



The Symbolic Meanings of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance in the *Sedekah Bumi* Ceremony of Kaliputih Village**Nugro Widiyanto¹ & Teguh Supriyanto²**¹Magister Pendidikan Seni, Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni, Universitas Negeri Semarang²Sastra Jawa, Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni, Universitas Negeri SemarangCorresponding Author: nugrowidiyanto@students.unnes.ac.id

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The *Topeng Lengger* Dance during the *Sedekah Bumi* Ceremony in Kaliputih village is a sacred tradition rich in symbolic meaning and is still maintained amid modernization. This research aims to uncover the symbolic meanings in the songs, movements, makeup, and dance clothes of the *Topeng Lengger*, and to explain how the community maintains its sustainability as a means of preserving local wisdom. This research uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach combined with an ethnopedagogical perspective, through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of traditional actors, traditional leaders, village officials, and communities. The data is analyzed using an interactive model through reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study show that the symbols in the *Topeng Lengger* Dance represent the cosmological relationship between humans, ancestors, nature, and God through the structure of the song, the variety of movements, and the performance's attributes. In addition, tradition is preserved through intergenerational inheritance, communal commitment, and the revitalization of cultural values in the practice of the *Sedekah Bumi* ritual. This study concludes that the symbolic meaning of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance is the primary foundation for the sustainability of tradition and for strengthening cultural education in the community.

Keywords: *symbolic meaning; Topeng Lengger dance; sedekah bumi; local wisdom; Wonosobo*

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INTRODUCTION

The *Topeng Lengger* Dance is a traditional performing art that constitutes an integral part of the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony in Kaliputih Village, Selomerto District, Wonosobo Regency. This tradition serves not only as a medium for cultural expression but also as a

means of reaffirming the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and the Creator. Through the dance performance, the local community reinforces the values of gratitude, cooperation, and respect for ancestors, which constitute the core of Javanese local wisdom. However, the rapid

development of globalization, modernization, changing entertainment preferences among younger generations, and the growing influence of certain religious perspectives have led some community members to overlook the symbolic values embedded in this traditional ritual gradually. This phenomenon is consistent with Sedjatiawan's (1997) view that traditions perceived as no longer relevant to contemporary societal needs tend to experience a decline in their cultural functions.

This phenomenon was evident during the preliminary observations conducted in Kaliputih Village. Kasiyo Ahmad Rosidin, a traditional community leader, and Parminto, the Head of Kaliputih Village, explained that younger generations tend to be more enthusiastic about participating in entertainment segments than in core ritual activities, such as the *kenduri*, communal prayers, and the presentation of *sesaji*. This shift indicates a gradual decline in young people's understanding of the ritual's symbolic meanings at each stage. This finding is consistent with Koentjaraningrat (2009), who argues that social change and modernization can affect the transmission of cultural values, particularly when younger generations are no longer actively involved in traditional cultural practices. Likewise, Sibarani (2023) emphasizes that the sustainability of cultural traditions depends largely on the successful transmission of their values, meanings, and cultural functions to future generations. When this transmission focuses solely on the performative aspects without fostering an understanding of their symbolic meanings, the

tradition risks shifting from a medium of cultural education to mere entertainment.

The presence of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance in the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony of Kaliputih Village is not merely a complementary element of the ceremonial sequence but an integral component of the ritual structure, regarded as indispensable to its implementation. Based on interviews with traditional leaders and community members, the *Topeng Lengger* Dance is consistently performed after the *Slametan* procession as an expression of gratitude for the agricultural harvest and as a symbolic prayer for the community's safety, prosperity, and social harmony. To this day, the people of Kaliputih Village have not replaced this role with any other form of traditional performing art, as the *Topeng Lengger* Dance has become a representation of local cultural identity transmitted across generations. Therefore, understanding the *Topeng Lengger* Dance should not be limited to its performative aspects alone but should also encompass an exploration of the symbolic meanings embedded in every element of its presentation. Such an understanding is essential for explaining how the community constructs, interprets, and transmits cultural values through the practice of this traditional performance.

