

The Sacred Narrative of Magombok Ritual by Bajau Laut Ethnic in Kampung Gelam Gelam Semporna Sabah

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ABSTRACT

The Bajau Laut community in Kampung Gelam-Gelam, Semporna, Sabah, practices various cultural traditions that have been passed down through generations, one of which is the Magombok ritual. This ritual serves as a traditional healing method to treat spiritual and emotional ailments, and contains sacred values closely tied to beliefs in ancestral spirits. However, there is growing concern among practitioners and the older generation regarding the younger generation's increasing neglect of the sacred values of this ritual, which threatens its continuation. This research aims to document the sacred narrative of the Magombok ritual by focusing on its structure, symbolic functions, and meanings that contribute to its sacredness. The study adopts a qualitative approach through a case study involving observations, interviews, and document analysis to collect data. Additionally, the data is analyzed through consensus using Turner's ritual theory to outline the ritual structure as social drama, involving the stages of separation, liminality, and reintegration. Meanwhile, Eliade's sacred theory is used to explore the symbolic functions and their meanings. Thus, the Magombok ritual can be seen as a form of community unification, a medium for prayer requests, a process of self-purification, an alternative healing practice, as well as a sign of gratitude. All of this impacts sacred communication, playing a role in preserving the cultural heritage of the Bajau Laut community in Kampung Gelam-Gelam, Semporna, Sabah.

Keywords: Bajau Laut, Magombok Ritual, Sacred Narrative

INTRODUCTION

Magombok is a deeply significant ritual for the Bajau Laut community, particularly in Kampung Gelam-Gelam, Semporna, Sabah. It is considered sacred, serving as a medium through which participants seek the blessings and protection of their ancestors' spirits. These spirits are believed to possess powers that influence key aspects of daily life, such as healing diseases, preventing misfortune, and ensuring the overall well-being of the community. The sacred nature of the Magombok ritual is conveyed through a series of symbolic actions that illustrate the community's connection to the supernatural realm. Elements such as prayers, food offerings, dances, and recitations of mantras play a central role in invoking and communicating with the ancestral spirits. In the context of the Magombok ritual, the term "sacred" refers to the ritual's divine and powerful nature, with certain actions and objects imbued with spiritual significance. The sanctity of the ritual is further reinforced by adherence to taboos, which are essential in maintaining the purity and sanctity of the ceremony. These taboos help ensure the ritual remains meaningful, serving as a reminder of the profound connection between the community and the spiritual world. At its core, Magombok is a process of collective action aimed at fulfilling spiritual, social, and cultural purposes. It involves the entire community performing symbolic actions together to strengthen their ties to the supernatural realm and maintain balance within the group. Through the ritual, individuals are reminded of their deep connection to their ancestors, which is central to their identity and survival. Participation in the ritual not only reinforces the community's unity but also fosters a sense of continuity and belonging. Magombok is not merely a traditional practice; it is a vital part of the Bajau Laut

community's cultural heritage and spiritual life. By preserving ancient beliefs and customs, the ritual plays an essential role in maintaining their cultural identity and passing it on to future generations.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The Magombok ritual of the Bajau Laut community, particularly in Kampung Gelam-Gelam, Semporna, is a highly complex and sacred tradition. The ritual is deeply rooted in the community's spiritual and cultural identity. The sacredness of Magombok is not only reflected in its spiritual significance but also in the symbolic actions performed during the ceremony. These include offerings, prayers, dances, and mantras, all of which are believed to connect participants with the spirits of their ancestors, or *omboh* (1;2). These practices are considered holy and are conducted with great reverence, ensuring the purity of the ritual.

The ritual's complex structure involves a series of layers of symbolic actions that are intertwined and sometimes performed simultaneously or in specific sequences. Each element, such as food offerings, dance, and prayer, serves a unique purpose, contributing to the overall goal of the ritual – seeking protection, healing, and well-being from the spirits. The complexity arises from the multiple layers and sub-rituals that are carried out, each with its own symbolic meaning, making the Magombok ritual difficult to understand without in-depth cultural knowledge (3). The ritual is described as one of the most complex, involving a variety of ceremonial acts that vary depending on the context (2).

