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# REINTERPRETING RELIGIOUS MEANING IN THE BALIA TRADITION OF THE KAILI COMMUNITY: AN ANALYSIS THROUGH PAUL RICOEUR'S HERMENEUTICS

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**abstrak**

*Perjumpaan antara ajaran Islam dan tradisi Balia masyarakat Kaili memperlihatkan perubahan simbol keagamaan yang tidak selalu diikuti oleh penggantian makna tradisional secara menyeluruh. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis reinterpretasi makna religius dalam tradisi Balia melalui perspektif hermeneutika Paul Ricoeur. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan sintesis interpretatif-kritis terhadap hasil penelitian empiris terdahulu. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga temuan utama. Pertama, perubahan simbolik terlihat melalui penggunaan bacaan Al-Qur'an, doa Islam, dan praktik bersuci dalam ritual Balia, sementara sejumlah unsur kepercayaan tradisional tetap dipertahankan. Kedua, reinterpretasi teologis tercermin dalam penjelasan yang menempatkan Allah sebagai sumber kesembuhan dan keselamatan, meskipun praktik yang melibatkan mediasi spiritual masih ditemukan dalam dokumentasi ritual. Ketiga, keberlanjutan Balia memperlihatkan bahwa penafsiran keagamaan berkaitan dengan otoritas adat, legitimasi agama, dan identitas budaya masyarakat Kaili. Analisis hermeneutika Ricoeur menunjukkan bahwa perubahan bahasa dan simbol ritual tidak selalu identik dengan perubahan keseluruhan makna religius. Penelitian ini menawarkan kerangka reinterpretasi melalui tiga ranah yang saling berkaitan, yaitu simbolik, interpretatif-teologis, dan sosial-kultural. Kerangka tersebut menjelaskan bahwa pemaknaan religius dalam Balia berlangsung melalui penyesuaian, negosiasi, dan kesinambungan tradisi, bukan proses perubahan keagamaan yang seragam.*

**Kata kunci:** *Tradisi Balia; Reinterpretasi Makna Religius; Hermeneutika Paul Ricoeur; Masyarakat Kaili; Identitas Budaya.*

## Abstract

*The encounter between Islamic teachings and the Balia tradition of the Kaili community reveals changes in religious symbols without necessarily replacing traditional meanings entirely. This study aims to analyze the reinterpretation of religious meaning in the Balia tradition through Paul Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics. Employing a qualitative library research approach, the study critically synthesizes previously published empirical findings. The findings reveal three major patterns. First, symbolic changes are reflected in the incorporation of Qur'anic recitations, Islamic prayers, and purification practices into Balia rituals, while certain elements of traditional beliefs persist. Second, theological reinterpretation is evident in explanations identifying Allah as the ultimate source of healing and protection, although practices involving spiritual mediation remain documented. Third, the continuity of Balia demonstrates that religious interpretation is closely related to customary authority, religious legitimacy, and Kaili cultural identity. Ricoeur's hermeneutical framework indicates that changes in ritual language and religious symbols do not necessarily entail a comprehensive transformation of religious meaning. This study proposes an analytical framework consisting of three interconnected dimensions: symbolic, interpretive-theological, and sociocultural. These dimensions demonstrate that religious meaning within the Balia tradition is negotiated and reinterpreted through adaptation and cultural continuity rather than through a uniform process of religious transformation.*

**Keywords:** *Balia Tradition; Reinterpretation of Religious Meaning; Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics; Kaili Community; Cultural Identity.*

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between religion and local culture is a significant issue in the development of Islamic thought in Indonesia, particularly when religious teachings encounter systems of belief, symbols, and ritual practices that have been transmitted across generations. Such encounters do not invariably result in the elimination of older traditions or the wholesale acceptance of religious teachings. Instead, they may give rise to processes of adaptation, negotiation, and reinterpretation of religious meanings. Among the Kaili people of Central Sulawesi, this phenomenon can be observed in Balia, a

traditional healing ritual historically associated with beliefs in spiritual powers and ancestral spirits. Saprillah's research demonstrates that Balia continues to be maintained amid the development of modern medicine and the influence of Islamic teachings. Its persistence indicates that Balia functions not merely as a healing practice but also as a space in which the community preserves its cultural identity while responding to changes in religious orientation.[1]

