



The Symbolic Meaning of the *Molelase* (Belly Rubbing) Traditional Procession Among the Tialo Ethnic Group in Tomini

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the implementation and symbolic meanings of the *Molelase* (belly rubbing) tradition among the Tialo ethnic group in Tomini Village, Parigi Moutong Regency. This tradition serves as a ritual of prayer and protection for pregnant women and their fetuses at seven months of gestation to ensure a smooth delivery process. The research utilizes a qualitative descriptive method, with data collected through observation, interviews, note-taking, and documentation. Data analysis follows an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results identify eleven primary symbols in the *Molelase* procession: (1) awar-awar leaves, (2) turmeric leaves, (3) green ti leaves, (4) red ti leaves, (5) kalanchoe leaves, (6) palmyra palm leaf string, (7) black hen, (8) coins, (9) candles and matches, (10) a knife, and (11) white rice. Symbolically, these elements represent pleas for protection against evil spirits, physical strength during childbirth, enlightenment, and the hope for future blessings and prosperity for the child. Ultimately, this ritual acts as a cultural identity that functions to safeguard the future generations of the Tialo people.

KEYWORDS

Meaning;
Molelase;
Symbolic;
Tialo Tribe;
Tradition.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan pelaksanaan dan makna simbolik tradisi *Molelase* (raba perut) pada masyarakat suku Tialo di Desa Tomini, Kabupaten Parigi Moutong. Tradisi ini merupakan ritual doa dan perlindungan bagi ibu hamil serta janin pada usia kehamilan tujuh bulan agar proses persalinan berjalan lancar. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, pencatatan, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan model interaktif yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan terdapat sebelas simbol utama dalam prosesi *Molelase*, yaitu: (1) daun awar-awar, (2) daun kunyit, (3) daun andong hijau, (4) daun andong merah, (5) daun cocor bebek, (6) tali daun lontar, (7) ayam betina hitam, (8) uang koin, (9) lilin dan korek, (10) pisau, serta (11) beras putih. Secara simbolik, perangkat tersebut merepresentasikan permohonan perlindungan dari roh jahat, kekuatan fisik dalam persalinan, pencerahan hidup, serta harapan keberkahan rezeki bagi sang anak di masa depan. Ritual ini ditegaskan sebagai identitas budaya yang berfungsi menjaga keselamatan generasi mendatang suku Tialo.

KATAKUNCI

Makna;
Molelase;
Simbol;
Suku Tialo;
Tradisi.

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1. Introduction

Indonesia is a diverse nation characterized by a multitude of ethnicities, customs, religions, and languages. Each ethnic group in Indonesia possesses its own cultural sphere and consistently strives to develop and preserve that culture, establishing it as a distinctive identity that differentiates one tribe from another.

The Tomini District possesses a "belly rubbing" tradition locally known as *Molelase*. This tradition has remained entirely unchanged and is passed down through generations by the Tialo ethnic community. Despite the changing times, this tradition persists as a symbol of togetherness, respect, and prayer for life's blessings. Within every gentle touch upon the abdomen, there are implicit hopes for the health, safety, and prosperity of future generations.

According to Bauto (2014), culture and humans share a profound relationship. Human creation forms culture, and culture, in turn, influences human beings. In this context, the existence of culture depends on the humans who create it, subsequently enabling them to live within the culture they themselves have established. Culture is an ancestral heritage that must be studied by the community that supports it. Every culture possesses social norms encompassing living habits and customs inherited from ancestors to subsequent generations.

The *Molelase* tradition, or "belly rubbing," is a practice performed by the Tialo ethnic community in Tomini Village, Tomini District, intended to "correct" the fetal position in the womb and to recite prayers for pregnant women who have reached seven months of gestation. This tradition serves not only as a form of gratitude but also as a means of protection for the mother and the fetus she carries. *Molelase* is performed in the morning because, according to the Tialo people, there are strong reasons related to customary values and beliefs. In the belief system of the Tialo community in Tomini Village, performing this tradition in the afternoon or evening is considered *pamali* or taboo (prohibition/restriction), as it is believed to bring misfortune.

