

TARIAN SOLE OHA SEBAGAI MEDIA KOMUNIKASI BUDAYA: STUDI ETNOGRAFI PADA MASYARAKAT FLORES TIMUR

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the Sole Oha Dance as a traditional communication media in the Lamaholot ethnic community in East Flores, East Nusa Tenggara. However, globalization and popular culture spread through social media have reduced young people's interest in local regional dances. Young people who were previously active and involved in the traditional sole oha dance event are now more interested in foreign cultures that they consume digitally. This phenomenon shows the transformation of shifting values and the potential for erosion of local cultural wealth, including the sole oha dance. Therefore, this study makes an important contribution to the preservation of unique and valuable local culture. This research method uses an ethnographic approach to explore the social meaning in the lyrics and dance movements, as well as its role as a traditional communication medium. This study found that the Soleh Oha Dance contains values of togetherness, respect for customs, and gratitude which are manifested through traditional lyrics, dance movements, and its implementation involving all members of society. This dance is also used in various events, such as traditional ceremonies, religious celebrations, and thanksgiving activities, so that it becomes an important means of strengthening the unity and cultural identity of the community. The uniqueness of this study lies in its focus on aspects of cultural communication that are rarely explored in previous studies, especially the role of the Soleh Oha Dance as a means of conveying moral and religious messages that are relevant to the social life of the community. The results of this study are expected to be a reference for the government and local communities in designing cultural preservation programs and promoting the Soleh Oha Dance as a cultural tourism attraction in NTT. Thus, this study closes the research gap regarding the documentation and analysis of cultural values in Lamaholot traditional art.

Keywords: sole oha dance, cultural communication, cultural preservation, ethnography of cultural identity

1. Introduction

Dance is a form of performing art that uses regular and rhythmic body movements. Dance is not only used as a means of entertainment but also used to express feelings and convey messages. As a form of art that is present in the community environment, through customs, culture, habits and entertainment that are characteristic of a region. Dance performances can hypnotize people to remember those who have forgotten the arts that belong to their region. In addition, dance is also a source of information that introduces the richness of regional arts to those who are not yet familiar with it. can provide information for those who are not yet familiar with it.

Dance is one of the arts that receives significant public attention. This is not surprising, as dance, like a language of movement, is a universal means of expression and communication that can be performed and participated in by anyone, anytime, and anywhere. Traditional dance is a window into culture, where every movement of the body, every footstep, and every musical accompaniment becomes a symbolic language that speaks without words. It functions as a medium of cultural communication, conveying social messages, moral values, and the cosmology of society. For example, in Sedyawati's study (2020), traditional dance is seen as a form of expression rich in meaning,

containing life lessons, and a vehicle for expressing ethnic identity. At this point, dance is not merely entertainment, but a "social text" that articulates collective memory.

Dance serves a crucial function beyond mere performance, acting as a powerful medium for strengthening social solidarity and symbolic communication (Wahyudi, 2021). It operates both internally, by reinforcing local identity, and externally, as a means of cultural representation (Maryono, 2023). In the era of globalization, traditional dances have transcended traditional venues, appearing in cultural festivals, educational settings, and digital platforms. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this transformation, requiring virtual performances to maintain cultural continuity (Herdiani et al., 2024). Studies, such as one in Lampung, confirm the enduring relevance of traditional dance's symbolic meaning even in modern contexts (Aksara, 2024).

East Flores Regency in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) is home to the Lamaholot people, an ethnic group known for their rich cultural heritage, which includes traditional dance, *ikat* weaving, rituals, and the Lamaholot language (Fakri. A, 2022). Amidst modernization, the Sole Oha Dance remains a vital collective identity marker. Etymologically, "Sole" means to converse or dialogue, and "Oha" means history told in the indigenous language. Sole Oha is an art form that interweaves dance, poetry, and music as a medium for cultural communication, sharing history, conveying moral messages, and teaching life values (Tokan et al., 2023).

