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## The Myth of the God Fish in Monte's Hair Pond as a Conservation Narrative

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### Abstract

This research aims to explore and examine the meaning of the mythical narrative of the God Fish in the Monte Hair Lake as part of efforts to conserve endemic animals and preserve their habitats. Oral literature in the form of myths in the region is examined and scrutinized in order to find values that are full of the call to protect nature and the living things that exist in it. This study uses a qualitative approach through narrative analysis as a method, with Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and Durkheim's theory of belief as the basis of the analysis. The data used were in the form of oral speech, phenomena, and behaviors that had indications related to animal conservation efforts and literature review. The data sources in the study were the key interpreters and the community around the lake in the form of data in the form of oral narrative speech. Structured interview techniques and literature review collected data. Based on the research that has been carried out, the findings in this study show several forms of myths spread in the region, including that the God Fish is told as the incarnation of a royal warrior, cannot be consumed, has luck, and is sacred. The existence of myths in the Monte Hair area has a function to strengthen collective awareness to maintain the existence of the God Fish as a 'protector' of the local aquatic ecosystem of the Monte Hair Lake.

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is dubbed as one of the megabiodiverse countries because it has abundant biodiversity (Sanka et al., 2023). This encourages the community and the government to protect and manage conservation as one of the pillars in maintaining the diversity of animal species. The presence of endemic animals in a protected area can indicate the effectiveness of protecting the area's ecosystem. The shrinking area of natural habitats, environmental damage, industrialization, population increase, and civilization can threaten animal life, leading to extinction (Tyas & Najicha, 2023). Previously, through Law (UU) Number 5 of 1990 concerning the Conservation of Biological Natural Resources and Their Ecosystems, the government drafted regulations on protecting endangered animals concerning the Conservation of Biological Natural Resources and Their Ecosystems that prohibit the trade in protected animals. However, Indonesia is also a country that has a high rate of environmental destruction, especially in terms of biodiversity and habitat extinction, due to the decline in the level of diversity of animals and fauna as a result of the increase in population and the increase in basic needs of the community (Febrian et al., 2024). Habitat destruction and exploitation can lead to drastic declines in animal populations. However, species extinctions can also be caused by scientific factors such as a small number of individuals (rare), limited geographic distribution in a narrow (endemic) area, low ability to produce offspring, and the influx of invasive predators (Decree of the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021).

Next, based on Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry Number P.106/MENLHK/SETJEN/KUM.1/12/2018 concerning the Second Amendment to the Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry Number P.20/MENLHK/SETJEN/KUM.1/6/2018 concerning Protected Species of Plants and Animals One of the protected fish species in Indonesia comes from the Cyprinidae family with the scientific name *Neolissochilus thienemanni*, which is named by the community around Lake Toba as Batak fish or the broader community of God fish. This fish has many different nicknames in each region. For example, in the western part of the island of Java, it is known as kancra fish, and in Central Java, it is called Tombro fish. In contrast, in Sumatra it is known as Semah fish, and in other parts of the archipelago it is called Sengkaring fish, Curong fish, Lempon fish, Ihan fish, Sepan fish, Kelah fish, Masheer fish, or Torsoro fish.

In addition to the names mentioned above, the god fish also has nicknames such as Java

Salmon. The United States, as one of the export markets for god fish, calls this fish Java Salmon because of its similarity to salmon in America, such as the taste and color of the meat, as well as its benefits for the body (Yuhana et al., 2021). According to researchers from the Research Institute for Freshwater Aquaculture and Fisheries Extension (BRPBATPP), Bogor, Otong Zenal Arifin and Jojo Subagja (in Yuhana et al., 2021) Batak fish or Dewa fish is a type of fish that has important cultural value, especially for the indigenous peoples of Java and North Sumatra. This fish is believed to have a sacred value that can bring harm when consumed, and can usually be found in ponds, mosques, or other places that should not be disturbed. On the other hand, this aquatic animal with a hardened dorsal fin radius has a fantastic selling value, with export demand reaching 500-1000 kg/month, with a price range of IDR 800,000-IDR 1000,000/kg domestically and IDR 1-5 million/kg abroad. The significant market demand, slow growth, and specific habitat criteria make this fish farming challenging. The typical habitat of the godfish is deep water niches, ranging from rivers in the mountains to rivers in the highlands with rocky bottoms, strong currents, and clear water. The water temperature is relatively low, contains high oxygen, and is surrounded by the surrounding environment in the form of forests (Yuhana et al., 2021). This causes the godfish population to continue to decrease. Quoted from the International Council for Conservation of Nature (*Red List Committee, 2021*) This one aquatic animal has been included on the Red List in the *Vulnerable category*.