The implementation of the *Molelase* tradition takes place in the morning at 08:00 AM. The procession is held at the residence of the traditional healer (*dukun*) who performs the rite. There are several specific requirements that must be prepared for this tradition. The *Molelase* tradition is only performed during the pregnancy of the first child and is not conducted for the second, third, or subsequent pregnancies. This is because the Tialo tribe believes that the first child acts as a "pathfinder" for their younger siblings and as a surrogate for the parents, particularly when the parents are not at home. Their role carries a significant responsibility as a successor and guardian of family honor. This tradition can also be interpreted as a collective custom or activity shared within a community group. Traditions performed continuously within a society function as a

community identity. Furthermore, the term "oral tradition" refers to traditions disseminated verbally from one generation to the next.

According to Peirce (in Hoed, 2017), semiotics is the relationship between signs, objects, and meanings. A sign represents the object designated by the interpreter. In the life of a sign, it depends on the relationship between the object and the representation. Therefore, Charles Sanders Peirce distinguishes several types of signs that the researcher will use to examine the message signs within the *tingkeban* tradition, including: 1) Icons, which are signs that possess a similarity so that users can easily distinguish them; in an icon, the relationship between the representation and its object is a simultaneous natural form; 2) Indexes, which are signs based on the relationship between representation and object grounded in contiguity or cause-and-effect, or signs that refer directly to reality; 3) Symbols, which are signs where the relationship between representation and object is based on social convention or community agreement.

This study aims to determine the implementation of the *Molelase* traditional procession among the Tialo ethnic community in Tomini Village, Tomini District, and to understand the symbolic meanings contained within the *Molelase* tradition. Theoretically, this research is expected to broaden insights and literature regarding local cultural traditions in Indonesia, specifically the *Molelase* tradition of the Tialo tribe. Practically, this research is expected to serve as a reference for the people of Tomini Village and the younger generation to understand and preserve the *Molelase* tradition, as well as a guide for other parties wishing to conduct further research on this tradition.

This research is relevant to the study conducted by Dewi, et al. (2024) titled "Symbolic Meaning of Offerings in the *Tingkeban* Thanksgiving in Karanganom Village, Trenggalek Regency". That study explains that at seven months, people commemorate pregnancy with a thanksgiving (*selamatan*); there are offerings in the *tingkeban* thanksgiving that possess implicit meanings. By exploring the symbols within the offerings, they can be understood symbolically. Additionally, there is research by Nurfadilah, et al. (2022) titled "Symbolic Meaning of the Seven-Month *Appassili* in Pasuleang II, Takalar Regency". That study aims to describe the meanings of icons, indexes, and symbols. The indexical meanings contained in the seven-month *appassili* procession lie in the customary stages, namely: (1) *paddupang*, (2) bathing, (3) wearing clean clothes, (4) reciting the *appassili* intention and prayers for goodness, (5) massaging the abdomen, and (6) pinching the *uring butta*. Research was also conducted by Boanergis, et al. (2019) titled "The *Mitoni* Tradition as a Socio-Cultural Glue for Javanese Society". From the aforementioned previous studies, this research shares similarities in investigating seven-month pregnancy traditions within culture using qualitative research methods. What distinguishes this study lies in the name of the

tradition, the research location, the customary meanings and symbols, and the incantations used in the implementation of the tradition.

1.1. Semiotics Study

According to Charles Sanders Peirce (as cited in Hoed, 2017, p. 19), semiotics is defined as the foundational relationship between signs, objects, and meanings. Within this framework, a sign functions to represent an object as perceived by the interpreter, whereby its existence relies heavily on the connection between the object and its representation. Based on this relationship, Peirce distinguishes three primary categories of signs utilized in this study to examine the cultural messages of the tradition: icons, which represent signs through physical resemblance or shared natural forms; indexes, which are established through a direct causal link or contiguity with reality; and symbols, which function based on social conventions and collective agreements within a specific community.

The *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI) defines a concept as a plan, design, or an idea and notion. The term "symbol" originates from the Greek word *symbolos*, which can be interpreted as a sign or characteristic that informs someone about something. Consequently, signs, paintings, words, badges, or any marks associated with an object can be considered symbols or emblems.