The performance structure of Sole Oha is unique, culminating in the *Bale*, where the *temalin* or *oha* sings solo vocals using figurative language and traditional poetry. This poetry facilitates a symbolic dialogue, fostering togetherness and cultural education. More than just an art show, Sole Oha holds significant social and spiritual roles, performed during thanksgiving ceremonies, religious celebrations, and traditional rituals. Its lyrics express religious values, respect for others and ancestors, gratitude, and communal hope, thus strengthening Lamaholot solidarity and cultural identity (Bataona, 2023).

The continued existence of Sole Oha attests to the resilience of Lamaholot culture. It is now featured at cultural festivals and studied academically for the Indonesian values it embodies (Seran, 2023), proving its potential as a bridge of communication beyond local spheres. However, the influence of globalization and popular culture, particularly through social media like Facebook and TikTok, poses a threat to its sustainability. The younger generation's interest is reportedly declining, leading to a potential erosion of this local cultural heritage. This decline makes the study and preservation of Sole Oha critically urgent, as its lyrics and movements are not just an ancestral legacy but a means of uniting the community through messages of togetherness and respect for tradition (Fakri, 2022; NTT Media Express, 2023).

Lack of documentation and dwindling youth involvement jeopardize the traditional poetry and *coda* embedded in Sole Oha, which articulate the Lamaholot people's social norms and life philosophy (Tokan et al., 2023). Preservation efforts are therefore strategic for safeguarding this local knowledge. Beyond preservation, Sole Oha holds significant potential as a cultural and tourism resource. Introducing the dance through festivals has already fostered community pride and attracted public attention (Tatkala, 2023). Furthermore, its study aligns with the national agenda of strengthening Indonesian character through local wisdom, as traditional arts like Sole Oha contribute to building an inclusive national identity rooted in diversity (Seran, 2023).

Ethnographic research on Sole Oha is vital to generate new understandings of its function as a cultural communication medium. The findings can serve as a reference for local government, educational institutions, and the community in designing sustainable preservation programs, thereby reinforcing Sole Oha as a symbol of Lamaholot pride and identity amidst changing times. Thus, ethnographic research on Sole Oha in East Flores is expected to generate new understandings regarding the function of dance as a medium for cultural communication. Furthermore, the results of this study can serve as a reference for communities, educational institutions, and local governments in designing sustainable cultural preservation programs, as well as affirming Sole Oha as a symbol of pride and identity for the Lamaholot community amidst changing times.

The practical benefit for researchers is to help document and deeply understand one of the cultural heritages of the Lamaholot community, namely the Sole Oha dance, so that it is not lost amidst the currents of modernization and globalization. Based on the description above, the main questions that became the focus of this research emerged: What is the symbolic meaning and social function of the Sole Oha Dance for the Lamaholot community, and what is its role in conveying religious, traditional, and social messages to the younger generation?

However, while there has been some research examining traditional dances in Indonesia, studies specifically examining the "Sole Oha Dance as a Medium of Cultural Communication" are still very limited. Furthermore, few have examined how globalization and social media have influenced a culture that has become a tradition in Lamaholot.

2. Literature Review

Recent studies highlight the multifaceted significance of the Sole Oha dance among the Lamaholot community in East Flores, positioning it not only as entertainment but as a critical medium for social and religious communication, a perspective that aligns well with Clifford Geertz's theory of culture as a symbolic system.

A 2022 study by Fakri Ali focused on the Sole Oha dance in Lamakera, identifying its function in conveying Islamic religious educational values. Using qualitative methods, the research found that the dance embodies a range of values, including social, moral, aesthetic, discipline, religiosity, and unity (Ali, 2022). The dance's frequent performance at important events, such as welcoming guests or thanksgiving celebrations, reinforces its spiritual and social role within the Muslim Lamaholot community.

The Sole Oha dance also plays a vital role in interfaith harmony. Anselmus Dorowoho Atasoge's 2022 research explored communal rites among Lamaholot Catholic and Muslim communities, finding that the Sole Oha dance acts as social capital for interfaith dialogue. It serves as a powerful symbol of unity, fostering mutual respect and understanding between different religious groups, despite the challenges posed by modernization (Atasoge, 2022).