To preserve this endemic fish, Telaga Rambut Monte, which is a cultural heritage in Krisik Village, Gandusari District, Blitar Regency, carries out animal conservation by making it sacred and preserving its habitat. As a cultural heritage that has a petilasan from the Majapahit era in the form of the Monte Hair temple site, and is used as a place of worship for Hindus or traditional rituals (Sulistiyorini, 2024) This place has a rich oral culture, especially to protect the lake residents, namely the God fish. The lakes and temples in the area are believed to be related to each other because they are used and needed by each other during rituals. Just like the indigenous peoples in various regions, the people around the Monte Hair lake also have local beliefs and knowledge related to mystical matters with an ecological charge that are sometimes difficult to explain logically. This could happen because the community adopted Hindu teachings that were brought when the Majapahit kingdom was still in power until it collapsed, so that many of its followers spread in the interior,

including in the area. At that time, along with the spread of religion and architectural art that underwent significant transformations, Hindu temples were built as a form of respect for Hindu gods (Ratni in Suci et al., 2023), salah satunya adalah candi rambut monte.

Referring to the beliefs of local communities that are still closely related to the religion adhered to, Durkheim's view, which was later re-explained by Pals In his book *Seven Theories of Religions* (2018), he mentions that the nature of a religious belief system is not a concept of something mystical, but rather a 'sacred' experience. Religion is closely related to people's belief in supernatural powers (Siagian, 2023). In any religious belief, ranging from simple to complex, there will always be two things that are always shared and distinguished by its followers, namely the 'sacred' and the 'profane'. Something considered sacred will become an object of respect, is believed to have great power, and is forbidden to be approached by anyone at any time. Conversely, things with a 'profane' nature are considered everyday life experiences. According to Durkheim, religion is a sacred pattern in society. For him, religion is a unity of experience in every action related to the sacred, which is separated and forbidden. Sacred things always connect with the interests and welfare of the wider community, while profane things are related to individual affairs daily and in personal activities. Although there is a distinction and division between the sacred and the profane, the two things do not determine good morality and evil. Sacred things can be good or evil, as well as profane ones. What cannot be is the sacred becoming profane, and vice versa.

Pals reveals that, according to Durkheim, the clan people who worship totems are not worshipping animals or plants. What they worship is a metaphysical power found in these animals and plants. These impersonal powers have vast power both physically and mentally over the lives of all clan members. Each clan member must respect this impersonal power and have a moral responsibility to carry out the worship ceremonies addressed to him. Through these ceremonies, each community member will have a stronger bond with each other and will be highly loyal to their group. (Pals, 2018). This is certainly in line with the phenomenon of implementing rites and beliefs embraced by the community around Telaga Rambut Monte.

A deeper understanding of the myths believed by the local community can be explored further using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory of the concepts of denotation and connotation—a concept created from the development of Saussure's dichotomous structuralist theory, which is treated

with deeper complexity. If Saussure only categorizes signs at the stage of Tier one meaning, Barthes develops them to the stage of connotation. Denotation is the first conventionally agreed-upon system of meaning. It explains the relationship of markers and signs to a reality; the meaning produced is explicit, definite, and direct. Connotation is the second implicit system of meaning. This stage provides an overview of the interactions that occur when signs meet emotions and feelings (Septiana, 2014)

Myth is a form of expansion of the connotative speech system. According to Barthes, myth does not merely contain superstitious and absurd facts, but myth, according to Barthes, is a *type of speech* used in society (Barthes in Putri, 2023). As a type of speech, myth conveys a message in a second-level meaning. Myths must be interpreted considering historical limitations, use conditions, and the community's social context. Myths then become mystical speech formed from thoughts that are processed in such a way that they are easily communicated (Barthes, 1991).