According to Moleong (2014), this study employs a qualitative research method. As the data obtained consists of words and images rather than numerical figures, this qualitative approach aims to present findings derived from the research process and the objectives provided by informants. The data is sourced from photographs, field notes, interviews, and documents, ensuring comprehensive data regarding the symbolic meanings within the *Molelase* tradition is presented descriptively through oral and written sources to provide an objective overview.

1.2. The Concept of Symbols

Herusatoto (2022) asserts that humans are cultural beings whose cultures are imbued with color and symbolism, manifesting in ways of thinking, understanding, or acting based on these symbols. Historically, human culture has always possessed symbols influenced by action, language, science, and religious life. Similarly, Purwadi (2022) states that as cultural beings, humans are inherently linked to symbols. Culture itself is often referred to as a system of symbols, referring to an individual's symbolic system and its relationship with others. Within this context, society is defined by those who engage in collective symbolic activities during specific events, such as traditional ceremonies. In relation to cultural symbols, humans perform various types of actions: (1)

Practical Actions, referred to as ordinary actions that do not produce specific outcomes or displays, primarily concerning interpersonal communication such as notifying, pointing out, or introducing something; (2) Pragmatic Actions, utilized in human communication to enhance social relationships, where individuals employ symbolic imagery to distinguish between actions related to symbols; (3) Effective Actions, which require comprehensive and effective communication skills that are time-bound yet unconditional in nature; and (4) Symbolic Actions, which are long-term and commonly used in interpersonal communication. Due to the reciprocal relationships occurring during symbolic actions, they provide significant benefits to humans and are frequently associated with natural phenomena.

According to Mujiati (2020), the term "tradition" is derived from the Latin *traditio*, meaning "handed down" or "habit". Etymologically, it refers to customs established within a society that are deeply linked to indigenous rituals or religious practices, while terminologically, it signifies the continuity between the past and the present. Tradition encompasses practices inherited from ancestors that remain functional in contemporary life, serving as the cultural foundation for groups sharing the same heritage and beliefs. In the context of the Tialo ethnic community, the *Molelase* tradition represents more than a habitual ritual; it is a complex system of signs that requires a semiotic approach to fully comprehend its underlying messages. By utilizing Peirce's semiotic framework, this research deciphers the icons, indexes, and symbols embedded within the *Molelase* procession, revealing how the Tialo people communicate their hopes for health, safety, and prosperity through physical media.

This study holds importance for the Tialo ethnic group as it documents and preserves a unique cultural identity that is passed down orally through generations. For the wider scope of cultural studies, this research contributes significantly to the semiotic map of the Tomini Bay area, a region rich in diverse indigenous traditions that are often under-documented. By investigating the *Molelase* tradition, this study provides a scholarly reference that elevates local Tialo wisdom into the broader discourse of Indonesian linguistics and cultural semiotics. Furthermore, it serves as a vital record for the younger generation in Tomini, ensuring that the symbolic meanings—which act as a "cultural glue" for the community—are understood and maintained amidst the pressures of modernization.

2. Method

According to Moleong (2014), this study employs a qualitative research design. This approach is selected because the data obtained consists of words and images rather than numerical figures, aiming to convey findings derived from the lived experiences and perspectives of the informants. To fulfill the research objectives—namely, to investigate

the implementation of the *Molelase* tradition and decipher its symbolic meanings—the researcher gathered comprehensive data through photographs, field notes, interviews, and documentary reviews. This ensures that the symbolic significance of the Tialo people's "belly rubbing" tradition is captured through both oral and written sources, providing an objective and descriptive overview of the cultural practice.