Further research emphasizes the dance's role in cultural transmission. Veronika Genua (2022) studied the "Sole Oha Text of the *Guyub Kultur* Lembata," confirming that the tradition delivers social and traditional messages through poetry and rhymes, which are essential components of Lamaholot cultural communication. Additionally, the traditional poetry within Sole Oha, known as *koda*, contains metaphors and proverbs that embody the Lamaholot community's philosophy of life and social norms, passed down across generations (Lamaholot Cultural Study, 2021). The dance is also recognized for its importance as a symbol of unity, social cohesion, and a promising cultural attraction for tourism (NTT Media Express, 2023; Tatkala, 2023), and even a tool for strengthening national character by linking traditional art to Indonesia's multicultural agenda (VictoryNews, 2023).

These findings resonate deeply with Clifford Geertz's theory of cultural communication, which posits that culture is a complex system of symbols and meanings produced through social interaction (Geertz, 2019). Geertz argued that cultural practices must be understood through "thick description"—an approach that delves beyond visible actions to uncover the embedded meanings within their social and historical context (Cai, 2024).

From this perspective, the movements and poetry of Sole Oha are cultural symbols—social texts—that the Lamaholot people use to interpret their world, convey values, negotiate meaning, and construct social reality. Although Geertz's theory is sometimes criticized for potential subjectivity, its strength lies in providing a deep understanding of local meanings, making it a relevant framework for analyzing how the Sole Oha dance continues to function as a dynamic medium for religious, moral, and social instruction.

Theoretical Basis

Clifford Geertz's theory of cultural communication focuses on understanding culture as a complex system of symbols. Geertz emphasized that culture consists not only of practices and norms, but also of the meanings produced through social interaction. He argued that cultural communication must be understood through "thick description," an approach that explores and analyzes cultural practices within their social and historical context.

Clifford Geertz emphasized that culture is a system of symbols that shapes how humans give meaning to the world. According to him, culture is like a social text that can be read and interpreted through symbols, rituals, and everyday communication practices (Geertz, 2019). This understanding emphasizes that human actions are never neutral but are laden with meaning rooted in social and historical contexts. From a communication perspective, culture serves as a frame of reference that allows individuals to interpret messages, agree on symbols, and construct social realities. Contemporary research shows that Geertz's approach remains relevant, particularly in examining the dynamics of cross-cultural communication and identity construction in global society (Susen, 2024).

In his view, cultural symbols, including language, ritual, and art, serve as tools for individuals and groups to interpret the world around them. Through these symbols, societies can convey their values, traditions, and identities. Geertz believed that meaning in culture is not static; rather, it is shaped and transformed through a process of social interaction in which individuals assign meaning to the actions and symbols around them. Therefore, cultural communication is not merely a form of information transmission but also an active process involving the negotiation of meaning among members of society.

A key concept introduced by Geertz is thick description. Through this approach, communication research goes beyond visible behaviour to uncovering the hidden meanings behind these actions (Cai, 2024). Thick description requires researchers to delve into the social context, the actor's intentions, and the symbolic meanings that accompany the action. Younas (2023) even developed the "MIRACLE" narrative framework as a new way to construct rich and reflective thick descriptions, demonstrating that Geertz's concepts remain an important foundation in modern qualitative research.

In recent developments, Geertz's theory of cultural communication has also been applied to understand the phenomenon of digital communication. Social media presents new symbols emojis, memes, and hashtags that function as cultural texts and need to be analysed through an interpretive framework. The communication process in digital spaces is not just the exchange of information, but also the construction of meaning involving identity, emotions, and social relations. Ethnographic studies of media show that the interpretation of digital symbols often follows the same patterns as traditional cultural practices, only taking place in virtual spaces.

Despite its significant influence, Geertz's theory has also faced criticism, particularly regarding its limitations in addressing macro contexts and power structures. Some studies argue that thick descriptions risk being too subjective because they rely heavily on the researcher's interpretation. However, this is precisely its strength: Geertz's theory allows for a deeper understanding of local meanings, and when combined with critical communication methods and media analysis, it can produce more comprehensive explanations. Thus, Geertz's theory of cultural communication remains relevant, provided it is combined with contemporary approaches that accommodate the dynamics of globalization and communication technology.