From a cultural studies perspective, a symbolic interpretation of traditional performances can be undertaken using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, which facilitates analysis of meaning at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth (Fauzan, 2025).

Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu's theory, particularly the concepts of habitus and cultural capital, provides a useful analytical framework for explaining how communities produce, negotiate, and preserve these cultural meanings amid ongoing social change (Bourdieu, 2020).

Previous studies on *Sedekah Bumi* have primarily focused on its religious values, social solidarity, and socio-cultural functions (Rochmawati et al., 2021; Kuswaningsih et al., 2024; Nisa et al., 2024; Khoirunnisa & Ribawati, 2025). Meanwhile, studies on traditional performing arts have largely examined issues related to cultural transmission and community-based learning (Hera, 2023). In general, previous research on the *Sedekah Bumi* tradition has emphasized its social, religious, and cultural values. In contrast, studies on the *Topeng Lengger* Dance have mainly explored its historical development, performance characteristics, and entertainment function. Research specifically investigating the symbolic meanings of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance as an integral component of the *Sedekah Bumi* ritual remains relatively limited. In practice, however, the *Topeng Lengger* Dance maintains a structural and symbolic relationship with the entire ritual process that cannot be separated from the ceremony itself. Addressing this research gap, the present study examines the symbolic meanings of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance performed during the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony in Kaliputih Village as an integral part of the community's cultural meaning system.

The novelty of this study lies in three main aspects. First, it focuses on the symbolism

of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance as an integral component of the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony. Second, it employs a combination of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework to examine the interaction between symbolic meanings and social structures. Third, it identifies and maps the values of Javanese local wisdom embedded in the dance symbols as a strategy for cultural preservation amid the dynamics of modernity.

Based on this context, the study seeks to examine and interpret the symbolic meanings embodied in the *Topeng Lengger* Dance as part of the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony in Kaliputih Village. The *Topeng Lengger* Dance is viewed not merely as a form of folk entertainment but also as a symbolic medium representing the spiritual, social, and cultural values of the Javanese community. Through its choreographic movements, the use of masks, musical accompaniment, and the sequence of performances, the dance reflects various expressions of Javanese local wisdom, including gratitude to God for agricultural abundance, respect for ancestors, harmony between humans and nature, and the values of togetherness and cooperation within community life. Therefore, an analysis of the symbolic meanings of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance within the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony is essential for understanding the role of traditional dance as a medium for preserving cultural identity and transmitting the noble values of Javanese society across generations.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study is designed to address the following research question: What are the symbolic

meanings of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance in the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony in Kaliputih Village?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative, ethnographic approach, integrated with an ethnopedagogical perspective, to explore the symbolic meanings of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance within the context of the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony in Kaliputih Village, Selomerto District, Wonosobo Regency. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables researchers to examine the experiences, practices, and systems of meaning embedded within a community (Harahap, 2020). Meanwhile, ethnography positions the researcher in direct interaction with the community to gain an in-depth understanding of cultural patterns and traditional practices (Elvandari, 2020; Zein, 2016).

The research site was purposively selected for its continuity with the *Sedekah Bumi* tradition, which has been preserved and practiced across generations. The study involved eight informants selected through purposive sampling: Kasiyo Ahmad Rosidin (traditional leader), Bambang Atmo Sutodjo (community elder), Bejo Yuwono (village official), Bisah Safitri (*Lengger* singer), Syukur Yektiyono (musician), Riski Septiyani (dancer), Jariyah (community member), and I Made Christian Wiranata Rediana (arts academic). These informants were selected for their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in organizing the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony and performing the *Topeng Lengger*

Dance, enabling them to provide data relevant to this study's objectives.