Barthes explained that there is a concept of semiotics in myth. As mentioned above, he developed a level of semiotic complexity that had previously only been reached at the level one stage, into two different levels of meaning, namely the level of denotation and connotation (Rusmana dalam Septiana, 2014). Denotations are signs whose markers have a high level of agreement and produce true meaning; this denotation is the first signification system. Then the connotation becomes a second-level significance system. Myth can be studied through Barthes' semiotic study up to the second level. To identify a meaning, humans examine it in the first stage of the signification system and utilize their cognitive abilities through several meaning identification and interpretation processes to produce connotative meanings. Myth, as part of oral literature, is a form of speech that utilizes the ability of human cognition to reach the second stage of the significance system and contain hidden values. According to Barthes, myths in semiotics are used as a step to convey meaning (Sobur, 2016). In this case, myths are not interpreted based on an ordinary everyday sense.

Myth is the birthplace of an ideology, emerging through a hypothesis based on a glimpse of observation. According to Barthes' view, myth is not an unreasonable or unexpressable reality, but a messenger that serves to be a defense of hegemony over a specific period (Budiman in Septiana, 2014) It fulfills a belief that gives birth to certain concrete dogmas that seem indisputable because that is how it should be.

Research on myths associated with conservation efforts has been conducted by several other researchers before. Some of them are research conducted by Wulansari & Iqlima (2019) With the title "Reactualization of Local Myths as an Effort to Conserve the Semeru Slope Bamboo Forest Area, Lumajang Regency," which contains the results of research that myths in conservation efforts do play an important role. Some myths are deliberately created to maintain the environment's or human life's stability. The myth that grows in the Semeru Slope Bamboo Forest area is an effort to preserve fish that inhabit spring water sources, and the preservation of bamboo trees, which is an effort in soil and water conservation. Then, the subsequent research that is in line with this study is the research conducted by Muqodam (2021), Who conducted research with the title "*Sampun Wonten Ket Mbiyen and the Amount of Mboten Kirang Mboten Nambah: The Myth of 'Fish of God' as a Conservation Strategy in Telaga Rambut Monte, Blitar Regency, East Java*"? This research uses ethnographic methods with research results in various myths spread in the area and strategies carried out by the local community to spread conservation values through socialization to tourists and routine village cleaning activities. Next is the research conducted by Hafida et al (2021) with the research title "Historical Study of the Belief of Danyang Telaga Rambut Monte in the Village Community of Krisik Blitar," using historical methods based on heuristic stages, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The study results show that the meaning of Danyang ritual values formed from oral traditions transformed into a system for controlling social values to form a ritual system to save and order the ecology in the region. Based on previous research that has been submitted, the analysis of the myth of the God Fish in the Monte Hair Lake with semiotic glasses has not been carried out. Therefore, this study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to examine the connotative meaning in the myth of the Fish of the God in the Monte Hair Lake and its correlation with Durkheim's theory of belief as a form of conservation narrative based on oral literature.

## METHODS

The method used in this research article is a qualitative approach. Denzin and Lincoln (in Kaharuddin, 2021) Revealed that the qualitative approach is an approach that uses a natural setting in interpreting phenomena that occur using various existing methods. The data collection methods used in qualitative research are usually in the form of interviews, observations, and documentation. This approach is practical when used to process data

with a natural background and studies that require focused and in-depth analysis. Likewise, as explained by Sugiyono (2019) Qualitative research is a survey method used to obtain data from certain natural places using tests, interviews, questionnaires, etc. Several important efforts are made in implementing qualitative research, including observation, interviews, data collection from participants carried out with several procedures, analysis of data collected, and interpretation of the meaning of the data obtained.

The qualitative analysis method used in this study is narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is a qualitative research method focusing on how individuals relate their experiences. This technique is used in understanding the meaning contained in the research subjects and how the experience ultimately shapes their identity and perspective (Hasan, 2025). This analysis technique has several uses, one of which is to study the role of language in forming social reality. The narrative used by the research subjects is not only a depiction of their personal experiences, but also a reflection of the social norms and cultural values that prevail in the region.