The sacredness is further emphasized through taboos and rituals that must be followed strictly, ensuring the protection and sanctity of the community. The ritual's complexity and sacredness are passed down orally through generations, and the absence of formal documentation has led to a risk of misunderstanding or loss of its original meaning, particularly among younger generations. This study highlights the intricate structure and deep sacredness of the Magombok ritual, aiming to preserve its spiritual and cultural significance for future generations, ensuring that its powerful traditions are not lost.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research aims to explain the structure of the Magombok ritual performance within the Bajau Laut community in Semporna, Sabah, while also analyzing the symbolic functions and sacred values embedded in the ritual, which are integral to the community's cultural and spiritual practices.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

This research uses the concept of consensus as the primary framework to analyze the Magombok ritual within the Bajau Laut community, integrating Turner's ritual theory and Eliade's concept of the sacred. Consensus refers to the collective agreement on norms, values, and social meanings within a community. In this context, consensus helps to understand how the Magombok ritual fosters social cohesion, where the ritual not only addresses spiritual aspects but also impacts social structure and community harmony.

Turner's ritual theory outlines three main phases: separation, liminality, and reintegration, which describe social transitions and individual transformation within rituals. These phases contribute to the formation of social consensus by bringing individuals together through shared experiences, fostering solidarity, and reinforcing social bonds. The Magombok ritual, with symbolic actions like prayers, dance, and music, unites participants, strengthening the shared cultural and spiritual values of the Bajau Laut community.

Eliade's concept of the sacred adds another dimension by emphasizing the importance of symbolism in rituals. Eliade (4) focuses on the sacred world created through rituals, which connects individuals to the spiritual realm and the sacred history of the community. In this sense, the Magombok ritual not only serves as a means of spiritual connection but also strengthens social consensus by assigning collective meaning to the sacred symbols used during the ritual. By combining both theories, Magombok can be seen as a form of consensus

that helps the Bajau Laut community align around shared cultural and spiritual values, thus enabling them to address social and spiritual challenges in a modern context.

Through the integration of Turner's ritual theory, Eliade's sacred concept, and consensus, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how the Magombok ritual plays a crucial role in reinforcing social consensus and forming the collective identity of the Bajau Laut community. This ritual not only resolves social conflicts and transforms individuals but also strengthens the necessary consensus to maintain harmony and ensure the continuity of their cultural traditions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Bajau Laut community, primarily located in Semporna, Sabah, and surrounding areas, is known for their strong cultural ties to the sea and their traditions that have been passed down through generations (5;6). This group, often referred to as sea nomads, once lived exclusively in boats, a lifestyle which has evolved over time, though many still maintain close connections with the sea (6). The Bajau Laut are a part of a larger group of Southeast Asian maritime peoples, with various subgroups like the Moken, Moklen, and Sama-Bajau, who share similar nomadic traditions and practices (7)

Central to the spiritual and cultural identity of the Bajau Laut is their animistic belief system, which includes reverence for ancestral spirits known as "Pangkat" (8). This belief system has heavily influenced their practices and rituals, including those related to healing and maintaining harmony with the supernatural world (9). These beliefs are reflected in various rituals, such as Magombok, which is carried out to honor ancestors and seek spiritual protection (10).

Rituals within the Bajau Laut culture, such as Magombok, play an integral role in both spiritual healing and community cohesion. These rituals are often linked with the cosmological understanding of the world, where the sea is seen as a life-giving force, and rituals serve to maintain balance between the physical and metaphysical realms (9). They are performed with an understanding of the sacredness inherent in ancestral spirits and nature, and include the use of symbolic offerings, prayers, and community participation (11).

The concept of sacredness (sakral) in Bajau Laut rituals is deeply rooted in the teachings of theorists like Durkheim and Eliade. According to Durkheim (12), sacred elements are those which are set apart from the everyday world, often governed by specific taboos to ensure their sanctity. This aligns with the practice of Magombok, which includes sacred objects such as heirloom items like gold needles and gongs, which are treated with reverence (11). Eliade (4) further explains that sacredness in rituals involves hierarchical relationships between the profane and the sacred, where rituals like Magombok serve to bridge the two realms, allowing the community to maintain balance with the spiritual world.

Magombok, as a central ritual, reflects this interaction of the sacred with the physical world. This includes rituals like Magpaii-bahau and Magduwata, which are performed to honor ancestral spirits and ensure prosperity or healing. These rituals also involve symbolic actions such as food offerings, prayer, and traditional dances, where elements like food are not merely sustenance but symbolic acts of offering to the spirits (1;11). Music and dance, such as the "Mag-igal" dance, are integral to these ceremonies, and serve as spiritual expressions that invite the presence of ancestral spirits (10).

