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Faith Embodied and Cultural Identity: Theological and Performative Dimensions of the Logu Senhor Procession in Sikka

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Abstract

This article explores the theological and performative significance of the Logu Senhor procession among the Catholic community of St. Ignatius Loyola Parish in Sikka, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Rooted in Portuguese missionary heritage and localized through generations, this Holy Week ritual symbolizes spiritual surrender and communal faith through the act of bowing under the cross. Employing a qualitative naturalistic approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The study reveals that the procession integrates historical memory, sacred music, physical endurance, and symbolic gestures to embody a living theology of the cross. Participants interpret the ritual as a transformative act of reconciliation and intercession, rather than a mere tradition. Generational participation, particularly among youth, illustrates its ongoing relevance. In addition, preparatory spiritual practices enhance its sacramental depth. The research highlights the role of embodied devotion in faith transmission and ritual inculturation. Despite socio-economic challenges, the procession continues to foster religious identity and spiritual renewal in a postcolonial setting. This study contributes to ritual and liturgical studies by showing how contextualized Catholic rituals can serve as meaningful sites of theological expression and cultural integration.

Keywords: Embodiment, Catholic Ritual, Logu Senhor, Inculturation, Sikka, Lived theology.

Introduction

Culture is inherently inseparable from human action, as it shapes both individual and collective identity. In the Indonesian context, culture manifests in diverse forms that transcend ethnic boundaries and encompass religious practices that shape society's moral and spiritual structures (Kartono, 2022). In eastern Indonesia, particularly in Sikka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, the community preserves distinctive religious traditions resulting from the integration of local cultural memory and Catholic ecclesiastical devotion (Vargas et al., 2020).

One of the most prominent expressions of this synthesis is the Logu Senhor procession at St. Ignatius Loyola Parish, which forms part of the annual Holy Week observances. This procession not only serves as a means of preserving religious history but also acts as a

theological proclamation expressed through communal ritual (Sharaby, 2020). On Good Friday, the Catholic community in Sikka commemorates the Passion of Christ by walking in silence while bowing under the cross in a prayerful atmosphere, reflecting deep spiritual participation in the Redeemer's suffering. In this context, the procession functions symbolically and performatively. Through embodied movement in a sacred space, the faithful enact the theology of the cross in a tangible manner (Grimes, 2014). Here, ritual becomes not merely a vehicle for remembering an event of faith but also a medium for real religious experience. Bodily gestures function as a language of faith that communicates devotion and surrender to God (Premawardhana, 2020).

The term Logu Senhor itself stems from the Portuguese Catholic heritage, with logu meaning to bow and Senhor referring to the cross. This tradition traces its origin to Don Allesu, a local nobleman who converted after being baptized by Portuguese missionaries in Malacca. He received the cross and the meinho statue as symbols of his new faith, which later became central to this ritual upon his return to Sikka. As an expression of his spiritual commitment, Don Allesu built a chapel to enshrine these sacred objects and initiated the Good Friday celebration now known as Sesta Feira. The procession begins after the liturgy at the old parish church, a relic of Portuguese colonial presence. During the procession, the faithful sing hymns such as Benedickto E. Lovado and Orettio in Portuguese, enhancing the liturgical atmosphere, connecting participants to their faith history, and serving as part of an oral theology transmitted across generations (Nugroho et al., 2022).

At each station or irmida, the penitential hymn O Vos Omnes is sung to express contrition and the longing for divine forgiveness. This hymn carries profound theological meaning and is delivered with emotionally stirring voices. The procession is conducted in a solemn atmosphere illuminated by candlelight and meditative silence, creating a sacred space that reinforces the spiritual depth of the celebration (Waruwu & Rumengan, 2023). Participation is limited to individuals who have formally registered, affirming the seriousness and spiritual commitment of those involved. However, the theological significance of this procession can only be fully appreciated through proper interior disposition. Meaningful participation requires spiritual preparation and deep reflection to prevent the loss of its sacred meaning.

The act of walking while bowing under the cross during the Logu Senhor procession carries rich symbolic meaning. It is not merely a public display but represents a form of

sacramental mortification imitating Christ's path to Calvary. This perspective aligns with Turner's (1969) theory of liminality, where ritual serves as a space for spiritual transition. In this procession, participants move from a profane state toward spiritual unity as a communitas that collectively opens itself to divine grace. Moreover, the cross is not simply perceived as a doctrinal symbol but becomes the focal point of actual and personal devotion. As such, the procession cultivates a profound spirituality and reinforces communal solidarity in an incarnational faith, a faith not confined to the heart but enacted through concrete practice (Coleman, 2002).

For this reason, preserving the Logu Senhor procession holds both cultural and ecclesial significance. It creates a space for the encounter between Catholic faith and local identity rooted in shared history and directs the faithful toward an eschatological renewal of belief (Molo et al., 2023). Furthermore, the cross in this procession is no longer viewed solely as a symbol of suffering but as a sign of solidarity and redemptive love that shapes a resilient faith community.