To systematically address the research questions, the data is analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (as cited in Sugiyono, 2013, p. 334). This model involves a continuous and cyclical process conducted until the data reaches a point of saturation. The analysis proceeds through three integral stages:

1. **Data Reduction:** The researcher distills the vast information gathered from observations and interviews with the Tialo community. By focusing on topics relevant to the *Molelase* procession and its eleven primary symbols, the data is simplified and abstracted. This critical thinking process allows the researcher to identify themes and patterns, transforming raw interview transcripts into structured information that directly addresses the procedural and symbolic aspects of the ritual.
2. **Data Display:** Following reduction, the data is organized and presented primarily through narrative text, supplemented by descriptions of the relationships between various symbolic categories. This stage is crucial for detailing the step-by-step implementation of the ritual—such as timeframe and the specific role of the traditional healer—thereby making the complex cultural system more accessible and easier to interpret.
3. **Conclusion Drawing:** The final stage involves synthesizing the analyzed data to generate new insights and findings. Through this process, the researcher provides a clear explanation of previously ambiguous symbolic meanings, such as the protective nature of specific leaves or the spiritual significance of the black hen. Ultimately, this methodological framework allows the study to conclude with a comprehensive understanding of how the *Molelase* tradition functions as both a spiritual safeguard and a cultural identity for the Tialo people in Tomini Village.

3. Results and Discussion

The *Molelase* (belly rubbing) tradition is one of the existing traditions within the Tialo tribe, Tomini Village, Tomini District. This tradition was established by them as a form of protection for the mother and the fetus in the womb, with the hope that the delivery process will be granted smoothness. Furthermore, within this tradition, a traditional healer (*dukun adat*) performs an adjustment on the pregnant woman's abdomen while reciting specific prayers. This abdominal adjustment is believed to assist the position

of the fetus so that it is appropriate for childbirth and to maintain the balance of the pregnant woman's bodily energy. The recited prayers serve as a symbolic plea to the Creator so that the mother and baby are kept away from danger and are granted health and safety until birth. This tradition is conducted with full respect and has become an important part of the cultural beliefs of the Tialo ethnic community.



Figure 1. The Molelase Ritual

Based on the research results regarding the Molelase traditional procession by the Tialo people in Tomini Village, Tomini District, the researcher will explain the symbolic meanings contained within this Molelase procession. The symbolic meanings contained in the Molelase procession include, among others:

1. *Awar-awar* leaves (*Longe lombonuge*), where the meaning of these leaves is protection; in the Molelase procession, they are considered to protect the mother and fetus from evil spirits. These leaves are also often associated with balance in life, and moreover, they serve as a repellent against misfortune (*Penolak Bala*). Many people believe that these leaves possess specific protective properties, therefore they are used during the belly rubbing process to avoid dangers that could disturb the pregnant woman and the unborn child. Overall, this tradition is intended to pray that the pregnancy runs smoothly, the mother remains healthy, and the baby is born safely during delivery.
2. Turmeric leaves (*Longe unite*), which signify a symbol of protection from evil spirits, while turmeric itself is also used as a medicinal plant with various health benefits. This procession is carried out when the pregnancy enters its seventh month, and the meaning of the leaves in this procession as protection is linked to prayers for the safeguarding of the mother and baby.
3. Green *andong* leaves (*Longe tabalang meido*), which serve as a symbol of protection; the green color on the *andong* leaves symbolizes fertility, resilience,

and protection from evil spirits or negative energy. In the belly rubbing tradition, green andong leaves are considered symbols of good hope, safety, and prosperity for the pregnant woman and the baby she carries. This tradition is performed to check the condition of the pregnancy and predict the birth, where the green color on the leaves is also often associated with life and growth, meaning the pregnancy runs smoothly and the baby is delivered safely.