Empirical evidence documented in previous studies shows that the relationship between Balia and Islamic teachings has developed through changes in symbols, recitations, and ritual practices. Darlis Dawing found that the Kaili community's engagement with the Qur'an in the Balia tradition takes place at three stages: before, during, and after the ritual. The recitation of the basmalah, Surah al-Fātiḥah, and several short surahs in prayers for protection demonstrates the incorporation of Qur'anic recitations into the community's religious practices. That study also relates the use of the Qur'an to the adaptation and assimilation of Islamic values within local traditions.[2] These findings indicate changes in the religious language and symbols accompanying the performance of Balia. Nevertheless, the presence of Qur'anic recitations in a ritual does not by itself explain how participants understand or interpret religious meanings. The use of scripture as ritual recitation must be distinguished from interpretations of its content and from the meanings attributed to religious actions in communal life.

The complexity of these meanings is more apparent in the study by Gazali, Ulinsa, Yunidar, and Indra on the Balia Tampilangi ritual of the Kaili community. Their research documents prayers and incantations containing representations of religious, philosophical, and ethical values.

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[1] Saprillah, "'Balia – Perayu Amuk Dewata': Pengobatan Tradisional di Antara Modernitas dan Agama di Masyarakat Kaili," *ETNOSIA: Jurnal Etnografi Indonesia* 2, no. 1 (2017): 40–54, https://doi.org/10.31947/etnosia.v2i1.2960.

[2] Darlis Dawing, "Living Qur'an di Tanah Kaili (Analisis Interaksi Suku Kaili terhadap Alquran dalam Tradisi Balia di Kota Palu, Sulawesi Tengah)," *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Tafsir di Nusantara* 3, no. 1 (2017): 61–87, https://doi.org/10.32459/nun.v3i1.15.

Some expressions identify God as the source of healing and protection and the one to whom prayers are addressed. Yet the same ritual structure also contains expressions and actions associated with communication with spirits or supernatural beings.[3] The coexistence of these orientations reveals that Islamic language about God and traditional symbolic systems can appear within a single cultural practice. This phenomenon raises philosophical questions concerning the relationship between meanings articulated in prayers, the beliefs invoked to explain rituals, and inherited structures of action. The central issue is not simply whether Islamic elements have entered the Balia tradition, but how their presence changes, preserves, or negotiates the religious meanings previously attached to the ritual.

Further evidence is provided by Ilma Melinea Putri, Syamzan Syukur, and Rahmawati in their study of the Balia tradition in Taipa, North Palu District, Palu City. They show that the presence of Islam has influenced the performance of Balia through purification practices, deliberation, and the strengthening of religious social relationships.[4] An earlier, more detailed study of Balia in the same area also documents a religious leader's explanation that requests for healing are directed to Allah, while certain ritual elements associated with traditional beliefs remain present. Thus, the acceptance of Islamic values cannot be understood as the replacement of an entire traditional system of meaning. Some ritual elements may change, whereas others are retained because of their connections to cultural heritage, experiences of healing, and the community's collective identity. This situation demonstrates that changes in religious forms and changes in religious meaning are related, but not necessarily identical, phenomena.

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[3] Gazali, Ulinsa, Yunidar, and Indra, "Representasi Nilai dalam Ritual Balia Tampilangi Etnik Kaili: Kajian Hermeneutik," *Sawerigading* 29, no. 1 (2023): 67–83, https://doi.org/10.26499/sawer.v29i1.1172.

[4] Ilma Melinea Putri, Syamzan Syukur, and Rahmawati, "Implementasi Nilai-Nilai Islam dalam Tradisi Balia pada Masyarakat Etnik Kaili di Kelurahan Taipa," *Rihlah: Jurnal Sejarah dan Kebudayaan* 12, no. 2 (2024): 99–111, https://doi.org/10.24252/rihlah.v12i02.47602.

