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## Ritual Myths in Traditional Dance Performances of Aceh, Java, Bali, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua

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**Abstract:** The insertion of myth into ritual events and supernatural powers in a dance performance certainly has a greater purpose. Something sacred and considered to have supernatural powers certainly has a value that cannot be grasped by common sense, so the mysteriousness of myths is still difficult to consider as truth. In general, this research aims to comprehensively examine the myths that develop in dance performance rituals, especially in the lives of the people of Aceh, Java, Bali, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua. This research method is qualitative research carried out by describing facts. The results of this research show that the background to the emergence of myths in ritual dance in Aceh, Java, Bali, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua is based on folklore that developed in these areas. Apart from that, it was also found that the main motives for creating myths were monotheism and ecological motifs. The bond and awareness between humans, the universe, and God create a balanced relationship so that a safe, secure, and protected situation is created. In this case, it can be seen that myths are not just reports of events that previously occurred, but myths provide direction to human behavior and are a guide in determining human wisdom.

**Keyword:** Ecology, Monotheism, Myth and Ritual Dance

### INTRODUCTION

When dance is discussed in the context of human life, the issues to be examined are highly complex. This complexity is inseparable from the multifunctionality of dance performances, both in group and individual contexts. Such multifunctionality aligns with the fundamental principle of why art is created to fulfill human needs for tranquility in facing the formidable forces of nature, which are perceived as potential threats to life (Desfiarni, 2004). The stages of human life in attaining happiness and peace are commonly referred to as myths (Nasrudin, 2020). Consequently, it is unsurprising that major themes in art worldwide often revolve around spiritual and mystical elements, particularly in traditional dance performances. The harmony between rituals and dance performances evolves dynamically, including in Indonesia. Ritual dance performances and supernatural forces have developed extensively throughout the country. It can even be said that the origins of Indonesian dances are rooted in ritual practices, whether in rural communities or royal courts. This phenomenon is influenced

by traditional beliefs and the constellation of myths that perceive humans as the weakest beings, necessitating reliance on external dominant forces.

The supernatural power of cosmic deities, ancestral spirits, and other transcendental entities is believed to have a close and interdependent relationship. These manifestations are implemented in various societal needs, such as warding off misfortune, healing illnesses, ensuring environmental fertility, and promoting human prosperity (Suharti, 2013). The incorporation of myths into ritual ceremonies and supernatural elements in dance performances serves a greater purpose beyond these manifestations. Sacred entities and supernatural forces hold values that transcend rational understanding, making the mystery of myths difficult to accept as absolute truth. This scholarly inquiry emerged from such concerns.

Considering the diversity of ethnicities, social groups, environments, beliefs, moral systems, and socio-cultural backgrounds, the roles and functions of traditional dance performances vary significantly. According to Soedarsono (Hera, 2018), performing arts serve three primary functions: (1) as a ritual medium, (2) as a means of personal expression, typically for entertainment, and (3) as an aesthetic presentation. Based on these primary functions, this study aims to explore myths in ritual dance performances from Aceh, Java, Bali, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua.

The central research problem of this study is to examine the myths and motifs embedded in ritual dance performances. The primary objective is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the myths present in ritual dance performances, particularly in the cultural contexts of Aceh, Java, Bali, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua. Through myth analysis, the study seeks to reveal the creative transformation of artistic movements by performers. Additionally, by depicting societal contexts, analyzing cultural aspects, interpreting performing arts, and identifying emerging myths, the study will illuminate the functions, aesthetic transformations, and inherent values within these traditional dance performances.

This study is expected to contribute to national development by enriching academic knowledge in the field of culture, particularly in the performing arts. Furthermore, it aims to expand the body of literature on Indonesian dance performances, specifically regarding ritual myths in performing arts, thereby providing valuable information for those interested in myths within Indonesian folk performances. Previous research has extensively examined similar subjects. However, no studies have specifically focused on myths in Aceh. The most relevant study was conducted by Magfhirah et al., titled *Aesthetic Aspects of Sining Dance in the Gayo Community of Central Aceh Regency*. The objective of this study was to describe the choreography and aesthetic values of Sining dance, which was once nearly extinct. The analysis utilized Sumandiyo Hadi's choreography concept, The Liang Gie's aesthetic analysis, and De Witt H. Parker's concept of life values. The findings indicated that Sining Dance possesses aesthetic value, as its form is perceptible through the senses and conveys significant life values within the Gayo community as part of their cultural and traditional rituals.