4. Red *andong* leaves (*Longe tabalang megange*), representing a symbol of protection, where the red color on the leaves symbolizes courage, strength, and the rejection of misfortune. It is believed that the *longe tabalang* or red *andong* leaves act as a symbol of protection, possessing a red color that symbolizes courage, strength, and warding off misfortune, which is believed to protect against disturbances from evil spirits that disrupt the mother and her baby. These leaves also symbolize the hope that the baby will have a good, healthy, and safe life, ensuring the mother is healthy, the baby is born safely, and the delivery runs smoothly, serving as a plea to Almighty God to be granted protection from all dangers.
5. Cocor bebek leaves (*Longe siranindi*), which symbolize protection for the pregnant woman while also possessing resilience and fertility in growth. These leaves have a strong meaning, particularly related to protection, resilience, and fertility, and in this tradition, they are considered as protection and a repellent against misfortune because they offer protection from evil spirits. When used in the Belly Rubbing, it can be trusted as a prayer so the mother and baby are protected from danger; furthermore, the leaves easily propagate and withstand extreme weather due to their strength and resilience, symbolizing the belief that the unborn baby will grow strong and healthy to face life's challenges. The cocor bebek leaves are also considered healing and health plants due to their medicinal properties that help heal wounds and relieve inflammation.
6. String made from palmyra palm leaves (*longe lelange*), which serves as a strengthener and protection during childbirth; this palmyra palm leaf is made into a string to be tied around the pregnant woman's abdomen. In the Molelase procession by the Tialo tribe, they believe that the binding made from these leaves holds a symbolic meaning as a strengthener in the labor process.
7. Knife (*Pisoe*), which signifies a symbol of protection from evil spirits for the pregnant woman. A knife often functions not only as a tool but also as a symbol of protection; in the Molelase procession, the knife functions to cut the string made from palmyra palm leaves, symbolizing courage in facing life's challenges.

8. Matches and Candles, where the meaning of the matches is to light the candle in this procession, acting as symbols of illumination and enlightenment. Used to light the candle, matches are considered capable of expelling darkness and bringing luck, associated with the light that illuminates darkness and symbolizing hope, guidance, or prayers that the unborn child will live a bright and blessed life. The candle is a symbol of light that illuminates life's path, interpreted as a prayer for the unborn baby's life to be full of blessings, wisdom, and luck. The blessing and purity of the candle's flame are associated with cleansing and protecting against evil spirits; thus, lighting the candle is a way to request protection for the mother and her baby, serving as a symbol of prayer and supplication for a smooth pregnancy and childbirth.
9. Coins, which symbolize the hope that the baby will live sufficiently, without lack, and always be blessed with smooth sustenance. Coins are often considered symbols of luck in this tradition, and when used in the Belly Rubbing, they act as a prayer that the baby will eventually possess luck and prosperity. The unborn baby might be like a valuable coin for the family, showing the hope that they will develop into an individual beneficial to society. Coins have two sides, which can be used to symbolize balance in life: rich and poor, joy and sorrow, and good and bad; one of the prayers that might be offered during this ritual is for the baby to live a balanced and wise life.
10. Black hen (*Manue beine meitome*), which is entrusted as a symbol to protect the pregnant mother and baby from the disturbance of evil spirits. Most people believe that the black hen possesses spiritual power capable of protecting the pregnant mother and her baby from mystical disturbances, evil spirits, or negative energy, as tradition often associates the color black with magical strength and protection. In the Belly Rubbing, the black hen is used to pray for the safety of the mother and baby during pregnancy and childbirth, and also as a symbol of strength and luck. In the Molelase procession by the Tialo tribe, the hen is interpreted as life and spirit in seeking food or sustenance.
11. White rice (*Bogase memease*), signifying a symbol of safety for the mother and baby in the future delivery process. White rice indicates purity and cleanliness, considered to bring blessings, and is a symbol of life and hope. Besides being used as a staple food, white rice is also considered a symbol of survival and life; in this procession, the white rice scattered over the pregnant woman's body parts symbolizes abundant sustenance and blessings, as well as the hope that the baby will be born safely, healthy, and have a good life in the future, bringing luck and sustenance to the family.

The implementation of the *Molelase* traditional procession is a meticulously structured ritual that begins with the deliberate procurement of materials by the pregnant woman. By personally gathering the necessary botanical and ceremonial items and presenting them to the *dukun adat* (traditional healer), the mother initiates a sacred interaction that signals her readiness for the spiritual safeguarding of her child. The core of the ceremony commences with the placement of five specific types of leaves across the mother's abdomen. These botanical elements—the *awar-awar* leaves (*longe lombonuge*), turmeric leaves (*longe unite*), green ti leaves (*longe tabalang meido*), and red ti leaves (*longe tabalang megange*)—are not merely decorative but serve as the primary symbolic layer of protection against negative metaphysical influences. Following this initial application, the ritual moves into a phase of metaphorical binding and release. The traditional healer binds the mother's midsection with a specialized cord crafted from palmyra palm leaves, known as *longe lelange*, which represents the physical and spiritual fortification of the womb.