The research data consisted of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through participant observation during the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony, in-depth interviews with tradition bearers, and documentation, including photographs, video recordings, local manuscripts, and field notes. Secondary data were obtained from relevant literature on cultural preservation, ethnopedagogy, symbolic meanings in performing arts, and village documents concerning the history of local traditions. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation (Zuchdi & Afifah, 2009), enabling the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the performance, ritual process, local wisdom values, and community strategies for preserving the *Topeng Lengger* Dance.

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through source, methodological, and time triangulation (Nawatri, 2015). Data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation were cross-checked to ensure consistency, followed by member checking with the informants to verify the researcher's interpretations. Data analysis involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with continuous verification throughout the research process. Through these procedures, the study identified cultural patterns, systems of meaning, and preservation strategies associated with the *Topeng Lengger* Dance within the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony, an

integral part of the Kaliputih community's cultural identity and local wisdom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The profile of Kaliputih Village indicates that the community is predominantly agrarian, with elementary-level education as the most common educational attainment, and a social structure characterized by cooperation and social solidarity. Although the number of local artists is relatively limited, they play a significant role in sustaining local traditions, particularly the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony. These demographic and socio-cultural characteristics provide an important context for understanding why the *Topeng Lengger* Dance continues to thrive and is regarded as an essential expression of the community's collective cultural identity. Furthermore, the harmonious coexistence of diverse religious communities has created a syncretic cultural space in which Javanese ritual traditions coexist with Islamic values, enabling traditional practices to be preserved without generating social conflict.

The *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony is held annually during the month of *Suro* and lasts for three consecutive days. The ritual comprises a series of ceremonial activities, including the collection of water from seven natural springs, ancestral pilgrimage, *Slametan*, and the *gunungan* procession. Each stage of the ceremony embodies symbolic representations of the cosmological balance among humans, nature, and God. Within this ritual sequence, the *Topeng Lengger* Dance occupies a central position as a symbolic medium that connects the community with its ancestors while

simultaneously expressing gratitude for nature's abundance. The *Topeng Lengger* Dance performance follows the *Slametan* ritual, signifying that the ceremony has entered the phase of collective thanksgiving.



Image 1. *Grebeg Gunung* Procession

The continued existence of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance within the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony demonstrates that the people of Kaliputih Village continue to regard this traditional performance as a sacred element of the ritual. This is evident from an interview with Kasiyo, who explained that the *Topeng Lengger* Dance is always performed after the *Slametan* procession as an expression of gratitude for the agricultural harvest and has never been omitted because it constitutes an essential component of customary tradition. Similarly, Mbah Atmo stated that the community believes the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony would be incomplete without the *Topeng Lengger* Dance. In addition, Syukur explained that, from the community's perspective, the *Topeng Lengger* Dance serves not only as entertainment but also as a means of *Ngalab Berkah* and as an expression of respect for the ancestors.

These findings indicate that the *Topeng Lengger* Dance is understood as an integral part of the traditional ritual, embodying both

symbolic and spiritual meanings. Nevertheless, this study also reveals a shift in its function, particularly as the dance has increasingly been performed outside its ritual context as public entertainment. Once the sacred ritual has concluded, the *Topeng Lengger* Dance is often presented as entertainment for the local community. Despite this functional shift, community members continue to distinguish between the sacred performance associated with the ritual and the secular entertainment performance. The symbolic meanings embodied in the *Topeng Lengger* Dance within the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony in Kaliputih Village are presented as follows.

The Symbolic Meanings of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance within the *Sedekah Bumi* Ceremony

The first symbolic meaning is reflected in the positioning of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance within the sequence of the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony. Its inclusion in the ritual demonstrates that the dance functions not merely as an aesthetic performance but also as a cultural sign system that mediates relationships among humans, God, the ancestors, and nature. The placement of the dance after the communal prayers and the *Slametan* ritual affirms its role as an integral component of the ceremony, serving as a symbolic expression of gratitude for agricultural abundance and a prayer for safety and well-being. From Barthes' (1981) semiotic perspective, this position represents a sign that develops from denotative meaning to connotative meaning and ultimately evolves into a cultural myth collectively accepted as

part of the community's spiritual identity. Furthermore, the transformation of *Sedekah Bumi* from the traditional *Merti Desa* ritual into a more inclusive village celebration has shifted the function of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance from a purely ritual medium to both a ritual performance and a form of community entertainment, without diminishing its sacred significance. This transformation reflects a process of cultural negotiation through which the tradition remains relevant by generating new meanings. At the same time, the dance serves as a symbolic marker of the transition from a sacred ritual space to a broader social space, reinforcing community solidarity (Barthes, 2013; Danika et al., 2025; Pelawi et al., 2025).