Victor Turner's concept of "rites of passage" is applicable in understanding the social functions of Bajau Laut rituals, particularly the liminal phase where participants undergo a transformation, bridging their previous and new states (13). The ritual transitions from separation (leaving the ordinary world) to liminality (an intermediate, transitional phase) and finally to reintegration (a return to the community with new knowledge or state). This framework provides insight into the social and spiritual significance of the Magombok ritual, reinforcing community unity and spiritual renewal (13).

Eliade's theory of hierophany is also relevant in explaining how sacred symbols in the Magombok ritual—such as heirloom items—serve as conduits for spiritual power, connecting the community with the divine (4). These symbols not only mediate between the human and spiritual worlds but also function to uphold cultural continuity, ensuring that rituals like Magombok remain vital to the community's identity and social structure (14; 4).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative case study methodology to investigate the Magombok ritual practiced by the Bajau Laut community in Kampung Gelam-Gelam, Semporna, Sabah. Conducted between January 22nd and 28th, 2023, the case study approach is well-suited for exploring complex cultural practices like Magombok, as it allows for a detailed, context-rich analysis of the phenomenon in its real-life setting. As defined by Robert K. Yin (15), case study research provides an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon within its natural context, offering insights that might be missed by other research methodologies. In this case, the Magombok ritual, which is increasingly overlooked by the younger generation, is examined to explore its cultural, spiritual, and social significance.

The research design incorporates both descriptive and explanatory case study approaches. According to Yin (16), descriptive case studies offer detailed accounts of a phenomenon, while explanatory case studies explore the underlying reasons for observed changes. This study aims not only to describe the Magombok ritual's structure, symbolism, and sacred values but also to explain the decline in its perceived sacredness and its evolving role within the community, particularly among younger participants. As Yin (15) emphasizes, a holistic approach is essential for understanding complex phenomena that cannot be easily divided into subunits. This methodology thus enables a comprehensive exploration of the Magombok ritual in its broader social, cultural, and spiritual context.

Data collection for this study relied on qualitative techniques, including in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. These methods were chosen for their ability to capture both the tangible and intangible aspects of the ritual. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including both older community members who actively engage in the ritual and younger individuals who hold different perspectives on its relevance. These interviews explored themes such as the ritual's structure, symbolism, sacred values, and the generational shifts in its meaning. Direct observation allowed the researcher to witness the ritual firsthand, observing the roles of participants and the social dynamics during the ritual practices. As noted by Yin (15), direct observation is crucial for understanding the full context and depth of a phenomenon. Document analysis further enriched the research by providing historical and cultural records related to the ritual, offering additional layers of context and understanding.

Purposive sampling was employed to select informants with specific knowledge of the Magombok ritual, including both older community members who are custodians of the tradition and younger individuals who provide insights into its changing perceptions. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (17), purposive sampling is particularly useful in qualitative research when the goal is to gather detailed information from individuals who have direct experience with the phenomenon under study. The informants were divided into two groups: the older generation, who have long been involved in the Magombok ritual and possess deep knowledge of its practices and sacred significance, and the younger generation, aged between 18 and 30, who represent the shifting views on the ritual, often seeing it as more of a cultural practice than a sacred one.

The data collection process was carried out in several stages to ensure thoroughness and reliability. The preparation stage involved selecting the research site in Kampung Gelam-Gelam, Semporna, and identifying informants through purposive sampling, with assistance from local researchers and community leaders. Initial visits helped establish rapport and trust within the community. In the data collection stage, the researcher conducted interviews and observations, focusing on themes such as the structure of the Magombok ritual, its symbolic functions, the sacred values attached to it, and generational differences in perceptions of its relevance. Triangulation, a process of cross-verifying data from interviews, observations, and document

analysis, was employed to ensure the credibility and validity of the findings. As Yin (15) suggests, triangulation strengthens the reliability of case study results by comparing information from multiple sources.