In Java, studies on myths in ritual dance performances are relatively abundant. One notable example is the research titled *Bedhaya Ketawang Dance: A Reflection of the Myth of Kanjeng Ratu Kidul in the Power Dimension of the Kasunanan Surakarta King*. Conducted by Sulistyo Haryanti, this study examined the symbolism of the four dancers from a different perspective, interpreting them through Hindu philosophy as representations of the four human potentials embodied in the Panca Pandawa figures. A qualitative research method was employed, and the findings indicated that the Bedhaya Ketawang dance remains significant among its supporters, demonstrating that cultural values rooted in mythology continue to be relevant today.

Similarly, studies on ritual dance myths in Bali are abundant. One such study was conducted by I Gusti Ngurah, titled *Sanghyang Dance and Wayang Sepuhleger: Rituals for the Liberation of Balinese People During the Pandemic*. This research aimed to analyze the

ritualistic form of Sanghyang dance in Cemenggaon village and the general practice of Wayang Sepuh Leger in Bali. The analysis was based on ritual and habitus theories. The findings revealed that the Sanghyang dance ritual involves a trance process in which the dancer enters an unconscious state. Meanwhile, the Wayang Sepuh Leger ritual is a performance led by a *dalang* (puppeteer) to purify individuals born on Tumpek Wayang from disease outbreaks.

In Kalimantan, a study on ritual dance was conducted by Hendro Listantono, titled *The Badewa Dance Ritual of the Tidung Tribe in Sembakung District: A Semiological Study of Roland Barthes*. This research aimed to understand the mythological meanings within the Badewa Dance ritual in Sembakung District. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, and the findings indicated that the ritual offerings (*kelangkang*) carried significant meanings. The various offerings, considered essential by the local community, were presented in three locations homes, forests, and rivers as fundamental components of the ritual. Additionally, elements such as chants, lyrics recited by ritual attendants, and ceremonial accessories used by the attendants held symbolic meanings that were essential for the ritual to be deemed complete.

Moving eastward, studies on myths in ritual dance performances are relatively scarce, particularly in Papua, where no prior research has been conducted. In Sulawesi, however, a relevant study was conducted by Ardin et al., titled *The Symbolic Meaning of Linda Performance in the Karia Ritual Ceremony in West Muna Regency, Southeast Sulawesi*. This research aimed to describe the symbolic meaning of the Linda dance performance within the Karia ritual ceremony. The study employed a qualitative methodology with approaches from Art Anthropology, Art Sociology, and Art Education. The findings indicated that the Linda performance serves as a ritual of purification and maturation for adolescent girls, symbolizing

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design by describing concrete facts regarding the ritual myths in traditional dance performances under investigation. Consequently, various facts that emerge in the discussion will provide a detailed depiction of different situations, social conditions, and the relationship between society and the myths they believe in (Gushevinalti et al., 2020). Since this study does not involve mathematical elements, the qualitative research approach is considered capable of providing broader and more credible insights than quantitative research, which is often restricted to numerical data. This perspective aligns with the argument put forth by Ali Anggito and Johan Setiawan (2018), who emphasize that qualitative research prioritizes processes and meanings over outcomes, thereby yielding more comprehensive findings.

The primary sources of this research are obtained from cultural experts and master performers of ritual dance performances in Aceh, Java, Bali, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua. Meanwhile, secondary sources are derived from various supporting materials such as journal articles, books, and media. The data collection techniques employed include document studies or literature reviews related to secondary sources, as well as interviews with artists recognized as masters in the field of ritual dance performances. Since this study adopts a qualitative approach, the collected data will be analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. These three components need to be compared to determine the direction of the final conclusions as the research outcome (Ambarwati, 2022).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. The Mythology of Dance in Aceh

Acehnese traditional dance is deeply rooted in the region's Islamic beliefs, cultural customs, and mythological narratives. These influences are reflected in two primary categories of dance: those based on religious and customary traditions such as Saman, Meuseukat, Rapa'i

Uroh, Rapa'i Geleng, Rampou Aceh, and Seudati and those inspired by myths and legends, including Pho, Ale Tunjang, Ula-Ula Lembing, Lang Ngelekak, and Geudumbak. These dances are more than mere performances; they function as cultural expressions that preserve communal memory and identity shaped by history, religion, and folklore (Putri et al., 2015). The Pho dance exemplifies how myth shapes dance in Aceh. It originates from a tragic legend in the Kaula Bate Malelang-Madion kingdom, where a couple is falsely accused and executed due to a rejected marriage proposal. The grieving mother of Malelang expresses her sorrow through poetic lamentation and dance, which was gradually adopted by other women and evolved into a ritualistic performance. Today, this expression of mourning is formalized in the Pho dance, with the element of *meuratoh* a distinctive style of lamentation serving as its hallmark (Putri et al., 2015).