An analysis based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory further demonstrates that the *Topeng Lengger* Dance serves as a medium through which symbolic violence operates by subtly internalizing cultural values within the community. Respect for ancestors, adherence to customary traditions, and the belief in maintaining harmony among humans, nature, and God are accepted as fundamental aspects of community life (Bourdieu, 1995). Simultaneously, the dance serves as a vehicle for transmitting the values of Javanese local wisdom, including *rukun* (social harmony), *tepa selira* (empathy and mutual respect), *andhap asor* (humility), and *eling lan waspada* (self-awareness and vigilance). These values are reflected throughout every stage of the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony, including the collection of water from seven natural springs, ancestral

pilgrimage, the gunungan procession featuring agricultural produce, *Slametan*, the ceremonial procession, and *birat sengkala*, all of which symbolize gratitude, cooperation, and respect for the ancestors (Fauzi & Salikurrahman, 2024; Koentjaraningrat, 1974; Mawikere & Hura, 2020). Therefore, the *Topeng Lengger* Dance functions not only as a form of traditional performing art but also as an important medium for preserving the cultural identity and cultural values of the Javanese community.

The Symbolic Meanings of the Accompanying Songs in the *Topeng Lengger* Dance during the *Sedekah Bumi* Ceremony in Kaliputih Village

The sacred songs (*tembang*) performed as musical accompaniment to the *Topeng Lengger* Dance during the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony, namely “*Babadana*, *Songketan*, *Tolak Balak*, *Lamuk Putih*, and *Ilir-ilir Jangkung Kuning*” serve as symbolic markers of the ritual's sacred structure. Each *tembang* embodies a distinct symbolic function, as follows:

- Babadana* symbolizes reverence for the ancestors and serves as the opening of the spiritual pathway.
- Songketan* represents a sequence of prayers that metaphorically “weaves” petitions for safety, protection, and well-being.
- Tolak Balak* symbolizes the rejection of misfortune and serves as a ritual invocation to ward off adversity.

- Lamuk Putih* symbolizes the purification of the ritual space and the cleansing of spiritual energy.
- Ilir-ilir Jangkung Kuning* symbolizes an invitation to spiritual awakening and heightened self-awareness.

Table 1. *Cakepan Tembang Sedekah Bumi*

Names of the <i>Tembang</i>	<i>Cakepan</i> (Lyrics)	English Translation
<i>Babadana</i>	<i>Babadana pangeran sung tilaksana Allah hu Allah.</i>	Open the way, O Allah, as I carry out Your will. O Allah, Allah Hu Allah.
	<i>Babadana pangeran sung tilaksana Allah hu Allah.</i>	Open the way, O Allah, as I carry out Your will. O Allah, Allah Hu Allah.
	<i>Babadana pangeran sung tilaksana, Pangeran sung tlaksana</i>	Open the way, O Allah, as I carry out Your will. O Allah, Allah Hu Allah.
<i>Songketan</i>	<i>Ibu Dewi Ratih sampeyan temuruna (2x)</i>	Mother Dewi Ratih, please descend. (2x)
	<i>Aja suwe-suwe ndalan, mesaake sing dolanan</i>	Do not delay on your journey, for those who are dancing are waiting.
<i>Tolak Balak</i>	<i>Billahi saka (wetan, kidul, kulon, ngalor, ngisor, ndhuwur) tinolak Balia, yolaelo elo yaelola</i>	I ward off all forms of misfortune coming from the east, south, west, north, above, and below, sending