The data used in this study are in the form of oral speech, phenomena, and behaviors related to the conservation narrative of animals and their correlation with belief theory and the use of literature wealth carried out through literature review. The data sources in this study are observations of the surrounding environment and interviews conducted with key officers and the general public living around the area, with specific criteria. The criteria in question include people who are quite influential in the area (in this case, traditional elders or locksmiths), the general public with an age range of 20-50 years, and who have lived in the area for at least ten years. The data sought is in the form of direct speech of oral literature in the form of mythical stories circulating in the community. Interviews are conducted with observation activities to observe the research object directly. The data collection instrument used is the researcher, who acts as a key instrument and a research data collector. In the next stage, the collected data is transcribed and identified before being analyzed to find data that suits the research objectives. This research aims to find the form and meaning of myths spread in the Monte Hair Lake area as a narrative of animal conservation based on oral literature.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Form and Meaning of the Myth in the Monte Hair Well as a Form of the Narrative of Conservation and Preservation of Animal Habitats

#### Myths, Society, and Conservation

In KBBI, myth is interpreted as a story about gods and heroes from the past, containing interpretations of the universe's origin, humans, and nations that have a deep meaning and are revealed supernaturally. Myth or mite can also be defined as folklore prose that is considered to have happened in the past and has to do with supernatural things that are usually about gods or demigod humans (Dananjaya, 2002). In the Javanese oral tradition, Endraswara (2005) Reveals that myths are stories that contain Javanese beliefs about the supernatural. Its function is equivalent to the function of symbols, rites, and speeches that show awareness of certain situations in the cosmos and give rise to metaphysical attitudes (Elifindade dalam Sartini, 2014).

Myths are something that some people believe, usually used to warn, scare, or convey specific moral values that are passed down from one generation to another through oral speech (Angeline, 2015). All existing myths have developed since the time of our ancestors and continue to evolve and have the potential to change according to the times. This is because the development of the times ultimately changes the human mindset; when something is challenging to digest using human logic or reason, it will not be easy to believe. The development factor of the times is very influential in the dynamics of traditional people's beliefs when juxtaposed with the pace of modernity. However, until now, some people still believe in certain myths and have made them their philosophy of life.

The primary function of myths for primitive cultures is to express, elevate, and discover beliefs, protect and strengthen morality, ensure the efficiency of rites, and provide practical rules to guide society. In addition, myth also has specific functions, including a) the process of awareness of supernatural powers, b) representing events that have existed, and c) stretching the epistemological and ontological horizons of reality. Myths provide an overview of the world and its origins. (Simon, 2006). The myth was born and developed in various regions of Indonesia as one of the manifestations of a conservative society. It plays a role in providing direction for human behavior and becomes a guideline for wise actions. Of course, various myths are deliberately created to maintain environmental stability and the preservation of flora and fauna. In addition, myths are also used as a medium from the time of our ancestors that have

been trusted for generations to ensure that people are submissive and obedient to the applicable regulations (Andariati, 2019).

Myth has to do with magical realism. Magical realism is an understanding that presents images and understandings that have magical, mystical, or even irrational properties whose source comes from mythological works, legends, and fairy tales (Faris in Sari, 2018). Indigenous peoples have coexisted with magical realism since time immemorial (Fajrin et al., 2023). This realism manifests itself in many events that are difficult to explain logically and often cause friction between rural and urban communities. Some examples of these phenomena include trance, death or mysterious disappearance of someone, witchcraft, *susuk*, taboo, *teluh*, and so on. Indigenous peoples consider all such extraneous events as a reality in their daily lives, and they accept them well. If understood further, myths hold a deeper meaning than stories about supernatural things or unnatural events experienced by traditional people.