Another notable example is the Inen Mayak Pukes dance of the Gayo people in Central Aceh, created by Ibrahim Kadir in 1960. The dance tells the story of a young girl transformed into stone after disobeying her parents' advice not to look back during her journey to her husband's home. Overwhelmed by emotion upon hearing her mother's voice, she turns around and is turned into stone inside a cave. Her husband, overcome with grief, prays to share her fate, and he too becomes stone. This tale of love, obedience, and fate is artistically captured through dance movements (Fitri, 2015). The Guel dance also blends myth with performance, recounting the legend of Sengeda and Bener Meriah, involving a white elephant as a central symbol. This dance incorporates ritualistic and symbolic gestures to reflect Sengeda's quest to capture the elephant, believed to be guided by a dream from his long-lost brother. Performed in pairs, Guel dance uses specific movement stages *menatap*, *redep*, *ketibung*, and *cicang nangka* to convey themes of loyalty, affection, betrayal, and reflection. It serves as both a reenactment of cultural memory and a medium of philosophical introspection within the Acehnese worldview (Rustiyanti, 2019; Permata, 2020).

## B. The Myth of Dance in Java

Folk art performances in Java such as *kuda lumping*, *reog*, *dolalak*, *rodhad*, *sintrenan*, *buncis*, and *pencak silat* are deeply rooted in mystical traditions, with performers often entering trance-like states that allow them to perform extraordinary feats. These include consuming sharp objects, withstanding fire or blades, and dancing tirelessly. One prominent example is the Lengger dance, which is strongly connected to the myth of Dewi Sri, the goddess of fertility. In regions like Banyumas, the dance is believed to be guided by spirits known as *indang*, whose presence is considered essential for the ritual's success (Suraji, 2010).

The Lengger dance is closely related to other ritual dances such as *tayub*, *ledhek*, *ronggeng seblang*, and *sintren*, which are typically performed during village cleansing ceremonies (*bersih desa*). These dances serve as offerings of gratitude to fertility deities and are performed post-harvest to celebrate agricultural abundance. According to Koentjaraningrat (1985), such ritualistic dances reflect Javanese cultural expressions of thankfulness to supernatural powers for prosperity. The dance rituals are thus not only artistic performances but also spiritual acts grounded in mythological belief systems, particularly the worship of Dewi Sri. Ben Suharto (1999) further elaborates that *tayub* a dance akin to Lengger originated from indigenous animistic beliefs later influenced by Hinduism, particularly from the Ciwa Cakta Tantrayana sect in India. This sect sought spiritual liberation (*moksha*) through direct experiences, including sexual rites (*maithuna*). When Hindu teachings merged with local Javanese practices, the dance forms evolved to reflect a fusion of indigenous fertility worship and Hindu mysticism. As a result, many fertility rituals in Java contain sensual elements, with erotic dance movements symbolizing divine union and the mystical promise of agricultural abundance (Suraji, 2010).



A parallel tradition can be found in the Beskalan dance from Malang, which also reflects themes of fertility and ancestral veneration. Typically performed during land-clearing or major construction events, the Beskalan ritual includes sacrificial offerings such as a buffalo head, representing the source of life. The dance features symbolic movements like *gendawa*, which signifies contact with ancestral spirits. According to Hidajat (2017), this connection underscores the ritual's purpose: to seek divine protection, good health (*seger waras*), and prosperity through a sacred engagement with spiritual ancestors. These traditions reveal how myth, fertility, and ritual dance are inextricably linked in Javanese culture.

### C. The Myth of Dance in Bali

The myths surrounding Balinese dances are inseparable from the belief in deities. However, due to human limitations in representing the divine, these beliefs are manifested in various forms, such as gods and goddesses, avatars, *lingga*, *Barong*, *Rangda*, statues, and *Pratima*. This concept is known as *Saguna Brahman*, a spiritual approach that allows devotees to comprehend and believe in God through various manifestations, whether as deities or as *Avataras* the reincarnations of God (Donder, 2006).