Changes in the Balia tradition are also associated with broader social developments among the Kaili people. Hatta Fakhrurrozi, Saepudin Mashuri, Ilham Dwitama Haeba, and Ulfun Khoirotun reveal that social changes following the 2018 Palu disaster contributed to the transformation of Balia into a practice known as Sakaya. This transformation illustrates how the form of a ritual can be adapted to social circumstances and community needs without completely eliminating its underlying spiritual elements.[5] This finding is important because it shows that changes in tradition are influenced not only by religious teachings but also by social experiences, community needs, and shifting forms of cultural acceptance. Changes in Balia must therefore be analyzed by distinguishing transformations in ritual form, shifts in social function, and reinterpretations of religious meaning, rather than treating them as processes that invariably produce the same outcomes.

Recent scholarship has continued to examine the relationship between Islamic teachings and Kaili culture. In their 2025 study of the transformation of Kaili rituals following Islamization, Surni Kadir and colleagues show that various local rituals have been reinterpreted to accommodate Islamic values without entirely losing their social functions and cultural identities. Their research primarily discusses other Kaili rituals; consequently, its relevance to Balia lies in providing a comparative context for the negotiation of religion and tradition, not direct evidence of changes in Balia itself.[6] Ahmad Syarif and colleagues subsequently examined the Petambuli tradition of the Kaili people in Sigi Regency in 2026 and identified connections between cultural practices and religious values, including sincerity, gratitude, respect for others, and

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[5] Hatta Fakhrurrozi, Saepudin Mashuri, Ilham Dwitama Haeba, and Ulfun Khoirotun, "Sakaya: Balia Tradition Transformation in the Kaili Tribe Community of Palu, Central Sulawesi," *El Harakah: Jurnal Budaya Islam* 24, no. 2 (2022): 175–192, https://doi.org/10.18860/eh.v24i2.17238.

[6] Surni Kadir, Hamdi Rudji, Normawati, Kamal, and Mukhlis Lubis, "Transformation of Kaili Tribe Rituals Post-Islamization: Integrating Islamic Values into Local Traditions," *Ilmu Ushuluddin* 12, no. 1 (2025): 1–22, https://doi.org/10.15408/iu.v12i1.46781.

social ethics associated with Qur'anic teachings.[7] Both studies suggest that contemporary research on Kaili culture increasingly attends to the relationship between cultural practices and religious values. Nevertheless, accounts of the presence or compatibility of Islamic values within local traditions can be advanced through philosophical analysis of how religious meanings are formed, shifted, and negotiated.

Previous scholarship has made significant contributions to understanding the relationship between Islam and the Balia tradition. Dawing focuses on forms of engagement with the Qur'an and the motivations underlying its use at different ritual stages. Gazali and colleagues employ Richard E. Palmer's hermeneutical approach to identify representations of religious, philosophical, and ethical values in Balia Tampilangi incantations. Putri and colleagues examine the implementation of Islamic values in Balia practices, while Fakhrurrozi and colleagues explain transformations in ritual form and function within a changing social context. Kadir and colleagues broaden the discussion of Islam and Kaili culture through their examination of post-Islamization ritual transformations. Taken together, these studies have devoted substantial attention to acculturation, value representation, and ritual transformation. However, the literature reviewed here still lacks a focused philosophical examination of the reinterpretation of religious meaning, particularly one that explains the relationship between changes in religious language, the persistence of traditional symbols, and the negotiation of meanings concerning God within Balia rituals.

The research gap concerns the insufficient explanation of how religious meaning can change when a tradition retains certain symbolic forms while acquiring different religious interpretations. Within Balia, the use of Islamic prayers and statements identifying Allah as the source of healing may indicate theological reinterpretation. Yet such

[7] Ahmad Syarif, Aisyah Arsyad, Rahmi Damis, Firdaus, and Alamsyah Halim, "Religiosity in the Petambuli Tradition among the Kaili People of Sigi Regency: A Qur'anic Review," *Kasyful Murad: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 3, no. 2 (2026): 101–119,

explanations must be examined critically alongside the persistence of spiritual symbols, the positions of customary leaders, and the reasons communities maintain the ritual. The research problem therefore cannot be resolved merely by classifying Balia elements as either local tradition or elements compatible with Islamic teaching. What is needed is an analysis capable of clarifying the relationships between language, symbols, actions, and religious interpretations without assuming that changes in ritual form always entail comprehensive changes in belief. This gap provides the rationale for a philosophical hermeneutical approach that treats the Balia tradition as a cultural practice open to multiple possible interpretations.