Data analysis was conducted using a systematic process of coding and interpretation. The analysis was inductive, aimed at identifying recurring themes and patterns within the data. As Miles and Huberman (18) argue, content analysis is an effective method for identifying significant themes and meanings. The data were first transcribed, and key themes related to the ritual's structure, sacred values, and generational shifts in understanding were coded and categorized. Following this, the data were interpreted to establish connections between the ritual's structure and its spiritual and social functions. These findings were then linked to theoretical frameworks, including Victor Turner's theory of ritual and Mircea Eliade's concept of the sacred, which helped explain the role of the Magombok ritual in maintaining social cohesion and spiritual identity within the Bajau Laut community.

In terms of ethical considerations, the study adhered to standard ethical research practices, including obtaining informed consent from all participants. The confidentiality of participants' identities was ensured, and their cultural values were respected throughout the research process. This ethical approach helped maintain the integrity of the study and ensured that the voices of community members were accurately represented and protected.

FINDINGS

This study analyzes the Magombok ritual practiced by the Bajau Laut community as a social drama involving several symbolic elements. The primary function of the ritual extends beyond seeking spiritual blessings; it also serves as a mechanism for resolving social tensions within the community. The Magombok ritual can be interpreted as a rite of passage, facilitating the transition of individuals or the community from one social state to another. Drawing on Arnold Van Gennep's and Victor Turner's theories of rites of passage, the ritual comprises three essential phases: pre-liminal (separation), liminal (transition), and post-liminal (reintegration) (13). These phases form a framework for understanding the structure of the Magombok ritual and its role in the community's social dynamics.

The first phase, Pre-Liminal Phase (Magpiai Bahau), is the preparatory phase, occurring the night before the main ritual. It involves a symbolic act of "sleeping" newly harvested rice and offering it to the spirits of ancestors. This phase signifies the separation from the everyday (profane) world and the transition into the sacred realm of the ritual. As explained by Hajah Amsiah Md Said (2023) during an interview, the process includes setting up ritual objects and adhering to prohibitions that help participants detach from their regular social roles and prepare for the sacred duties of the ritual. This separation is key to entering the liminal phase, where social norms are suspended, and participants enter a transformative state.

The second phase, Liminal Phase (Magduwata), begins on the first day of the ritual and involves the main healing process. Several sub-processes, such as Magtappah, where rice and corn are pounded to create flour for ritual offerings, embody the transition. This act symbolizes a transformative process that prepares participants for the spiritual journey ahead. Another key ritual is the Mandi Pajati (purification with a sacred object), where individuals are blessed and purified through contact with the pajati, a sacred object believed to hold ancestral power. This act exemplifies a hierophany, where an ordinary object becomes sacred through ritual, marking the beginning of the liminal transition. Within this phase, Magtagungguk (traditional music) and Magigal (ancestral dance) serve as transformative elements that unite participants. The music invites ancestral spirits to enter the body of the ritual leader (kelamat), mirroring the individual's transformation into a state of spiritual possession. The intense emotions expressed through the ritual dance (Mengalai) and music symbolize the social tensions being played out and resolved during the ritual.

The final phase, Post-Liminal Phase (Magbassah & Reintegration), marks the reintegration of participants back into the community after completing the ritual. This phase involves the blessing and sharing of food, symbolizing the return to the social fold after the tensions of the transition have been resolved. The ritual

concludes with a prayer and the distribution of food, which further symbolizes the harmonization of the community and the return to social equilibrium. This phase reflects the reintegration aspect of Turner's social drama model, where individuals, having undergone spiritual transformation, are re-accepted into the social community.

In conclusion, the Magombok ritual is not just a religious practice; it is a complex social drama that unfolds in a structured series of phases, each corresponding to Turner's framework of breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration. The ritual serves as a space for resolving conflicts within the Bajau Laut community and acts as a mechanism for spiritual, social, and cultural reconciliation. As a rite of passage, it plays a critical role in maintaining cohesion and harmony within the community, transcending mere ritual to become a transformative social process. By examining the Magombok ritual through the lens of social drama and rites of passage, this study highlights how the social dynamics of the Bajau Laut community are maintained, with the ritual acting as a catalyst for both personal and collective transformation.

The research also reveals three key themes central to the symbolic analysis of the Magombok ritual: Hierophany, Space and Time, and Myths. These themes serve as critical tools for understanding how the symbols and sacred values embedded within the ritual create a space where the profane world is transformed into the sacred. Through these processes, the Bajau Laut community engages with their ancestors and the spiritual world, ensuring the continuity of their cultural and spiritual identity. Eliade's concept of hierophany is vital in understanding how ordinary objects in the Magombok ritual, such as the bed (katil) or food items, are transformed into sacred objects through ritual actions. For instance, the bed becomes a symbol of spiritual connection, serving as the resting place for ancestral spirits. These objects are imbued with sacred meaning, acting as intermediaries between the human world and the spiritual realm. In the Magombok ritual, space is not merely a physical dimension but carries deep sacred significance.