The mythology of *Barong* in *Barong* dance is not merely an artistic expression but is also considered a powerful force capable of protecting humanity. According to the *Lontar Siva Tattwa*, Sang Hyang Siva descended to earth in the fifth lunar month (*sasih kalima*). Prior to this, Goddess Durga had already descended in the form of *Rangda*, known as Sang Hyang Barawi, accompanied by her followers, *Buta Kala* and *Pemali*. Since his consort had descended in an improper manifestation, Sang Hyang Siva also descended, embodying a *bhuta egeg* figure resembling *Banaspati Raja*, which later took the form of *Barong*. Out of reverence for *Banaspati Raja* as a manifestation of Sang Hyang Siva, Balinese Hindus, guided by divine revelations, created a physical representation of this form through masks, which were then consecrated as religious symbols. The community believes that *Barong* in its various forms, such as *Ratu Bagus* and *Ratu Gede* is none other than *Ida Bhatara Dalem*, a manifestation of Sang Hyang Siva (Wirawan, 2016).

A consecrated and sanctified *Barong* is believed to possess protective and binding spiritual power over the community. This belief aligns with animism, the notion that all entities in the universe are inhabited and governed by distinct spiritual beings (Darmawan, 2019). A similar belief applies to the *Barong Brutuk* dance, which is considered the oldest masked dance in Bali. Representing the primitive life of early Balinese society, the *Barong Brutuk* mask features a simple design, while its costume made from dried banana leaves is believed to bring blessings and protection (Wiradharma et al., 2021).

This dance cannot entirely be categorized as a “dance” in the conventional sense. The *Barong Brutuk* performance consists mainly of the dancers walking around the temple courtyard or encircling the inner sanctum (*jeroan pura*) while throwing fruits from ritual offerings as a symbolic act of bestowing prosperity and welfare upon the community. The dancers also carry whips, which they use to lash spectators. It is believed that being struck by these whips has healing properties and can cure illnesses (Putrayana & Feby, 2018).

The indestructible and omnipresent spiritual force is also evident in the *Sanghyang* dance. This sacred dance is deeply rooted in prehistoric spiritual traditions and serves as a form of ritual worship and Hindu religious ceremonies (Lodra, 2017). The *Sanghyang* dance is typically performed as part of a ceremonial ritual that induces a state of trance (*kerauhan*) in the dancers. Despite the existence of several variations of the *Sanghyang* dance in Bali, they all share the same primary function: to ward off evil spirits and dispel diseases.

During the *kerauhan* trance state, dancers lose consciousness, close their eyes, leap and move erratically, climb bamboo poles, and exhibit immunity to sharp weapons. This condition is understood as a means of communication between the dancers and the spirit possessing their

bodies, with the intention of seeking protection from misfortune. The Balinese generally recognize that the *roh* (spirit) and *atman* (soul) inhabiting the dancer's body are governed by supernatural forces (Lodra, 2017).

#### **D. The Myth of Dance in Kalimantan**

As in other agrarian regions, myths surrounding dance in Kalimantan include rituals related to rice harvests. One such dance is Totok'ng Padi, performed as part of the Naik Dango ritual to celebrate the rice harvest. This dance is intended for those seeking abundant harvests each year. The Totok'ng Padi dance is led by a Panyangahatn (mantra reader) as the ritual leader. Before the performance, specific offerings must be prepared and dedicated to Jubata (God). These offerings include Pabayo (a Dayak Kanayatn cultural symbol), rice, betel lime, betel leaves, areca nuts, tobacco, grains, rinjuang leaves, cold water, boiled chicken, chicken eggs, cucur (traditional cake), selasih leaves, cooking oil, glasses, combs, leman (glutinous rice cooked in bamboo), Apar (a traditional Dayak offering tray), and Opa' (a container for betel lime, betel leaves, and areca nuts). The Panyangahatn and the offerings are placed at the center of the gathering, surrounded by farmers. As the mantra is recited, dancers perform the Totok'ng Padi dance (Martha et al., 2021). The local community believes that failing to prepare offerings or perform the matek ritual beforehand will anger Jubata and ancestral spirits.