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics offers a relevant conceptual framework for addressing this problem. For Ricoeur, interpretation does not end with recovering the original intention behind an expression; it also considers structures of meaning and the new possibilities of understanding they disclose. Paolo Furia explains that the relationship between explanation and understanding in Ricoeur's thought allows interpretation to bring the analysis of explicable structures into dialogue with an understanding of human experience.[8] In the context of religious rituals, Marianne Moyaert shows that Ricoeur's hermeneutics has the potential to illuminate ritual actions through an analogy with texts, provided that their performative dimensions are not reduced entirely to written language.[9] This perspective allows Balia prayers, incantations, and symbols to be examined as meaningful expressions through the relationship between ritual structures, cultural contexts, and participants' interpretations. The concept of *distanciation* enables the researcher to establish analytical distance from any single account of a ritual; the *explanation–understanding* dialectic relates expressions to actions; and the *world of the text* helps clarify the possible horizons of understanding

[8] Paolo Furia, "Understanding and Explanation: Paul Ricœur and Human Geography," *Continental Philosophy Review* 55, no. 2 (2022): 193–214, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-021-09554-9.

[9] Marianne Moyaert, "Ricoeur and the Wager of Interreligious Ritual Participation," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 78, no. 3 (2017): 173–199, https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2017.1312491.

disclosed by religious language. These concepts are not used to equate rituals completely with texts, but to develop a critical interpretation of meanings documented in previous research.

The relevance of Ricoeur's approach is further supported by developments in contemporary philosophy of religion. In a 2026 study of symbols, hermeneutics, and religious language in the thought of Ricoeur and Fazlur Rahman, Krisna S. Yogiswari highlights the importance of understanding religious language as symbolic discourse that cannot be reduced to literal expressions alone.[10] Meanwhile, a text by Ricoeur published in *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies* in 2024 explores the relationship between discourse, the hermeneutics of the self, and the philosophy of human action.[11] These works reinforce the philosophical premise that religious symbols and expressions can be analyzed through the relationships between language, understanding, and action. However, in a library-based study of Balia, these relationships must be treated as interpretive possibilities derived from documents, rather than as direct evidence of changes in individuals' consciousness. Within this limitation, Ricoeur's hermeneutics is employed to reinterpret religious meaning in Balia on the basis of published evidence.

In response to this gap, the present study distinguishes itself by placing the reinterpretation of religious meaning at the center of inquiry, rather than merely describing Islamic elements within Balia or assessing ritual conformity to religious norms. It also differs from earlier hermeneutical research that primarily identifies representations of values in incantations: the present analysis examines relationships among changes in religious expressions, interpretations of the source of

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[10] Krisna S. Yogiswari, "Dialectics of Symbol and Hermeneutics: A Comparative Study of Paul Ricoeur and Fazlurrahman's Thought on Religious Language," *Mahiyah: Journal of Islamic Thought and Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2026): 43–63, https://doi.org/10.24239/r06sxh83.

[11] Paul Ricœur, "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self," *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies* 15, no. 2 (2024): 193–206, https://doi.org/10.5195/errs.2024.679.

assistance, and the continuity of cultural symbols. Methodologically, this study draws on library research and reinterprets published empirical findings through Ricoeur's hermeneutical framework. Accordingly, it does not claim to produce new field data, but offers a philosophical synthesis of existing evidence. This position also limits its conclusions to documented meanings and precludes claims concerning psychological changes or transformations in the consciousness of the entire Kaili population.