The ritual is conducted within the sacred space of Teratak Panglima Haji Indanan, which functions as the axis mundi, connecting the earthly realm with the ancestral and spiritual worlds. This transformation of everyday space into sacred space highlights the intersection of the physical and spiritual worlds in Bajau Laut culture. Time also plays a crucial role in marking the ritual's sacredness. The ritual is scheduled annually, strategically before Ramadan, particularly in the months of Rajab or Sya'aban, to spiritually prepare participants for the holy month. The careful selection of time aligns with Eliade's idea of sacred time, a period set apart for spiritual renewal and divine connection. Myths in the Magombok ritual serve as a bridge between the community and the sacred. These oral traditions recount the origins and teachings of the Bajau Laut people and guide their interaction with the spiritual world. In the ritual, myths help define the moral and spiritual framework within which participants navigate their lives and rituals, reinforcing the importance of maintaining connections with ancestral spirits.

The first symbolic function of the ritual is its role in uniting the Bajau Laut community. Through the preparatory phase, Magpaii Bahau, the ritual brings together members of the community to prepare both physically and spiritually. While focused on material preparation, this phase also acts as a symbolic space for reinforcing social bonds and uniting participants in a shared sacred goal. According to Eliade's theory, the ritual transforms an ordinary home into a sacred space, establishing a physical and spiritual axis around which the community gathers. The Teratak Panglima Haji Indanan serves as this sacred axis, where ritual activities such as food preparation, music playing, and prayer offerings take place. The spatial arrangement within the house symbolizes the connection between the material world and the spiritual world, further enhancing the sacred nature of the ritual. The ritual also acts as a medium for fulfilling personal desires and spiritual petitions. In the Magtappah process, the action of pounding rice and corn is not simply for food preparation but also a symbolic act where participants make silent prayers or wishes for health, prosperity, or spiritual well-being. This aligns with the concept of sacred action, where the physical act of pounding becomes a spiritual offering. The traditional wooden pestles used in Magtappah carry their own sacred symbolism, seen as extensions of the natural world, linking the human realm with the spiritual and reinforcing the community's respect for nature's sacred powers.

Another significant symbolic function of the ritual is its role in the spiritual cleansing of participants. This is most evident in the Mandi Pajati process, where the sacred object, pajati, purifies participants before they enter the sacred space. This purification is an essential step before engaging with the spiritual world, allowing participants to cleanse themselves of physical or spiritual impurities. According to Eliade, the pajati functions as a hierophany, a physical object transformed into a conduit for spiritual power through ritual and myth. The act of purification symbolizes a deeper connection to the ancestral spirits and the sacred forces they represent.

The Magombok ritual is also a form of alternative healing for the Bajau Laut people. Processes like Magaddun Tepung Buas, Magtagungguk, and Magigal involve both physical and spiritual healing. These acts—offering food, playing traditional music, and dancing—connect participants with the spiritual realm, enabling them to heal from physical ailments, spiritual disturbances, and social tensions. The rituals also demonstrate communication between the human and spiritual worlds, central to the healing process. Under the guidance of the kelamat, participants request healing or the resolution of personal or communal issues, aligning with Eliade's concept of sacred rituals as spaces where humans interact with higher powers for transformation and healing.

Finally, the Magjamu and Magbassah sub-structures of the ritual express gratitude and reverence. The food offerings made in Magjamu symbolize thanks to Allah and the ancestors for their protection and blessings, while the prayers in Magbassah serve as a form of reverence to the divine and ancestral spirits. This final phase reinforces the idea of sacred reciprocity, where the community offers thanks for divine protection, healing, and guidance.