The Dayak Kanayatn people hold a strong belief in customary laws, which they consider divine mandates from Jubata, their supreme deity. They believe that these traditions were passed down by Jubata to their ancestors. The welcoming of Jubata is symbolized by pabayo, a bamboo carving resembling a flower. This symbol also serves as an identity marker for the Dayak people. According to Pak Yunus, each pabayo carving holds a distinct meaning. A single-tiered pabayo signifies Batalah Dama and Batenek ceremonies (e.g., ear piercing for girls). A three-tiered pabayo represents adoption ceremonies and Batunangan (engagement). A five-tiered pabayo denotes marriage ceremonies, circumcision rites (Babalak), and Naik Dango. A seven-tiered pabayo indicates a major ritual event (Martha et al., 2021).

According to Soedarsono (2002), primitive dances are characterized by movements that have not been choreographically refined. These dances feature simple movements, minimal musical accompaniment, and basic costumes and makeup. Primitive dances are typically performed by indigenous communities that continue ancient cultural traditions. All primitive dances possess magical and sacred qualities, as they are exclusively performed in religious or customary ceremonies. They serve specific purposes, such as invoking rain, ensuring a successful hunt, and marking significant life events like birth, death, and marriage (Martha et al., 2021).

Among the primitive dances of Kalimantan, Hudoq and Bubung are considered highly mystical by some communities. These dances are integral to Dayak rituals, serving as a medium for seeking divine assistance, dispelling negative energies, and attracting positive forces. Notably, Hudoq dance imposes no restrictions on the number of dancers, their social status, or their gender. The dance movements are simple and lack formal names, reflecting the essence of primitive dance. The most distinctive aspects of the Hudoq dance involve hand and foot movements. Despite its simplicity, each movement carries a predetermined meaning assigned by its practitioners.

The Hudoq dance is not exclusive to a single ethnic group but is performed by various Dayak subgroups, including the Ga'ay, Bahau, and Kenyak peoples. While the term Hudoq holds a similar meaning across these groups, variations exist in costumes, musical accompaniment, masks, and movements. For instance, Hudoq Kita dancers typically wear long-sleeved shirts and sarongs rather than banana leaves. In contrast, dancers from the Mudang, Bahau, and Ga'ay subgroups don costumes made of banana leaves (Rosana, 2018).

The Dayak people believe that the Hudoq dance originates from supernatural beings. These beings are categorized as Wan Epah (spirit of banana leaves), Wan We'kyan (spirit of kledang leaves), Wan Tu'aq (spirit of aren trees), Wan Penim (spirit carrying a blowpipe), and Wan Selek (spirit of mud) (Rosana, 2018). According to the beliefs of the Dayak Modang community, the Hudoq dance plays a crucial role in warding off misfortune. It is also associated with divine blessings and prosperity. Many believe that the Hudoq dance has the power to bring good fortune or misfortune to individuals. The ritual of circling the wedding venue during the Hudoq dance symbolizes a plea for protection against harm and misfortune (Rosana, 2018).

### **E. The Myth of Dance in Sulawesi**

A variety of ritual dances and musical performances have been regularly featured in the royal courts of traditional rulers and rural areas of Sulawesi. Among the most frequently performed ritual dances are Pakarena (Makassar), Pagellu' and Mabadong (Toraja), as well as Pajaga and several Bissu dances (Bugis). In the Torajan worldview, life in this world is temporary, whereas there exists an eternal realm known as puya. Puya is a gathering place for spirits before they ascend to divinity or return to their origins. To facilitate this transition, the Torajan people believe that performing the Rambu Solo' funeral ceremony helps the deceased reach puya more easily (Patandean et al., 2018).

The Rambu Solo' ceremony includes several ritual dances, such as Pa'Katia, Ma'Badong, Ma'Randang, and Ma'Pompang. The Torajan people believe that by making material sacrifices to the best of their ability, family members fulfill an unavoidable duty as long as they adhere to customary traditions, religious beliefs, and familial prestige, particularly in Tana Toraja. Religious and customary obligations must be met to ensure the deceased's soul attains peace and safely departs this world for the tranquil realm of puya. This religious ceremony includes offerings of pigs and buffaloes to ancestral spirits or the deceased, as seen in the Ma'nene ritual, in which pigs or buffaloes are sacrificed for those already buried in stone graveyards (liang batu) (Matandung, 2018). In Tana Toraja, death is not immediately recognized as final (tomakula) but is only considered definitive once the Rambu Solo' ceremony has been performed.