		them back to their respective directions.
<i>Lamuk Putih</i>	<i>Lamuk putih</i>	White Clouds
	<i>Lamuke ketiga dawa solunabi bismillah</i>	White clouds in the long dry season,
	<i>ya mano bismillah ya mano, Ya manoo'... eeeee.....lo</i>	Solunabi Bismillah.
	<i>Elo yae alok alok hokya</i>	ya mano bismillah ya mano, Ya manoo'...
	<i>Ala kembang mawar</i>	eeeeee.....lo Elo yae alok alok hokya
	<i>Kembang mawar di sebar tengahe latar solunabi bismillah</i>	Oh, Rose Blossom. Rose blossoms are scattered
	<i>Ya mano Bismillah, Ya mano Bismillah, Ya Mano... eee.eee</i>	across the courtyard, Solnabi Bismillah.
		Ya mano Bismillah, Ya mano Bismillah, Ya Mano... eee.eee
<i>Ilir-ilir Jangkung Kuning</i>	<i>Rama rama banda rasukan... (hoya)</i>	Gentlemen, the burdens of life are beginning to accumulate.
	<i>Sekar gadung gadunge semayar mayar</i>	(hoyaa) The gadung flower blooms gracefully,
	<i>Ilir ilir wedang bobok gula pasir ya ndok..hokya (2x)</i>	with delicate and gentle beauty
	<i>Sore...eman sekar gadung mayar mayar</i>	Awaken, my child, like wedang bobok sweetened with granulated

sugar.
(hoya)
In the evening, oh my dear, the gadung flower appears so beautiful.

These *tembang* are performed exclusively within the context of the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony and are never used in entertainment performances, thereby reinforcing the distinction between the sacred and secular dimensions of the *Lengger* tradition. Their lyrics convey not only denotative meanings as expressions of religious devotion but also connotative meanings that symbolize the cosmological relationship among humans, nature, and God. From a semiotic perspective, cultural symbols extend beyond their literal meanings to develop into systems of meaning that are collectively understood and shared within a community (Barthes, 2007). Accordingly, the *tembang* accompanying the *Topeng Lengger* Dance functions as cultural and religious media through which values are transmitted, thereby reinforcing the symbolic meanings embodied in the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony.

The Symbolic Meanings of Dance Movements in the *Topeng Lengger* Dance during the *Sedekah Bumi* Ceremony in Kaliputih Village

Visually, the movement patterns performed in both ritual and entertainment contexts appear similar; however, they differ in terms of

expression, tempo, and their relationship to the sacred tembang. Within the ritual context, the dance movements function as a medium of symbolic communication among humans, the ancestors, nature, and God. Consequently, their meanings are determined not merely by their physical forms but by the cultural sign system and the shared conventions through which they are interpreted (Barthes, 2013).

Findings from observations and interviews with Bisah and Riski indicate that the movements of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance are largely improvisational, while remaining firmly grounded in the traditional choreographic conventions (*pakem*) transmitted from generation to generation. Although the dancers are given the freedom to develop and elaborate their movements, they are required to preserve certain core movements that serve as markers of the dance's sacred character. This condition reflects Pierre Bourdieu's (1995) concept of habitus, whereby embodied cultural practices are performed naturally because they have been deeply internalized within the community's collective consciousness.



Image 2. Performance of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance

The movements of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance performed during the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony are improvisational in nature while remaining firmly grounded in the *pakem* that

