maintain the Parmalim School established by his father but successfully organized Parmalim administratively. A year before his death, Parmalim was registered in the inventory of Believers of the One Almighty God by the Decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture No. I.136/F.3/N.1.1/1980. Parmalim also successfully renovated Bale Pasogit Sisingamangaraja and Batu Siungkapungkapon in Bakkara in 1974, considered the headquarters of Parmalim. This indicated that various ceremonies associated with Parmalim beliefs were ostensibly unproblematic and aligned with Batak culture, such as the *manulanghi* ritual (honoring parents by serving them), *pariaan boloh sipaha lima* (celebrating harvest results), *mangkokal holi* (ancestor skeleton purification), and others (Liyansyah, [2012](#)). But for the term "Parmalim" itself is a problem because for the Batak, a religion is clearly related to universal beliefs, such as Islam or Christianity.

However, the term "Parmalim" itself posed issues regarding its social rights impact. For instance, in administrative processes, adherents of Parmalim had to choose a religion column in their identity cards (KTP) according to officially recognized religions in Indonesia or leave it blank. Despite state facilitation that believers of indigenous faiths should include their beliefs in their identities, in practice, Parmalim adherents were often "forced" to choose from established religions. This was typically due to bureaucratic simplification sought by officials. The implications for Parmalim believers were substantial, affecting their relationships in economic, social, and political spheres.

Essentially, the issue surrounding the term "Parmalim" itself is quite straightforward. If adherents of Parmalim choose one of the recognized religions, it resolves many of the issues they face simply due to the name "Parmalim." Although the actual practice of their religious beliefs may differ, what matters most is that the designation of their faith is changed to one of the recognized religions. However, Parmalim believers hold high dignity, both in terms of relational and human dignity. The issue of a name change isn't as simple as merely obtaining ease of access to societal or governmental relations.

The most affected impact of Parmalim adherents' decision not to choose a recognized religion is in the field of education. In the early years of independence, Parmalim beliefs were not given much attention. The focus was on establishing governance systems and finding the right formula for independence. The less conducive political situation did not make Parmalim beliefs something perceived as strange or unique. A Parmalim follower remained so even if attending public schools and enjoying equal rights, except perhaps in matters concerning religious education. However, during this period, religious education in public schools was not a primary requirement for graduation, hence there was no reason to discredit Parmalim adherents. It was only during the New Order era that this became a challenge.

The political environment of the New Order era, which centralized belief systems and ideologies, required minority beliefs to align with government-designated groups. Parmalim beliefs were affected, viewed as a strange belief within their social environment. In school settings, Parmalim did not receive equal opportunities in religious education. Those adhering to Parmalim would leave during religious classes, as the government did not provide religious teachers for Parmalim. There were attempts by Parmalim adherents themselves to bring in teachers from Parmalim backgrounds, but the government rejected this. As a consequence, during religious exams, which became a requirement for graduation during the New Order era, many Parmalim adherents either did not pass or were unable to continue their education to higher levels.

Nevertheless, some individuals eventually converted to Islam or Christianity to facilitate their educational pursuits in Indonesia, although Parmalim remained a deeply held belief in their hearts. In the era of reform, there was a slight change as regional governments began to recognize the rights of traditional belief adherents like Parmalim to be included in the curriculum as an important local content.

## CONCLUSION

The teachings and beliefs of Parmalim are fundamentally accepted as part of Batak culture, rather than as a recognized religious sect. The rituals performed by Parmalim are viewed as pure Batak cultural practices, yet not a belief system standing on par with recognized religions in Indonesia. Parmalim teachings represent a spiritual doctrine that during colonial times evolved into a resistance movement, famously known as the Batak War with Sisingamangaraja XII as its central figure. As a spiritual doctrine, Parmalim developed into a resistance movement against colonial authorities and in opposition to missionary activities in Silindung. The conclusion of the Batak War did not halt confrontations, as similar movements like Nasiakbagi and Parhudamdin emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The government took the stance that Parmalim teachings could not be disregarded outright. In 1921, Parmalim was recognized as an official spiritual institution and was facilitated by the government with the aim of controlling these movements. Parmalim was even permitted to establish schools. However, in the early years of independence, these schools were closed due to Indonesian government policies that sought to nationalize anything impacting localities, leading Parmalim adherents to attend public schools. During the New Order era, Parmalim belief systems faced increasing challenges due to government policies that categorized various ideologies, compelling Parmalim adherents to choose from recognized religions. Consequently, Parmalim was perceived as a deviant sect, although simultaneously, its religious acts and rituals were recognized as cultural activities within the Batak community. As an identity, Parmalim has yet to be regarded in terms of human dignity and relational dignity, which are crucial aspects of religious and belief freedoms in Indonesia.

This historical analysis of Parmalim underscores the need for further research into the contemporary manifestations of Parmalim beliefs and practices, particularly in relation to modern Batak identity formation and the ongoing negotiation of religious freedom in Indonesia. Future studies could delve into the lived experiences of Parmalim adherents, examining how they navigate the complexities of maintaining their traditional beliefs within a predominantly Christian Batak society and a state that prioritizes recognized religions. Additionally, research could explore the potential for legal reforms to better protect minority belief systems like Parmalim, ensuring their rights to practice their faith without discrimination or marginalization. By addressing these questions, future research can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of religious diversity, cultural identity, and the evolving landscape of belief in Indonesia.

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