Myth and logos are two things that cannot be separated (Snijders, 2007). Logos can be interpreted as "science" or science understood as the result of rational or intellectual processes (Siahaan, 2018), a concept, science, and the mind. The two are like the two sides of a coin that intersect. These two mindsets should be held together and not seen as an evolution of the way of thinking. Meanwhile, as explained above, myths are in the form of beliefs that do not necessarily involve scientific facts. Myths often consist of stories understood logically, but some people use them as a source of truth or justification (Shintia, 2024). The Logos is more inclined to practical science, and myth leads to wisdom and connectedness. Neither can be eliminated because each has a specific role that the other cannot replace. Indigenous peoples highly uphold mythical mindsets and see the surrounding environment as living objects like humans, so there are many rituals, mantras, and specific customary rules to communicate with other living beings. In understanding indigenous peoples, through myths, they want to show that nature also has voices and attentions, be it animals, trees, soil, stones, mountains, seas, lakes, etc. This shows that indigenous peoples are more connected to their living space, nature, and environment. Through that, the balance of the natural ecosystem can also be maintained, so that natural damage and massive exploitation due to industrialization can be minimized. Without myths, the climate crisis, environmental damage, and extinction of flora and fauna species are inevitable.

Magical realism or myth is born from a healthy environment, without the balance of nature

that is maintained, humans will not be born and live to this day, nor will some cultures and traditions give birth to deeper stories and meanings. Discussing myths without talking about ecology and conservation issues would be impossible. If nature is damaged, then myth will also fade, and if the existence of myth loses its sacredness, then nature will also be damaged. Myth and nature are two interrelated things.

### **Myths in the Monte Hair Lake Area to Preserve Animals and Their Habitats**

The city of Blitar, which is often referred to as the city of Patria, is rich in many stories. One type of folklore that has developed and spread in the Blitar area is Myths. One is the myth found in the Monte Hair Lake area in Krisik Village, Gandusari District, Blitar Regency, East Java. This place is part of a cultural heritage site and gets its name from a temple not far from the lake.

Monte's Hair Lake holds a myth that tells the story of a type of incarnate sengkaring fish called the God Fish. The surrounding community believes the Fish of the Gods to be the incarnation of a warrior who was cursed by a rei named Mbah Monte or Ratu Baka, who came from the Majapahit Kingdom (Hafida et al., 2021). In addition to cultural heritage, the Monte Hair Lake area is also used as a conservation site for water protection plants, including banyan trees, bamboo, and several other types of trees.

Local indigenous peoples have a significant role in the region's formation and spread of myths. This aligns with Durkheim's opinion (dalam Pals, 2018), Which prioritizes the importance of society, structures, interactions, and social institutions in understanding human thoughts and behavior. The specific difference that arises from human activity is the emphasis on the aspects intended to be addressed, such as law, morality, family, art, and religion, by observing them through a social lens. In the totemism practices believed by traditional society, Durkheim mentioned that the forms of worship practiced by traditional society can be divided into positive and negative worship. The main task of rituals incorporated in negative worship is to keep the sacredness of a thing or a place so that it is always separate from the profane. The form of worship usually contains prohibitions or taboos. A taboo place will protect the sacredness of the territory. This is in line with the community's behavior, which firmly maintains the preservation and harmony of the area by maintaining the culture of objects and intangibles through actions or speech culture. This is done so that the sacred and profane do not mix. The concept of taboo places is also believed by more advanced religions, such as

establishing places of worship in mosques, temples, and churches in holy and sacred places. Negative worship also determines certain times as a provision for ceremonies that can and should not be performed. If the form of negative worship is the protection of prohibitions or taboos that should not be violated, then ritual is a form of positive worship. The following are the myths in the Monte Hair Well and their correlation with the narrative of endemic animal conservation and habitat preservation through the richness of oral traditions.

### **Fish of the Gods is a royal soldier**

In the cultural heritage area, there is a lake which is one of the headwaters of the spring from the foot of Mount Buthak. The lake is inhabited by a species of fish whose existence is starting to become rare, known as the god fish. Based on the results of the interview, the surrounding community views that the God Fish is a special type of incarnate fish with unusual behavior.