Ritual-based dances also exist in South Sulawesi, particularly in Bone Regency. One such dance, Sere Wara, is performed over burning embers by the Bissu community a group of individuals biologically male but who adopt feminine roles. Before the Sere Wara performance, a Ma'tula Bala ritual known as Mappangolo is conducted. The Mappangolo ritual is a supplication to Dewata Seuwae (the Supreme Deity) for the dancers' protection from harm and for the successful execution of the dance (Utami, 2013). Before the Ma'tula Bala ritual, specific offerings must be prepared. These offerings are an essential requirement for the ritual and serve as a medium for conveying the performers' intentions. The required offerings include bananas, young coconuts, areca nuts, nutmeg, ota leaves or betel leaves, gambier, tenri pica lime, benro, incense with burning embers, and tappere (a ritual seat cushion) (Utami, 2013).

Beyond these ritual myths, another significant myth in Sulawesi dance traditions is the legend of the rice goddess, which is embedded in the Pakarena dance. According to folklore, the Pakarena dance originates from the mythical separation between the inhabitants of Boting Langi (the celestial realm) and Lino (the earthly realm) in ancient times. Before parting ways, the celestial beings taught earthly inhabitants essential aspects of life, such as farming, animal husbandry, and hunting, through hand, body, and foot movements. These movements later evolved into a ritual dance performed by Lino inhabitants as an expression of gratitude to Boting Langi. Another legend associates the Pakarena dance with Tumanurung ri Tamalate, the first Somba (king) of the Gowa Kingdom (Lathief, 1996). Halilintar Latif, as cited in Shaifuddin Bahrum (2012), stated that the Pakarena dance originated from a palace dance called Sere Jaga, which was part of ritual ceremonies, particularly those performed before and

after rice planting. In its original form, the dance involved dancers holding a bundle of selected rice seeds that had undergone a ritual ceremony. Over time, the Sere Jaga dance became part of other rituals, such as Ammatamata Jene and Ammatamata Benteng. The dance also evolved in its presentation and props, with the rice bundle being replaced by a fan (Yanti, 2019).

#### **F. The Myth of Dance in Papua**

In essence, all gods, spirits, and deities similar to animistic beliefs found in Bali, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and other regions are recognized and revered by the Papuan people. Deities are considered supreme creators with absolute power over human destiny, unseen beings, and certain natural elements. These natural forces are appeased through offerings and specific rituals to seek protection. Several mountain dances in Papua are closely associated with these beliefs, such as the Musyoh dance, a sacred ritual aimed at appeasing the spirits of deceased tribal members, and the Suanggi dance, which narrates the story of a husband who loses his wife to *angi-angi* (malevolent forces).

Within the Maybrat community, *suanggi* is perceived as an ominous and feared spirit. It is believed that *suanggi* consumes *naiwan* which translates to "shadow" and symbolizes a person's life force resulting in illness and eventual death. *Suanggi* manifests as malevolent spirits that can exist anywhere, often targeting individuals, particularly women. Consequently, the *Suanggi* dance was created as a form of veneration for deities and ancestral spirits. The spirits honored in these rituals, known as *taqio*, are benevolent entities that remain close to humans and aid their kin in various endeavors (Yumame, 2021). Karl Jaspers describes these existential crises as *Grenzsituationen* or boundary situations, particularly in the confrontation with death (Elas, 2018).

Similarly, the Aniri dance, performed in Koakwa Village, Fak-Fak Regency, West Papua Province, is deeply intertwined with mystical elements. This dance represents the liberation of a child from demonic disturbances after being abandoned by parents who have left for the forest. The term Aniri itself means "liberation of a child." While the dance movements appear natural, as is common in Papuan dances, specific gestures hold profound symbolic meanings. For instance, the Wae Ndi movement signifies protection from spirits, Aniri Ndi represents an offering to appease spirits and release the child, and Wapai symbolizes the child's ultimate liberation from supernatural influence (Nurhayati, 2019).

Beyond these ritual dances, the highland regions of Papua also feature a dance deeply rooted in religious and sacred traditions: the War Dance. Contrary to its name, this dance does not symbolize violence but rather a cultural tradition related to paying tributes in the form of agricultural produce. The fertile lands of Papua often attract other tribes seeking to claim them, making war a necessary means of defense. However, warfare in this context is governed by mutually agreed-upon regulations designed to minimize casualties. War holds a binding significance in Papuan society, as it is seen as a mandate from ancestors (*innappu-innopaneb*). Failing to engage in war when required is believed to result in misfortunes such as failed harvests, disease outbreaks, and other calamities (Howay, 2018).