DISCUSSIONS

The structure of the Magombok ritual analyzed in this study clearly reflects the principles outlined in previous research, particularly those concerning the liminality and social drama within rituals. The findings reveal that the ritual unfolds in distinct phases that separate the profane world from the sacred, echoing Victor Turner's concepts of liminality and the transformation processes in rituals. As Turner (13) argues, ritual processes generally encompass three phases: the pre-liminal, the liminal, and the post-liminal. The Magombok ritual aligns with this structure, as it divides its processes into phases that guide participants through transitions, social reconciliation, and spiritual renewal. The first phase, Magpaii Bahau, serves as the preparatory stage and clearly reflects the pre-liminal phase. During this time, the community engages in activities that serve to separate participants from the ordinary world. The taboos enforced in this phase—such as restrictions on bathing, eating spicy food, and sleeping on mattresses—are a means of purifying individuals and setting the stage for their transition into a more sacred space. These taboos echo Turner's concept of separation from normal social structures, marking the first step in the ritual's transformative process. This separation is integral to liminality, where participants find themselves in a state of "betwixt and between" (Turner, 13), existing outside the normal social order. The Magpaii Bahau phase, alongside the strict gender-based divisions of labor (such as women preparing food), illustrates how individuals participate in the liminal process, each playing a role crucial for the success of the ritual. This sets the stage for the next phase, Magduwata, where participants further undergo spiritual and social transitions.

The Magduwata phase, representing the liminal stage, involves both physical healing and spiritual unity. Through prayer, mantra recitations, and ritual actions, participants undergo a communal transformation, preparing to receive ancestral wisdom. This phase encapsulates Turner's concept of *communitas* (19), where shared rituals foster equality and bond the community together. Activities like Magtappah (pounding rice and corn), Mandi Pajati, and Magaddun Tepung Buas serve as communal acts of purification and renewal. These rituals are not only physical acts but also powerful processes of social and spiritual cohesion, allowing the community to come together and address underlying tensions. Moreover, Turner's social drama model provides a lens through which we can view the emotional tensions that arise during the ritual. In the Magtagungguk and Magigal processes, emotional outbursts—especially from the kelamat (ritual leader)—symbolize social conflicts within the community. According to Turner (20), these moments of crisis in social dramas reflect unresolved tensions that are dramatically expressed and resolved through ritual participation.

The *kelamat*'s emotional outbursts and trance-like state during the *Magigal* phase (accompanied by the *mengalai* dance and *Tagunggu* music) embody these tensions, and their resolution brings the community back into harmony, reinforcing the idea that rituals serve as transformative mechanisms for social healing.

Further insight into the liminal nature of the *Magombok* ritual can be drawn from studies such as St. John's (21), which discuss how rituals catalyze social change and transform individuals' social roles. The *Magombok* ritual, with its multiple phases and gender-based roles, demonstrates how the liminal process not only facilitates individual healing but also provides a platform for resolving social conflicts. The *Magombok* is not merely a means of spiritual purification; it is a tool for restoring social harmony. This study thus affirms the perspectives of Turner (13) and St. John (21) on rituals as mechanisms for fostering community cohesion. Through its liminal phases, the *Magombok* ritual acts as a space where social tensions are acknowledged and resolved, providing the *Bajau Laut* community in *Kampung Gelam-Gelam* with a means of achieving social unity and spiritual renewal.

In examining the symbolic function and sacred value of the *Magombok* ritual, this study draws on Mircea Eliade's theory of hierophany and sacred time and space. Through this lens, the ritual emerges not only as a religious ceremony but also as a socio-cultural tool that unites the community and links the human world with the ancestral and spiritual realms. The *Magombok* ritual begins with *Magpali Bahau*, which marks the transition from the profane to the sacred world. Eliade's concept of sacred time is reflected here, particularly as the ritual is conducted before Ramadan, a period of spiritual purification. This timing imbues the ritual with a deep spiritual significance, aligning participants with the cosmic order and reconnecting them with the divine world. As Hanafi Hussin & Judeth John Baptist (10) note, rituals in the *Bajau-Sama* community function not only as religious practices but also as powerful social tools that reinforce community identity and cultural continuity.

The ritual's sacred space, exemplified by the *Teratak Panglima Haji Indanan* (the *kelamat*'s house), functions as an *axis mundi* (Eliade, 4)—a symbolic center connecting the earthly and spiritual realms. This house becomes a sacred space, where participants commune with the spiritual world. As Hajah Amsiah Md Said (2023) explained, the house transcends its ordinary function, becoming a ritual center that establishes a sacred connection between the community and the ancestral spirits. The *Magtappah* process, where rice and corn are pounded, also serves as a medium for communication with the spiritual world. As observed in Amsalib Pisali et al.'s (22) study on the *Panangsang* ritual, the recitation of mantras serves as a direct communication channel with ancestral spirits. In the case of *Magombok*, food preparation symbolizes the transformation of ordinary objects (like rice and corn) into sacred mediums, allowing participants to communicate their requests and prayers to their ancestors, aligning with Eliade's concept of hierophany.