The novelty of this research lies in developing a hermeneutical interpretation that distinguishes three dimensions of the reinterpretation of religious meaning in Balia: the symbolic, the interpretive-theological, and the sociocultural. The symbolic dimension concerns religious language, recitations, and ritual implements; the interpretive-theological dimension encompasses interpretations of the positions of God and ancestral spirits and the source of healing; and the sociocultural dimension concerns the continuity of tradition, customary authority, and the formation of religious legitimacy within the community. These three dimensions are not stages of consciousness through which ritual participants must pass, but analytical categories proposed for understanding the relationship between change and continuity in meaning. This framework seeks to demonstrate that the incorporation of Islamic symbols and language into Balia may produce adaptation, negotiation, and interpretive tensions without necessarily entailing the complete elimination of earlier traditions. Its contribution is thus a philosophical explanation of the complexity of religious meaning arising from encounters among tawhid, ritual practices, and Kaili cultural identity.

On this basis, the study aims to analyze forms of reinterpretation of religious meaning in the Kaili community's Balia tradition as documented in previous research, and to explain the relationships between ritual symbols, interpretations of God, and cultural identity through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical perspective. Specifically, it asks how changes and continuities in religious meaning are reflected in the use of prayers, incantations, and Balia ritual practices, and how Ricoeur's

hermeneutics can illuminate the relationships among religious language, symbolic action, and community interpretations of the tradition. The research is expected to contribute to Islamic philosophy and the study of religious hermeneutics, especially by clarifying the dynamics through which Islamic values are interpreted within local cultures. It also aims to enrich studies of religion and culture by offering a reading that considers not only the presence of religious symbols but also the complexity of meanings emerging from interactions between Islamic teachings and Kaili traditions.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative *library research* approach employing *critical interpretive synthesis*. The approach is used to reanalyze findings from previous studies of the Kaili community's Balia tradition, particularly those concerning religious language, changes in ritual symbols, conceptions of God, and the continuity of cultural identity. Hannah Snyder explains that literature-based research can integrate and evaluate existing knowledge and develop conceptual understandings of scholarly problems through critical analysis.[12] Similarly, Dixon-Woods and colleagues emphasize that *critical interpretive synthesis* seeks not merely to summarize findings but also to develop conceptual constructions through critical examination of the relationships, differences, and tensions among sources.[13] This approach was chosen because the purpose of the study is not to produce new ethnographic data, but to construct a philosophical explanation of the reinterpretation of religious meaning in Balia on the basis of published empirical evidence.

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[12] Hannah Snyder, "Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines," *Journal of Business Research* 104 (2019): 333–339, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039.

[13] Mary Dixon-Woods et al., "Conducting a Critical Interpretive Synthesis of the Literature on Access to Healthcare by Vulnerable Groups," *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 6 (2006): 35, https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-6-35.

The study draws on scholarly documents, including journal articles, qualitative research findings, and philosophical works relevant to its subject. Its principal empirical sources include Saprillah's research on Balia in relation to religion and modernity; Darlis Dawing's examination of the Kaili community's engagement with the Qur'an in Balia rituals; the work of Gazali and colleagues on value representation in Balia Tampilangi; and the research by Ilma Melinea Putri and colleagues on the implementation of Islamic values in the Balia tradition in Taipa.[14] Fakhrurrozi and colleagues' study of the transformation of Balia into Sakaya provides comparative evidence for understanding changes in ritual functions and forms within Kaili society.[15] Paul Ricoeur's works, particularly *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* and *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, serve as the principal theoretical foundations. Sources were selected purposively according to their relevance to Balia, the clarity of their empirical documentation, their traceability, and their contribution to questions about reinterpretations of religious meaning. Studies of other Kaili rituals are used for comparative context while maintaining distinctions among their respective characteristics and locations.