These beliefs are deeply rooted in the mythologies of various Papuan ethnic groups, forming the foundation of cargoism movements in Papua. These movements reflect the anticipation and longing for the return of ancestors, who are expected to bring prosperity and happiness. One such myth is that of Manarmakeri, a legendary figure depicted as an unattractive bachelor possessing the secret of eternal life. He vowed to return one day to bring prosperity to those who doubted him. Additionally, myths surrounding Tomalup and Mbeten tell of mythical figures who rose from the dead and journeyed to the ends of the world to aid those in distress (Rumansara, 2015).



## DISCUSSION

The discussion highlights three major motifs underlying the myths that inform Indonesian ritual dances: theistic, ecological, and death-related. Across diverse regions like Aceh, Kalimantan, Bali, Java, Sulawesi, and Papua, belief in a supreme being Allah, Jubata, Dewata Seuwae, Sang Hyang Siwa, or Fun Nah and Muwe forms a spiritual foundation for dance traditions. These dances function as sacred acts, akin to prayers, designed to express devotion and seek divine blessings. Performances such as Sufi dance, Saman, and Ratoeh Duek embody spiritual surrender, blending poetic chants with movement to foster divine connection (Restian, 2017; Restella & Rahma, 2013). Symbolism plays a crucial role in representing the divine, where symbols are not just representations but manifestations of divine presence (Suseno, 2006). For instance, Bali's Ogoh-Ogoh visualizes cosmic imbalance and the transformation of destructive forces into positive energies, showing myths as behavioral regulators (Siswadi, 2022).

The second motif, ecology, underscores how myth links divine-human relations to environmental harmony. The myth of Dewi Sri, goddess of fertility, is a central figure in many agricultural rituals across Indonesia. Her presence symbolizes balance and prosperity, and neglecting her myth is thought to lead to social unrest (Maslikatin, 2015). Rituals like sedekah bumi and nyadran combine spiritual reverence with ecological consciousness, expressed through performances such as Tayub and Wayang Purwa (Dewi et al., 2018). Fertility dances like Tayub use symbolic sexual imagery to represent agricultural abundance, revealing how ritual performance becomes a form of sympathetic magic (Soedarsono, 2002; Widyastutieningrum, 2012). These performances reflect a cultural imagery in which humans interact with, and express gratitude for, the natural world, reinforcing values of sustainability and harmony.

Lastly, death-related motifs illuminate how ritual dances address mortality and human transience. In Papua and Toraja, myths surrounding death rituals like the Pho, Ma'badong, and Hedung dances offer a framework for mourning and honoring the deceased (Tokan, 2023; Suprpta, 2019; Murgiyanto, 2018). These dances articulate a metaphysical transition from life to the afterlife, with performances symbolizing emotional release, remembrance, and spiritual transformation. Myth and dance together offer a cultural structure for interpreting life and death, shaping communal beliefs and behaviors. Through myths, communities construct a moral and spiritual order that guides social interaction, fosters identity, and harmonizes relationships between humans, nature, and the divine (Yassa et al., 2021; Siswadi, 2022). Thus, ritual dance becomes not merely artistic expression, but a vessel for myth, memory, and meaning.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the emergence of myths in ritual dances across Aceh, Java, Bali, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua is rooted in local folklore or legends that have developed in these regions. Examples include the myth of Kaula Bate Malelang-Madion in the Pho and Sengada-Gajah Putih dances in Aceh; the myth of Dewi Sri in the Lenggeng, Ronggeng, Tayub, Seblang, and Sintren dances in Java; the myths of Heleang Hebeung and Selau Sen Yeang in the Hudoq dance of Kalimantan; the myth of the Rambu Solo' tradition in the Ma'badong dance of Sulawesi; as well as the myth of Sinako Hololik-Hololik in the War Dance and Manarmakeri in the Death Dance of Papua. Additionally, it was found that the primary motifs behind the creation of myths in ritual dances originate from themes of divinity, ecology, and death. These three motifs hold a significant role in the formation of myths within Indonesian ritual dances. Beyond symbolizing the existence of God, myths in ritual dances also serve to guide human behavior, ensuring that individuals do not act in ways that harm nature or fellow human beings. The interconnectedness and awareness between humans, the universe,

and God create an unending parade of balance. In this context, it becomes evident that myths are not merely reports of past events but instead function as a framework that shapes human behavior and serves as a guiding principle in determining human wisdom.

## REFERENCE

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