The purification process in *Mandi Pajati* further aligns with Eliade's notion of sacralization. The water mixed with seven types of herbs and seven flowers becomes a sacred medium, not just for physical cleansing but for spiritual purification. This practice, which prepares participants for entry into the sacred space, echoes Eliade's view that purification rituals renew the connection between the human world and the spirit realm, elevating participants to a higher spiritual state (Eliade, 4). Additionally, the *Magombok* ritual serves as a form of alternative healing through practices like *Magaddun Tepung Buas*, *Magtagungguk*, and *Magigal*. These rituals, which involve trance-like states induced by dance and music, facilitate communication with the ancestors. This phenomenon, where participants enter altered states of consciousness (ASC), mirrors Eliade's theory on how music and dance open channels to the divine, serving as powerful tools for spiritual and physical healing.

Finally, the *Magombok* ritual includes the *Magjamu* and *Magbassah* phases, where food offerings are presented to the ancestral spirits as an expression of gratitude. These food offerings, as noted by Hanafi Hussin (23), are not just sustenance but become sacred objects that carry spiritual meaning. The act of offering food transforms it into a hierophany, a means of communication with the divine, reinforcing the ritual's role as both a social and spiritual mechanism. In conclusion, the *Magombok* ritual in the *Bajau Laut* community exemplifies the application of Eliade's sacred concepts, connecting the community to the spiritual realm through symbolic actions, sacred spaces, and transformative rituals. This study confirms that the ritual is not

merely a religious practice but a social mechanism that sustains community harmony, spiritual renewal, and cultural identity. Through the ritual, the Bajau Laut community reaffirms its connection to the sacred, illustrating Eliade's concept of homo religiosus, who experiences the world as a continuum between the profane and the sacred.

CONCLUSIONS

The Magombok ritual, practiced by the Bajau Laut community in Kampung Gelam-Gelam, Semporna, is a deeply sacred tradition intricately woven into the fabric of the community's spiritual and cultural identity. This study highlights the ritual's complex structure, symbolic functions, and sacred values, which are pivotal in maintaining the cohesion and cultural identity of the community. Far beyond a spiritual practice seeking blessings and protection from ancestral spirits, the ritual is a powerful social mechanism that fosters unity and plays a critical role in addressing community conflicts. By applying the theories of Victor Turner and Mircea Eliade, the study illustrates how the Magombok ritual serves as a rite of passage, where its phases of separation, liminality, and reintegration symbolize transitions not only of a spiritual nature but also of a social character.

The ritual's sacred nature is preserved through its rich symbolic elements—including food offerings, music, dance, and heirloom objects—which act as conduits for communication with the spiritual world. These elements reinforce the ritual's profound sacredness, connecting the human realm with the divine and facilitating a deeper understanding of the community's relationship with its ancestral spirits. Furthermore, the ritual's role as an alternative form of healing, addressing both physical and spiritual needs, underscores its integral position in the Bajau Laut community's health and well-being.

However, the study also reveals a growing concern about the declining participation and understanding of the ritual's sacredness among the younger generation. This shift represents a significant threat to the preservation of the ritual, as it risks severing the link between the younger members of the community and the spiritual and cultural heritage that the ritual embodies. Given these concerns, it is imperative to document, preserve, and transmit the sacred narratives and practices associated with the Magombok ritual to ensure its continuity and relevance in the future. Protecting this cultural treasure is essential to maintain its spiritual significance and prevent its erosion over time.

In conclusion, the Magombok ritual transcends being merely a religious practice; it is a transformative social drama that strengthens community bonds, heals both individuals and the collective, and preserves the cultural heritage of the Bajau Laut. Its enduring importance lies in its ability to unite the community, serve as a bridge to the spiritual realm, and provide a sense of continuity and belonging for the Bajau Laut people. Therefore, efforts to preserve and revitalize the sacred values and practices of the Magombok ritual are vital for safeguarding the community's spiritual and cultural identity for future generations.

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