3. Methods

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with a semiotic approach, which focuses on the study of signs and meaning in communication. In this study, the researcher acts as the main instrument, and data collection is carried out through triangulation techniques, namely a combination of several data collection methods to obtain more valid results. Data collection techniques used include observation and interviews. Observations are carried out by directly observing the behavior of subjects related to Sole Oha Ritual Communication, while interviews are used to obtain in-depth information from participants, both through structured and unstructured interviews.

Data analysis was conducted inductively, following a three-stage analysis model: data reduction, data presentation, and verification. Checking the validity of data is crucial in qualitative research. Various methods to increase data credibility include extended observation, triangulation, and discussions with colleagues. Extended observation allows researchers to build closer relationships with informants, while triangulation compares data from multiple sources to ensure consistency. Discussions with colleagues also help enrich perspectives and validate findings. With this approach, the research is expected to provide in-depth insights into the meanings of communication and the culture under study.

This research is limited to an analysis of the social meaning and cultural values contained in the Soleh Oha Dance, specifically within the context of the Lamaholot ethnic community in East Flores, East Nusa Tenggara. The main focus of the research is on the aspects of communication produced through the dance movements and lyrics, and how these elements reflect the norms, values, and cultural identity of the local community. This research does not include other traditional dances in the East Flores region or in Indonesia in general, so all findings will focus on the Soleh Oha Dance as a specific cultural entity.

Furthermore, this study employs an ethnographic approach that prioritizes direct observation and in-depth interviews with cultural actors, without addressing the influence of external factors such as globalization or broader social

change. With these limitations, it is hoped that the research will provide a deep and comprehensive understanding of the role of the Soleh Oha Dance in traditional communication in the Lamaholot community.

4. Results and Discussion

This research found that the Sole Oha Dance serves as a vital traditional communication medium for the Lamaholot community in East Flores, emphasizing the values of togetherness, respect for tradition, and gratitude through three main elements: collective circular movements, traditional poetry (Sole and Oha), and the ritual context of its implementation. The circular movements and hand-holding are a strong visual representation of unity and social equality, while the Oha poetry that is sung specifically presents a philosophical narrative about ancestors and the Creator (Ama Lera Wulan Tana Ekan), functioning as a means of socializing values and maintaining collective memory displayed in thanksgiving ceremonies and traditional celebrations. Furthermore, the discussion within the framework of cultural communication theory shows that Sole Oha is a complex social text (thick description) that functionally counters the current of individualism brought by popular culture and digital media, which is now a major threat because it causes a shift in the interest of the younger generation of Lamaholot towards tradition, so that a cultural revitalization strategy is needed that integrates the traditional values of this dance with contemporary media so that the message of unity and cultural identity remains relevant and sustainable.

4.1 Results

This study aims to describe and analyze the role of the Sole Oha Dance as a medium of cultural communication in the Lamaholot community in East Flores. The results show that Sole Oha functions as a traditional communication medium rich in symbols and values. This dance is found to have three main elements: collective circular movements, traditional Sole and Oha poetry, and the context of ritual implementation. The collective circular movements, in which the dancers hold hands, symbolize the values of togetherness and unity that are fundamental to the Lamaholot community. Rhythmic and progressive footwork, from slow to fast tempo, reflects the dynamics of life and the spirit of mutual cooperation in facing challenges. Traditional poetry, which is divided into Sole (reciprocal pantun) and Oha (historical/moral narrative), is the core of this dance's communication. Oha, which is chanted by certain people (Koda nimo tawa), contains philosophical messages about respect for ancestors and the Creator (Ama Lera Wulan Tana Ekan), as well as moral advice for living in harmony. This dance is consistently performed in the context of harvest thanksgiving ceremonies, traditional wedding celebrations, and local cultural festivals, making it an important means of socializing values and maintaining collective memory. The Sole Oha dance reflects the identity of the Lamaholot people.