This study aims to examine the theological and performative meanings of the Logu Senhor procession within the Catholic community of Sikka and to explore how this ritual is maintained as a living cultural heritage amid the social dynamics of the local context.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative method with a naturalistic descriptive approach to explore the phenomenon within its real life context. The research was conducted at St. Ignatius Loyola Parish, Sikka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. Data were collected using purposive sampling by selecting informants from sixteen households, the parish priest, the pastoral council chairperson, the procession coordinator, and eight lay members who actively participate in the Logu Senhor procession. Interviews were used to obtain in-depth information from the informants and were supplemented by document analysis, including parish archives and liturgical texts. The data were analyzed using non-statistical descriptive techniques through stages of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This process aimed to interpret the theological and performative meanings of the procession and to understand how it is preserved as a cultural heritage within the local community.

Research Findings

Results Based on historical documentation and in-depth interviews with traditional leaders and Catholic community leaders in Sikka, it was found that the initial interaction between

the Sikka community and Catholic teachings began with the encounter between King Moang Allesu and the Portuguese in 1597. This pivotal moment culminated in the baptism of Moang Allesu in Malacca in 1607 under the Christian name Don Allesus Ximenes Da Silva. Upon returning to Sikka, he pioneered baptism for his family and subjects, marking the beginning of the relationship between the Sikka Kingdom and the Catholic mission.

This relationship did not end with the initial encounter but developed institutionally through the increasingly organized presence of the Catholic mission. Records from ecclesiastical documents and senior informants reveal that in the 1870s, Dutch Jesuit missionaries expanded their pastoral work in the region. The arrival of Father Le Cocq De Amand Ville SJ in 1881, who was later appointed the first parish priest in 1884, marked a significant milestone in the development of the local Church structure. Since then, collaboration between clergy and traditional leaders laid the foundation for strengthening catechesis and liturgical life in Sikka.

This historical background has shaped the religious dynamics of the community at St. Ignatius Loyola Parish, Sikka. Located in a coastal region, the parish is composed of people with varied socio-economic backgrounds. Most residents work as fishermen, farmers, weavers, and teachers, with key commodities including guava, cocoa, and cashew. This unique economic context influences the pattern of participation in Church activities in terms of time, intensity, and type of contribution.

One of the most prominent and meaningful forms of participation is the Logu Senhor procession, an annual devotion conducted on Good Friday evening. The procession begins at 7:00 p.m. and continues into the early morning hours, during which participants walk in silence, carry candles, sing penitential hymns, and bow beneath the cross. This physical act is interpreted as a sign of surrender and plea for mercy, serving as a means of expressing a faith that is both spiritual and performative.

Furthermore, field findings show that participants do not engage in the procession merely as a formal rite but often carry personal intentions. Interviews revealed that many consider the procession an opportunity to pray for healing, economic restoration, and family harmony. In this context, the cross is no longer seen solely as a symbol of suffering but as a source of hope and interior renewal. The spirituality that emerges from this experience deepens awareness of redemptive love and fosters emotional closeness with God.

The spiritual implications of the procession extend beyond individual experience to the communal dimension. Some informants reported moments of reconciliation and renewed faith during the procession. The combination of physical movement and interior reflection creates a space for emotional engagement, thereby enhancing the congregation's existential connection with the mystery of Christ's Passion.

The findings also emphasize that the continuity of the procession depends on the synergy among various community elements. The Church oversees liturgical structure and pastoral coordination, parishioners are actively involved in the implementation, and the village government supports logistical and security aspects. However, most informants agree that interior readiness is the decisive factor in appreciating the deeper meaning of the procession.

To underline the importance of spiritual readiness, informants compared the experiences of those who prepared themselves spiritually with those who did not. Those who engaged in retreats or personal prayer reported peace, inner calm, and life renewal as the fruits of the procession. In contrast, participants without spiritual preparation often perceived the procession as a routine lacking transformative power. This contrast highlights the importance of faith formation prior to the procession to enable participants to fully internalize its theological dimension.

Regarding youth participation, the findings indicate a relatively high level of involvement with diverse motivations. Some join due to family encouragement, while others are drawn by an interest in spirituality or traditional values. Young informants shared that the procession provided new insights into the Catholic faith and the meaning of Christ's suffering. This shows that the Logu Senhor procession also functions as an educational medium that facilitates intergenerational transmission of faith.

The performative dimension of the procession is also evident in its physical and musical aspects. Informants explained that walking while bowing for hours, though physically demanding, constitutes an act of penance and a discipline of patience. On the other hand, musical elements such as O Vos Omnes enhance the contemplative atmosphere and support the congregation's spiritual engagement throughout the procession. This underscores the integration of body, emotion, and faith within a unified religious experience.