*"ikan yang disana itu berperilaku unik lho, setiap pagi dan sore selalu berkumpul di tengah sumber. Seperti sedang apel" (K/42)*

"The fish there behave uniquely; every morning and evening, they always gather in the middle of the spring. Like they were in a meeting. (F/42)

According to the guards from the area, every morning and evening, the fish in the lake often form formations as if they are lining up or gathering around *the banner* or spring source. This is in line with the opinion of E. B. Tylor (1865), which states that myth is born under the influence of language that has an identity and arises from its natural tendency to provide an analogy between human behavior and nature. Examples given by Taylor are the sound of lightning, which is equated with anger, and rain, which is interpreted as a feeling of sadness. From there, we will understand why each myth is always connected to the forces of nature in their imaginary stories, where every natural event is seen as animal or human behavior. That sounds similar to the narrative in Monte's Hair Lake, where the community considers the godfish a group of other incarnate beings. Although their stories are purely imaginative works, the personification and belief in the gods clearly serve as a thought exercise aimed at explaining why a phenomenon can occur.

Based on the statement of the interview results, the god fish got its name because the people believed that the fish were the incarnation of the soldiers of the Majapahit kingdom.

*"iwak kuwi lek jarene wong-wong biyen prajurit sing dikutuk gawe njaga panggonan kono. Njaga candi ana kono kuwi lho jarene"* (J/75)

"According to the old people, the fish were the cursed warriors to guard the place. Guarding the temple, they say" (J/75)

They considered the fish to be soldiers assigned to guard the lake and the temple that was built nearby. In Hinduism, warriors fall under the Kshatriya (Knight) caste category. This group has the responsibility to protect the population from external dangers and disturbances (Wiana in Ardana, 2013). Based on this context, it can be seen that connotatively local myths understand that aquatic animals living in the lake are species that play a role in maintaining the region's ecosystem, so that it is preserved. This myth is then passed down from generation to generation, internalized in society, and then develops into a collective belief. This collective belief then developed into a form of totemism in society. This statement is supported by Taylor's idea (in Pals, 2018) which states that religion is the belief in something spiritual. This definition has advantages because it is simple, straightforward, and broad in scope. While we can find other similarities within each religion, the only characteristic that religions, large and small, traditional and modern, have in common is the belief in a spirit that thinks, behaves, and feels like a human being. Like mythology, animism is at the heart of any religion, which comes from the Latin word *anima*, which means spirit or belief in something alive and has power behind everything. Animism is the oldest form of thought that can be found in every human being (Pals, 2018). This is in line with the beliefs held by the community around the Monte Hair lake, which considers there to be a great power behind the animals in the area, which makes them valued and respected. This collective belief that developed into a form of totemism has the function of strengthening the collective consciousness to maintain the existence of the God Fish as a 'protector' of the local aquatic ecosystem of the Monte Hair Lake.

### The Fish of the Gods is Sacred

The collective belief that developed into the totemism of the Fish of the Gods in the Lake of the Monte Hair made the Fish of the Gods a sacred being. This species is considered sacred and has high religious value. The community then attached special traits to the Fish of the Gods as a sacred animal. One of the special traits attached to it is the

number of people in the population, which never changes.

*"Sampun Wonten Ket Mbiyen lan Jumlahe Mboten Kirang Mboten Nambah"* (J/75)

"It has long since been the number has not decreased or increased" (J/75)

Based on the connotative meaning, the fish is still maintained and sustainable, with a sign that the population is stable, not decreasing as a sign of extinction, and not increasing so that it becomes invasive. If we associate the myth with the belief in animals having great powers that can destroy humans who break their rules, this is in line with what Taylor explains (in Pals, 2018) Regarding a belief that human experience of death and dreams led traditional societies to put forward a simple theory of their lives for the first time, that a metaphysical component causes every life. They consider this to give life wherever it is. With this assumption, they then think through analogy and extension. Just as a spirit moves a human being, it also moves the universe. In addition to attaching special traits to creatures that are considered sacred, people also pay homage with positive forms of worship, such as rituals, and negative worship, such as taboos.

Violating the applicable customary law, such as abstinence, will result in punishment, even death (Suprianto, 2021). It refers to the belief of the local people that unseemly human activities will lead them to a curse influenced by the invisible beings present in the place.