4.2 Discussion

Furthermore, the discussion within the framework of cultural communication theory indicates that Sole Oha is a complex social text (*thick description*) that functionally counters the flow of individualism brought about by popular culture and digital media, which currently poses a major threat due to shifting the interest of the Lamaholot youth away from tradition. The role of the Sole Oha Dance plays an important part in cultural communication within the Lamaholot community by educating the younger generation about cultural and social values through the preservation of tradition. Through participation in the dance, community members strengthen their ethnic identity, thereby building a community identity. Dance performances are often held during important events such as weddings or traditional ceremonies, where the community gathers to celebrate together. According to Jamaludin Ismail, every performance of the dance involves all community members, both old and young, who collectively express their gratitude to God and the ancestors. Therefore, a cultural revitalization strategy is needed to integrate the traditional values of this dance with contemporary media so that the message of unity and cultural identity remains relevant and sustainable.

There are several cultural and religious values contained in the performance of the Sole Oha Dance: Value of Togetherness This dance emphasizes the importance of cooperation and solidarity among community members. Aesthetic Value The beautiful dance movements reflect the beauty of the Lamaholot culture. Spiritual Value It invites the community to be grateful to God and the ancestors as the givers of life. This research has diverse theoretical implications, particularly in the study of cultural communication, anthropology, and the preservation of traditional arts. Structural Functionalism Theory Within the structural functionalism framework (Talcott Parsons), Sole Oha serves as a unifying mechanism that helps the Lamaholot community maintain social order. Traditional Communication Theory Sole Oha reinforces concepts within traditional communication theory, where cultural media are used to convey social and religious messages. Cultural Preservation Theory This research supports the

theory that cultural preservation requires a participatory approach involving the local community. Sole Oha illustrates the relationship between humans, tradition, and their social environment, which is relevant in understanding the cultural dynamics of indigenous communities in Indonesia.

5. Conclusion

This research confirms that the Sole Oha Dance is not merely an artistic expression, but rather a cultural heritage of the Lamaholot people, containing profound philosophical values. It serves as a traditional means of communication that strengthens relationships between people, unites communities, and connects people with their ancestors and the Creator. The dance movements and traditional poetry in Sole Oha convey religious, moral, and social messages that remain relevant today, despite the rapid movement towards modernization. Thus, Sole Oha serves as a bridge between the past, present, and future of the people of East Flores.

From a cultural communication perspective, Sole Oha demonstrates that symbols, poetry, and movement are a living language. It conveys messages that are not simply understood through words but felt emotionally by the people involved. This aligns with Clifford Geertz's concept of culture as a system of symbols, where meaning emerges from contextual social practices. By reading Sole Oha through thick description, we can uncover the layers of meaning contained within each movement, poem, and accompanying ritual.

The findings of this study also demonstrate that Sole Oha has a dual function: on the one hand, it is an aesthetic performing art, and on the other, it is a social instrument that strengthens togetherness. The values of unity, respect for tradition, and gratitude manifested in Sole Oha demonstrate how traditional dance can build social capital for the community. Thus, Sole Oha not only maintains the internal cohesion of the Lamaholot community but also contributes to strengthening national unity through local wisdom.

In the context of globalization, this research warns of the vulnerability of local cultures to the potential erosion of modernity. Documentation, research, and revitalization of the Sole Oha tradition are crucial to prevent the younger generation from losing their cultural identity. If efforts are not made to preserve it, the noble values it embodies will fade, leaving a void of meaning in social life. Therefore, cultural preservation must be a strategic agenda for local communities, academics, and local governments.

Furthermore, this research has significant practical implications. First, the results can serve as a reference for local governments and cultural institutions in designing dance preservation programs. Second, Sole Oha can be promoted as an authentic cultural tourism attraction, without losing its sacred meaning. Third, this research can serve as an academic reference for studies in cultural communication, anthropology, and education, thus generating new discourse on the relationship between traditional arts and collective identity.

Ultimately, this research confirms that the Sole Oha dance reflects the soul of the Lamaholot people: it speaks through movement, sings through poetry, and binds the community together. It is an ancestral heritage that must be preserved, as well as an inspiration for the future rooted in local wisdom. Therefore, preserving Sole Oha is not merely about preserving the dance, but also about preserving the nation's identity.

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