Considering all these dimensions, it can be concluded that the Logu Senhor procession is not merely an annual liturgical ritual. It is a religious event that combines theological meaning

with performative expression, serving as a living cultural heritage. This procession is not only preserved as a tradition among the Catholic community in Sikka but is also continually enacted as a relevant expression of faith in the face of ongoing societal changes.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the Christianization process in Sikka was not merely the result of external Catholic missionary influence but also reflected strong local initiative, particularly through the leadership of King Moang Allesu. Interviews with traditional figures and community leaders revealed that the king's conversion, which subsequently influenced his subjects, served as a pivotal moment in the widespread acceptance of the Catholic faith. This suggests that traditional authority played a crucial role in facilitating Christianization, as the spiritual decisions of a traditional leader were trusted and followed by the community (Lopes, 2023).

Subsequently, the research reveals that the Catholic mission in the nineteenth century gained momentum through the arrival of Dutch Jesuit priests. Historical accounts highlight the work of Father Le Cocq De Ville SJ, who established strong relationships with local authorities and adopted a contextual pastoral approach. Community leaders observed that the success of these priests was not solely based on doctrinal teaching but also on their willingness to understand local social and cultural structures. As Barnes (2009) argued, Christianization, including in the Sikka context, did not occur through confrontation but through integration aligned with social dynamics (Wheatley, 2023).

From the perspective of local culture, the study affirms that the Logu Senhor procession is one of the most significant liturgical inheritances in the Catholic community of Sikka. Traditional leaders and parishioners do not perceive this ritual as a routine event, but as an expression of profound reverence for Christ's suffering. Data suggest that the faithful interpret this procession as both an expression of faith rooted in ecclesiastical tradition and an adaptation of local devotional practices (Ranubaya et al., 2023; Dinis, 2023).

Furthermore, the theological meaning of the Logu Senhor procession is deeply embedded in the bodily actions performed during the ritual, especially the act of bowing under the cross. Traditional leaders explained that bowing is not simply an act of reverence, but symbolizes surrender to God. According to Martasudjita (2021), this gesture may be interpreted as a form of humility and acceptance of Christ's suffering, uniting it with the daily struggles of the people.

Thus, the symbolic act within the procession strengthens the faithful's spiritual understanding of the cross.

Participation in the procession also affects the inner experiences of the faithful. Many informants stated that reflective engagement in the ritual brought about feelings of peace, forgiveness, and spiritual renewal. These findings demonstrate that the procession functions as a space for actual spiritual transformation (Tym, 2022; Slatter, 2023). Several participants noted changes in their attitudes and an increased enthusiasm for service after sincerely and fully participating in the rite.

In response to the spiritual needs of the community, the local Church provides preparatory support prior to the procession. Based on information from parish leaders, the faithful often take part in communal prayers, meditations, or personal spiritual preparation before entering the procession. While these activities are not mandatory, they are considered vital for helping participants engage more deeply with the ritual. Therefore, these preparatory efforts are regarded as an integral part of the overall spiritual experience (Kurniawan et al., 2022).

The study also found a growing trend of youth participation in the procession in recent years. Church leaders noted that many young people have become involved as choir members, psalmists, and active participants. This illustrates a process of internalizing religious values through direct experience in the ritual. Moreover, the presence of youth participants provides hope for the continuity of this devotional tradition in the face of rapid social changes (Bembot & Viktoria, 2024; Balle, 2022).

However, the interviews also revealed that not all participants possess a deep theological understanding of the procession. Some admitted to participating due to family tradition or social encouragement. Despite this, such involvement still provides space for gradual spiritual growth. According to Coleman (2002), this suggests that the procession remains relevant for all segments of the community, both those who are spiritually mature and those still seeking religious meaning.

In addition, the musical dimension and the solemn atmosphere of the procession were found to be instrumental in fostering inner reflection. The hymns and the rhythm of the procession created a sacred atmosphere. Several informants emphasized that this environment enhanced contemplation, deepened their understanding of Christ's suffering, and served as a call to embrace the cross in daily life (Davis & Coningham, 2018).

The Logu Senhor procession, as evidenced by the research findings, is a form of inherited faith that is not merely preserved ritually but also lived existentially. The faithful regard this ritual as a concrete embodiment of Catholic faith integrated with the cultural context of Sikka. Therefore, the procession is not only maintained for its traditional value but also cherished for its enduring spiritual relevance in the lives of Sikka's Catholic community.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the research was limited to the Catholic community in Sikka, which restricts the generalizability of its findings to other communities with different cultural and religious backgrounds. Second, the qualitative approach employed in this study prioritized the depth of understanding over the breadth of data, which means that individual variations in interpreting the procession may not be fully captured. Therefore, future studies are recommended to adopt a quantitative approach to examine the extent to which the Logu Senhor procession influences the faith life of the community in a measurable way, especially in the context of daily religious practices.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the Logu Senhor procession among the Catholic community in Sikka is not only a religious tradition but also a rich expression of theological significance and performative function in shaping spiritual life. The Christianization process, which involved the intersection of traditional authority and Catholic mission, laid the foundation for the reception and preservation of this ritual. The faithful perceive the procession as a participatory embodiment of Christ's suffering and as a contextually meaningful medium for spiritual transformation. Therefore, Logu Senhor represents not merely a cultural heritage but an enduring and dynamic expression of faith relevant to the religious life of Sikka's Catholic community.

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