have been transmitted across generations, including *Sembahan*, *Lampah Jinjitan*, *Njinjig*, *Ukel Lathi*, *Ngilo Asta*, *Ulap-ulap*, and *Menthang Sampur*. According to Bisah, improvisation is more dominant in entertainment performances. In contrast, in ritual contexts, movements are performed at a slower tempo, with greater composure and deep spiritual expression as a form of ritual discipline. These movements function not only as aesthetic elements but also as symbols of reverence for the ancestors and God (*Andhap asor*), prudence (*Gemi, titi, lan ngati-ati*), social harmony (*rukun*), self-control, introspection, vigilance, and the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. These symbolic meanings indicate that the significance of the movements is determined not merely by their physical form but by the social and ritual contexts in which they are performed (Barthes, 2013). The continuous repetition of these *pakem* movements has enabled these values to become deeply internalized as part of the community's cultural tradition, thereby constituting a mechanism of symbolic violence that is naturally accepted and reproduced within society (Bourdieu, 1995). Furthermore, the distinction between the ritual *Topeng Lengger* Dance and its entertainment counterpart demonstrates that the sacredness of the dance movements lies not in their physical form but in the ritual context, the performers' spiritual engagement, and the system of meanings that accompanies them (Barthes, 2013; Koentjaraningrat, 1974).

The Symbolic Meanings of the Makeup, Costume, and Properties of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance in the *Sedekah Bumi* Ceremony of Kaliputih Village

The symbolic meanings of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance are also reflected in the mask's use as the principal element of the performance. The mask functions not merely as a performance property but also as a symbol of concealed identity and a marker that defines symbolic boundaries within the ritual context. According to Kasiyo, the masked performer, traditionally portrayed by a male dancer, serves as an intermediary and guardian of the ritual's cosmological balance. In contrast, the female *Lengger* dancer represents fertility and the continuity of life.

The concealment of the dancer's face through the mask symbolizes the control and sanctification of fertility, ensuring that its meaning remains within the sacred domain. Accordingly, the mask not only shapes the dance's performative identity but also preserves the boundary between the sacred and the profane in the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony.

From Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective (as cited in Basri & Sari, 2019), the mask functions as a (signifier) that refers to the (signified) concepts of self-restraint, the concealment of identity, and the protection of sacred meanings. The relationship between the signifier and the signified subsequently constructs a cultural myth concerning purity, order, and cosmological balance, which continues to be reproduced through the

performance of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance within the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony.

The symbolic meanings of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance in the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony of Kaliputih Village are understood through the various elements that constitute the performance, including the accompanying *tembang*, choreographic movements, costumes and masks, and the sequence of ritual processions. These elements do not function independently; rather, they are interconnected as a unified system of signs that collectively constructs cultural meaning. From the perspective of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, cultural symbols operate through three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. Accordingly, each element of the performance should be understood not only in terms of its visual form but also in terms of the cultural meanings it constructs, transmits, and collectively interprets within the community that sustains the tradition (Barthes, 1981; Zaimar, 2008).

The analysis of symbolic meanings in this study is based on interpretations developed within the local community through three groups of informants: community members as participants in and practitioners of the ritual, performing artists including dancers, *pengrawit* (traditional gamelan musicians), and *pesinden* (traditional female vocalists) as custodians of artistic knowledge, and traditional leaders who possess a deep understanding of the history, functions, and cultural values of the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony. These diverse perspectives complement one another, ensuring that the symbolic meanings presented in this study are

not solely the researcher's interpretations but also reflect the community's living cultural meanings. The findings were subsequently interpreted using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to explain how symbolic meanings are constructed, and were further strengthened by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence to elucidate how cultural values are internalized through ritual practices.

The findings from observations and interviews indicate that the sacred atmosphere of the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony is established through the *tembang* accompanying the *Topeng Lengger* Dance, including *Babadana*, *Songketan*, *Tolak Balak*, *Lamuk Putih*, and *Ilir-ilir*. According to Mbah Atmo, these *tembang* serve not merely as musical accompaniment to the dance but also as vehicles for prayer, expressions of gratitude, petitions for protection, and acts of reverence toward the ancestors. Consequently, the local community believes that the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony cannot be considered complete without the *Topeng Lengger* Dance and its accompanying ritual *tembang*. For example, in the *Babadana tembang*, the lyric "*Babadana pangeran sung tilaksana Allah hu Allah*" denotes a religious invocation to God. At the connotative level, however, it symbolizes the harmonious relationship among humans, nature, and God. At the level of myth, this *tembang* constructs a collective belief that the community's well-being depends upon maintaining harmony among humans, nature, the ancestors, and the Creator (Barthes, 2013; Fauzan, 2025).