Figure 2. Interview with Tribal Chief of Tomini Village

This binding is subsequently severed with a knife while the healer recites sacred prayers. This act of cutting the cord is deeply symbolic, representing the removal of obstacles and the clearing of the path for a smooth transition during labor. The prayers recited during this moment act as a verbal seal, invoking divine protection and ensuring that the mother's energy remains balanced as she approaches the final stages of her pregnancy. The ritual then transitions into a process of sanctification using animal and monetary mediums. The mother is rubbed on various parts of her body with the comb of a black hen, an animal believed to possess the spiritual power to absorb and neutralize negative energies. This rubbing is performed in conjunction with the use of a coin, which serves as a symbolic bridge to future luck and prosperity. This specific interaction is vital to the Tialo belief system, as it is thought to firmly anchor the mother's safety and the baby's health. The procession culminates in the scattering of white rice, a final act of purification that symbolizes abundant blessings and the continuity of life. Ultimately, every step of the *Molelase* tradition is designed to function as an integrated

cultural safeguard, ensuring that the mother and child are holistically protected from danger until the moment of birth.

3.1.1. The Implementation of Molelase Tradition

3.1.2. Discussion

This study employs the semiotic theory of Peirce, who argues that pragmatic semiotics serves as a vital framework for investigating culture. From a semiotic perspective, culture operates as a complex system of interconnected signs utilized by a community to construct and understand meaning. Within the Tialo ethnic community in Tomini Village, the Molelase (belly rubbing) tradition functions as a profound cultural sign system. Conducted during the seventh month of pregnancy to adjust the fetal position and offer prayers, this ritual transcends a mere expression of gratitude; it operates as a macro-symbol of protection for both the mother and the unborn child.

When analyzed through Peirce's theoretical lens, even the timing of the ritual acts as a crucial semiotic sign. The Tialo people strictly perform Molelase in the morning based on deeply rooted customary values, considering afternoon or evening performances as *pamali* (taboo) that invite misfortune. Semiotically, the morning functions as an index of light, purity, and divine blessing, directly pointing to a positive existential outcome. Conversely, the afternoon and night symbolize the end of the day and are indexically associated with the emergence of dark, negative energy. Therefore, by executing the Molelase custom exclusively in the morning, the Tialo community engages in a symbolic action that actively demonstrates their reverence for natural harmony, ancestral wisdom, and inherited traditions.

To contextualize these theoretical findings, this study draws comparisons with previous literature, notably the research conducted by Dewi, et al. (2024) titled "Symbolic Meaning of Offerings in the Tingkeban Thanksgiving in Karanganom Village, Trenggalek Regency". Their study illustrates how a community commemorates the seventh month of pregnancy through a thanksgiving ritual (*selamatan*), demonstrating that physical offerings contain implicit meanings that can be understood symbolically. The present study shares fundamental similarities with Dewi et al.'s research, as both investigate the cultural phenomenon of seven-month prenatal traditions and utilize qualitative research methodologies. However, this research distinguishes itself significantly through its specific semiotic subject. While previous studies focus on Javanese rituals, this study uniquely decodes the Molelase tradition of the Tialo tribe. The primary differences lie in the nomenclature of the tradition, the geographical setting, the distinct material symbols and incantations utilized during the procession, and the varying data collection techniques, thereby providing a novel semiotic

contribution to the understanding of indigenous cultures in the Tomini District.