### Forms of Worship of God Fish

The God fish, as a creature that is considered sacred by the community, encourages both positive and negative worship activities. Positive worship is a form of activity that must be carried out by the community of its adherents in a specific period or situation, usually in the form of a ceremony that is carried out with joy and enthusiasm. One of the forms of positive worship carried out by the community around Telaga Rambut Monte towards the Fish of the Gods is the routine ritual of cleaning the village (*ruwatan*) which is held every year in the month of *selo* in the Javanese calendar. The offerings forbidden in the lake are in the form of a specific part of a striped goat (*kendhit*) carried out by village elders. The forbidden parts are a whole goat head, skin, leg bones, half-cooked rice (*kekelan*), and bananas (Rahmawati, 2017). This procession is considered an offering for the residents of the well by the local

villagers as a form of gratitude, hope for mercy, and a request to be kept away from calamity.

*"Setahun sekali ada bersih desa, biasanya masyarakat disini nglarung wedhus kendhit, slametan, dan pagelaran"*

"Once a year, there is a village clean, usually the community bans striped goats, Thanksgiving, and performs" (K/42)

In Javanese culture, the village cleansing ceremony, or ruwatan bumi, has philosophical value. These values include the obligation to always respect each other, especially to ancestors, and always be grateful for what they have obtained (Abadi & Soebijantoro, 2016). Village clean traditional ceremonies can also serve as a means of self-expression for the community in terms of attention and respect for the environment. Rituals that remind people to be aware of environmental sustainability (Cathrin, 2017).

In addition to positive forms of worship, such as earth alms, other forms of worship are carried out in certain situations. Some of them are that on certain nights, there will be people who do meditation in the area overnight to get good luck, such as finding lottery numbers, worshiping, deepening knowledge or metaphysical skills, and seeking wealth. Then there is also the myth that if someone performs a ritual, feeds the fish, or throws a coin into the lake, it will bring good luck or abundant good fortune. This aligns with Durkheim's view that this ritual worship is a "sacred exchange" in which, in this activity, the people who perform the worship surrender their lives to God, and God gives them back their lives. (Qudsy, 2019).

The following form is negative worship in the form of prohibitions (taboos). If there is a person who violates, then he will bear the risk of his actions. The purpose of negative worship is to keep the prohibitions from being violated. An example of negative worship is the narrative about the prohibition of catching or consuming the Fish of the Gods because it can bring disaster or even death. People believe that when deliberately caught and cooked, the Fish of the God will not taste good and turn into oil and foam when fried. This could happen because they think the bond is not meant to be consumed.

*"mboten kenging dimasak, upami digoreng dados lengo. Tirose simbah jaman biyen tau ana sing masak nalika ana iwak mati, ananing malah ilang daginge dados lisah. Tiyange sedo bibar nyobi mangan"* (T/52)

"It cannot be cooked, if the fish is fried, the meat turns to oil. In ancient times, someone tried to cook it when a fish died, but the meat turned into oil. The person then died after trying to eat it." (T/52).

Based on the connotative meaning, being unable to cook means that the fish is not intended for consumption by the community. From a cultural perspective, animals in certain mythologies play a special enough role to be respected and sanctified. This is related to beliefs that view certain animals as sacred entities because they are ritual means or are considered as totems or drops of the god (Antono, 2019). The area around the lake is also prohibited from being used as a residence or damaged by the environmental ecosystem. Trees are forbidden to be cut down. Visitors are urged to maintain manners and ethics. If the taboo is violated, then the violator will get sick. This is actually what helps to keep the sacred separate from the profane.

Regarding the violation of taboos, Durkheim's theory of belief also explains the third type of worship that falls within the territory of the first form of worship, namely the piacular. Piacular means penance or mistake (Mustofa, 2020). Durkheim (in the Pals, 2018) revealing that piaculum is derived from the word piaculum, which is present in the process of expelling misfortune or disaster, is a ritual performed to atone for a mistake or sin, or for reasons of mourning, which is performed after the death of a person or after a great disaster. From this, we can understand that the ritual performed can reveal two sides of the power possessed by the sacred. That power symbolizes darkness and evil, but can also symbolize light and goodness.

Based on a statement from the manager of the Monte Hair Temple, a tourist once came to the place and was caught saying dirty words in the lake area. It is said that the tourist finally fell ill or experienced a disaster.