The community's belief in the presence of *dhanyang* and ancestral spirits during the

chanting of these ritual *tembang* further reinforces the spiritual significance of the *Topeng Lengger* Dance. This finding is consistent with Elvandari (2020), who argues that Javanese rituals invariably incorporate cosmological symbols that mediate the relationship between humans and supernatural forces. Likewise, Geertz explains that rituals function as systems of symbols that cultivate spiritual dispositions and reinforce the community's belief in the cosmic order (Widiyanto, 2025). Accordingly, the *tembang* accompanying the *Topeng Lengger* Dance serves not only as a musical element but also as a medium of spiritual communication connecting humans, the ancestors, nature, and God.

Based on the overall analysis, the first symbolic meaning embodied in the *Topeng Lengger* Dance is its spiritual significance. The dance functions as a medium of religious and cosmological communication, connecting humans with God, the ancestors, and nature through the symbolic expressions embodied in the *tembang* and the sequence of rituals that constitute the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony.

The findings of this study reveal that the *Topeng Lengger* Dance performed in the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony of Kaliputih Village embodies three interconnected layers of symbolic meaning: (1) spiritual meaning, (2) socio-ritual meaning, and (3) ecological meaning. These three dimensions are consistent with the characteristics of traditional performing arts, which, within Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, can be interpreted through the levels of denotation, connotation,

and myth. This functional transformation reflects a process of producing new meanings, as Barthes explains, arguing that cultural myths operate by naturalizing socially constructed meanings, so that changes in function are perceived not as deviations but as a natural evolution of a living tradition (Pelawi et al., 2025). Furthermore, Barthes explains that myth empties an object or event of its historical meaning and subsequently refills it with an ideological meaning that appears natural and self-evident (Barthes, 2013).

1. Spiritual Meaning: A Ritual Connecting Humans, Nature, and God

The findings reveal that the *Babadana*, *Songketan*, and *Tolak Balak tembang* constitute essential components of the ritual structure in the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony, demonstrating that the *Topeng Lengger Dance* functions as a medium of spiritual communication. Within Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, this sacred value represents the level of connotation, generating meanings associated with closeness to the ancestors and harmony between humans and nature (Barthes, 2007). In this sense, the *Topeng Lengger Dance* serves as a symbolic language that mediates the relationship between humans and supernatural forces.

These findings are consistent with Elvandari (2020), who argues that Javanese rituals invariably embody collective symbols that affirm the cosmological relationship between living beings and supernatural powers. Explanations provided by traditional

leaders further indicate that the people of Kaliputih believe that the *dhanyang* (guardian spirits) and ancestral spirits are present during the performance of a particular ritual *tembang*. This belief reflects the continuity of a collective cultural myth that regards the ancestors as guardians of the village's harmony. Barthes further argues that cultural symbols operate through layers of meaning that extend beyond their literal significance and function to reproduce a society's value systems (Fauzan, 2025).

The sequence of *tembang*, which is performed exclusively during the ritual ceremony, further supports the finding that Javanese ritual traditions employ musical symbols to shape the community's *rasa* (collective feeling or emotional disposition), thereby uniting participants within a sacred space. This explains why community members believe that without the *Topeng Lengger Dance*, the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony feels incomplete, as its sacred symbolism cannot be fully realized. This finding aligns with Geertz's view (as cited in Widiyanto, 2025) that ritual functions as a system of symbols that reinforces collective emotional dispositions by affirming conceptions of the cosmic order.

The *tembang* accompanying the *Topeng Lengger Dance*, therefore, functions not merely as musical accompaniment but as a symbolic system rich in cultural meanings through which the community expresses its cosmology, social values,

moral principles, and religious beliefs. Viewed through the combined perspectives of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, each *tembang* serves as a medium of nonverbal ritual communication that connects humans, nature, and God while simultaneously internalizing local cultural values within the community's collective consciousness (Khairunnisa & Afandi, 2023).