Ritual Continuity, Kinship, and the Challenge of Modernization

The findings regarding the Molelase tradition can be theoretically situated within the broader discourse of Indonesian life-cycle rituals and communal solidarity. While the Molelase ritual functions primarily as a pre-natal safeguard to ensure the physical and spiritual health of the mother and fetus during the seventh month of pregnancy, it shares a foundational sociological purpose with other indigenous traditions across the archipelago: fortifying social cohesion and expressing profound gratitude to the Divine. This communal function is similarly observed in post-natal cultural practices. For instance, Malik (2019) notes that the Batak Mandailing community conducts the *Mangupa Lahiron Daganak* tradition specifically to welcome the birth of a child. Similarly, rural Javanese communities practice the *Jagongan Bayi* tradition, a post-natal gathering that spans from the baby's birth until the seventh day (Widyaningrum & Tantor, 2017). Just as Molelase unites the family and the traditional healer for spiritual preparation and protection, *Jagongan Bayi* prioritizes kinship and empathy by gathering relatives and neighbors to provide a lively atmosphere, comfort the newly delivered mother, and celebrate the birth without the societal pressure of offering material gifts (Widyaningrum & Tantor, 2017). These communal gatherings—often accompanied by interactive games such as cards, dominoes, and chess—reinforce village relationships and demonstrate how indigenous rituals serve as crucial socio-emotional support systems during the critical phases of human reproduction (Widyaningrum & Tantor, 2017).

Furthermore, comparing the unwavering persistence of the Molelase ritual with other communal gratitude rituals highlights the complex impact of modernization on cultural preservation. Research by Tumarjio and Birsyada (2022) on the *Merti Dusun* tradition—etymologically derived from the Javanese word *memetri*, which translates to maintaining, preserving, and cleaning the village to ensure abundant future harvests—reveals a significant cultural shift. They found that the *Merti Dusun* procession is currently experiencing a degradation in both its procedural quantity and philosophical meaning (Tumarjio & Birsyada, 2022). This decline is triggered by waning community enthusiasm, economic constraints, inadequate cultural internalization, logistical challenges in committee organization, and the overarching emergence of modern, rationalist mindsets among the villagers (Tumarjio & Birsyada, 2022).

This creates a compelling sociological contrast with the Molelase tradition among the Tialo people, which is reported to have remained entirely unchanged despite the passage of time. The resilience of the Molelase ritual can be theoretically attributed to

its direct connection to human survival and existential health—specifically, the immediate physical and spiritual protection of the mother and child against life-threatening risks. This personal and health-oriented urgency naturally sustains a higher level of community adherence compared to agricultural or spatial rituals like Merti Dusun, which are increasingly vulnerable to modern economic rationalization and shifting social priorities (Tumarjio & Birsyada, 2022). Ultimately, recognizing these dynamics provides a deeper academic understanding of why certain traditions face cultural erosion, while others, such as Molelase, continue to thrive as indispensable pillars of indigenous identity and socio-medical belief systems.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research findings regarding the implementation of the procession and the symbolic meanings within the *Molelase* tradition among the Tialo ethnic community in Tomini Village, Tomini District (a semiotic study), several conclusions can be drawn.

First, regarding the implementation of the *Molelase* traditional procession, the pregnant woman prepares the necessary materials and equipment, which are then handed over to the traditional healer (*dukun adat*) to be utilized during the ritual. The initial procession involves placing five types of leaves on the abdomen, which include awar-awar leaves (*longe lombonuge*), turmeric leaves (*longe unite*), green *andong* leaves (*longe tabalang meido*), and red *andong* leaves (*longe tabalang megange*). The traditional healer then binds the abdomen with a string made from palmyra palm leaves (*longe lelange*). Subsequently, the healer cuts the string with a knife while reciting prayers for the pregnant woman. Following this, the pregnant woman receives a rubbing using the comb of a black hen combined with a coin on several parts of her body; this act is intended to safeguard the mother's safety. The final procession involves the scattering of white rice. Ultimately, this entire *Molelase* tradition aims to protect the pregnant mother and the baby during the future labor process.

Second, the symbolic meanings contained within the *Molelase* traditional procession are deeply rooted in spiritual safeguarding. The elements functioning as protection for the pregnant mother and the fetus against evil spirits encompass the awar-awar leaves, turmeric leaves, *andong* leaves, *cocor bebek* leaves, the knife, and the black hen. Furthermore, the string made from palmyra palm leaves serves as a strengthener and protector during childbirth. The matches and candles symbolize illumination and enlightenment. The coin acts as a bringer of sustenance derived from luck. Lastly, the white rice signifies purity and cleanliness, which are considered to bring the ultimate blessings of life.

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