*"pernah ada wisatawan yang berkata kotor ketika berkunjung disini, kemudian beberapa hari kemudian jatuh sakit tanpa diketahui penyebabnya. Akhirnya kembali lagi dengan keluarga, mengadakan ritual dan melakukan permohonan maaf secara langsung disini"* (K/42)

"There used to be a tourist who used to say rude words when he visited here, and a few days later, he fell ill for no apparent reason.



Finally, he returned to his family, held a ritual, and apologized directly here" (K/42)

The solution to the misfortune was to return to the Monte Hair area and hold an apology session by performing rituals. Animist beliefs may explain why sacred objects, such as amulets, or animals as described in these myths, are thought to have power and then sanctified, which is important to indigenous communities. They do not worship the object but rather the *anima* that resides in it. The spirit that gives power and life to the object. By understanding the essence of animism, we will understand how primitive medicine worked, because everyone who shivers unconsciously during a fever knows that it is not their actions that cause the disease, but evil spirits that control their bodies. To cure a disease, what is needed is not medicine but the expulsion of evil spirits that control or live in their bodies (Taylor in the Pals, 2018).

Solidarity in religion or belief in such myths first emerged not from personal moments, but from clan ceremonies or communal group rituals. The beliefs found in each totemism are not the most important aspects; instead, the traditional and religious rituals ultimately gave it its existence and continue to be practiced.

In the context of bringing good luck and disaster, its denotative meaning refers to a literal action that is considered to bring good luck or a curse. In contrast, its connotative meaning can be something that can symbolically have a positive or negative impact on the life of a person or a group of people. The god fish is considered a sacred fish that can bring good luck to a person if he does something according to the applicable rules, and brings bad luck or a curse to the person who violates its taboo. Connotatively, the god fish is considered a symbol that can have a positive or negative impact on a person's life or a group of people.

Without us realizing it, all the forms of myths in the Monte Hair area indirectly protect the endemic wildlife that lives there, along with their habitats, which will continue to be preserved as long as the community upholds all existing myths. When explored deeper, stories that are passed down orally hold a more significant meaning than just fairy tales used to scare children. For indigenous peoples, many magical stories cannot be measured and explained using reason; For them, these stories are real and can be felt based on the experiences they absorb with feelings and imagination. Myths belong to the category of local knowledge that existed long before Western knowledge was discovered. If someone says myth is

the opposite of science, it is not necessarily true. Myth itself is a form of knowledge and understanding of the local community that they learn from natural patterns that have occurred repeatedly and have gone through many trials since ancient times, until it can be well formulated in the form of stories and customary knowledge about a phenomenon through the intermediary of basic knowledge in the form of language. Indigenous knowledge here is considered more contextual and environmentally friendly than Western knowledge, which relies on logic. The climate crisis is one of the results of the erosion of knowledge and customary rules, which are beginning to be eroded by the pace of industrialization, without ever considering that everything discussed in the modern era depends on the environment that is still functioning. Ecological issues are the basis of all knowledge; Discussions about art, visual arts, discourse about economics or politics, and so on will be meaningless when the environment and the world are damaged. Ecosystem instability, extinction of specific flora and fauna, and environmental damage are consequences of human nature forgetting the meaning of sufficiency and the loss of a wise attitude in living in harmony with nature. Through oral literature, humans are reminded not to overstep and become wiser.

## CONCLUSION

The myth was born and developed in various regions in Indonesia, spreading from Sabang to Merauke. Myths can be one of the manifestations of the conservative mindset of the community, both towards the flora and fauna in the area, to ensure their preservation. Myths are directions or guidelines for human behavior that will lead them to wisdom. Several myths are deliberately created to maintain the stability of the environment and ecosystems. One of them is the myth that developed in the Monte Hair Lake area. The oral stories developed in the Monte Hair Lake contain a conservation narrative for protected animals. A big idea is deliberately formed to protect the area and the animals, namely by making it sacred. The Fish of the Gods is described as a warrior assigned to guard the place. Connotatively, the idea seeks to provide an idea that aquatic animals living in the lake are species that play a role in maintaining the region's ecosystem, so that it is preserved. This myth is then passed down from generation to generation and internalized in society, until it develops into a collective belief. This collective belief then developed into a form of totemism in society.

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