2. Social Meaning: Collective Identity and Cultural Reproduction

The *Topeng Lengger* Dance is not merely a form of traditional performing art but also a social practice that functions as a marker of collective identity. This is reflected in the participation of people from different age groups and religious backgrounds throughout the entire *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony. From Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, cultural practices such as the *Topeng Lengger* Dance constitute forms of *habitus* that are continuously reproduced through social mechanisms, including *Slametan*, the *kirab* (ritual procession), and *kembul bujana* (communal feast). This finding is consistent with Fitriana (2019), who argues that *habitus* in a cultural context is manifested through habitual practices, aesthetic preferences, and the ways individuals perceive and evaluate works of art.

The dance movements, such as *Sembahan*, *Jinjitan*, and *Ulap-ulap*, are not merely aesthetic expressions but also symbolize humility, vigilance, and

readiness. Likewise, the *surjan*, *jarik*, and mask reinforce traditional Javanese cultural identity. This finding is supported by Widiyanto (2022), who states that the makeup, costumes, and movement vocabulary of traditional Javanese dance function not only as visual elements but also as symbolic media of cultural communication that link humans, ancestors, and the natural world.

3. Ecological Meaning: Environmental Awareness and Stewardship of Nature

The field findings indicate that the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony emphasizes the relationship between humans and nature through symbolic elements such as the seven natural springs, the *gunungan* of agricultural produce, and *tembang* containing natural metaphors, such as *Lamuk Putih* and *Sekar Gadung*. From the perspective of cultural ecology, this ritual represents an ecological consciousness transmitted from one generation to the next.

This finding is consistent with Supriyanto (2018), who argues that local wisdom plays a crucial role in the management of natural resources, as communities rely on traditional knowledge to maintain ecological balance. Through the *Topeng Lengger* Dance, these ecological values are communicated not only through verbal expressions but also through aesthetic performances that can be understood and appreciated by all members of the community.

Furthermore, R. Pamungkas (2008) argues in his study of Javanese agrarian traditions that symbols such as water, flowers, and gunungan constitute ecological narratives that shape and reinforce the community's social behavior. This perspective supports the findings of the present study in Kaliputih Village, particularly that the *Tolak Balak* and *Lamuk Putih tembang* convey messages concerning spiritual purification, the warding off of disasters, and prayers for the protection and sustainability of the natural environment.

CONCLUSION

This study proves that the *Topeng Lengger* Dance in the *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony in Kaliputih is an integral part of the community's ritual system. According to Soedarsono's theory, this dance has a complete performance structure (dancers, movements, accompaniment, makeup/costumes, place, time, audience). However, its function emphasizes the ritual aspect—expressing gratitude, warding off misfortune, and strengthening solidarity—rather than mere entertainment. Its symbolic meaning (analyzed using Barthes' semiotics) represents the harmony between humans, nature, ancestors, and God. Meanwhile, Bourdieu's perspective shows that cultural values like *rukun* (harmony), *tepa slira* (consideration), *andhap asor* (humility), and *eling* (awareness) are subtly internalized through this ritual practice.

Preservation occurs in two ways: ritually, through the maintenance of

conventions, chants, and the role of traditional elders; and culturally, through adaptation, regeneration, art education, and cultural revitalization. This study enriches research on performing arts, semiotics, sociology, and pedagogy, and also serves as a reference for preserving traditional arts based on local wisdom. This research contributes to the fields of performing arts, cultural semiotics, cultural sociology, and ethnopedagogy. The findings show that the *Topeng Lengger* Dance integrates aesthetic, religious, social, ecological, and educational dimensions into the Kaliputih community's life. The results are expected to serve as a reference for preserving traditional arts based on local wisdom, as well as a foundation for further studies on the transformation of traditional dance functions and the integration of local cultural values into arts and cultural education.

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