Data were collected through documentary study of scholarly publications meeting these criteria. The documentation process included identifying sources, examining the contexts of the original research, undertaking critical readings, and classifying information on prayers, incantations, ritual symbols, customary and religious leaders, and explanations of the sources of protection and healing. Glenn A. Bowen notes that document analysis enables systematic examination of written materials in order to obtain meanings, understanding, and knowledge

[14] Saprillah, "'Balia – Perayu Amuk Dewata': Pengobatan Tradisional di Antara Modernitas dan Agama di Masyarakat Kaili," *ETNOSIA: Jurnal Etnografi Indonesia* 2, no. 1 (2017): 40–54, https://doi.org/10.31947/etnosia.v2i1.2960

[15] Hatta Fakhrurrozi, Saepudin Mashuri, Ilham Dwitama Haeba, and Ulfun Khoirotun, "Sakaya: Balia Tradition Transformation in the Kaili Tribe Community of Palu, Central Sulawesi," *El Harakah: Jurnal Budaya Islam* 24, no. 2 (2022): 175–192, https://doi.org/10.18860/eh.v24i2.17238.

relevant to the research problem.[16] In this study, the units of analysis comprise quoted prayers and incantations, descriptions of ritual practices, published informant statements, and interpretations advanced by earlier researchers. The use of secondary qualitative data requires distinctions among informants' statements, original researchers' interpretations, and the interpretations developed in the present study. As Ruggiano and Perry explain, secondary qualitative analysis must attend to the original context of data collection and maintain transparency concerning the relationship between the primary research and the new analysis.[17]

Data analysis proceeded in two interrelated stages. The first stage involved thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning across the sources. Data were organized into three principal dimensions: the symbolic dimension, encompassing recitations, incantations, and ritual practices; the interpretive-theological dimension, addressing understandings of God, ancestral spirits, and the source of healing; and the sociocultural dimension, covering continuity of tradition, customary authority, and religious legitimacy. These served as preliminary analytical categories, remaining open to modification in response to the documentary evidence. Braun and Clarke explain that thematic analysis is an interpretive process requiring coherence among research questions, conceptual frameworks, and theme development.[18] Accordingly, the organization of the data was not intended to generate a fixed classification, but to identify relationships and tensions between changes in religious symbols and interpretations of the tradition.

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[16] Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40, https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027.

[17] Nicole Ruggiano and Tam E. Perry, "Conducting Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data: Should We, Can We, and How?," *Qualitative Social Work* 18, no. 1 (2019): 81–97, https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325017700701.

[18] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "One Size Fits All? What Counts as Quality Practice in (Reflexive) Thematic Analysis?," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2021): 328–352, https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238.

The second stage employed Paul Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics to interpret the relationships among ritual language, religious symbols, and the cultural context of Kaili society. The analysis drew on *distanciation*, *explanation–understanding*, and the *world of the text*. *Distanciation* was used to create critical distance from initial explanations of a ritual, so that meaning would not be determined solely by customary practice or participants' normative statements. *Explanation–understanding* brought analysis of the structures of prayers, incantations, and symbolic actions into dialogue with the social and religious contexts in which these practices occur. The *world of the text* was employed to examine potential horizons of meaning disclosed through the language of divinity and religious symbols in Balia. Ricoeur explains that interpretation enables the meaning of an expression to be understood beyond its original situation of use, through the relationships between explanation, understanding, and the possible world opened by a text.[19] In applying this approach, prayers and incantations were treated as expressions amenable to textual analysis, whereas rituals were understood as meaningful actions that cannot be entirely reduced to linguistic structures. This qualification is consistent with Marianne Moyaert's emphasis on the performative dimensions of ritual when applying Ricoeur's hermeneutics.[20]

The trustworthiness of the interpretations was supported by comparing findings across documents, examining the contexts of the original studies, and tracing evidence that both supported and challenged the emerging analysis. Each analytical conclusion was linked to identifiable documentary sources, maintaining a clear distinction between secondary empirical evidence and the researcher's philosophical constructions. Nowell and colleagues underscore the importance of transparent analytical procedures, documenting interpretive decisions,

[19] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976)

[20] Marianne Moyaert, "Ricoeur and the Wager of Interreligious Ritual Participation," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 78, no. 3 (2017): 173–199, https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2017.1312491

and establishing traceable connections between data and conclusions in qualitative research.[21] In accordance with these principles, the study seeks to produce a philosophical synthesis of three dimensions of religious reinterpretation: symbolic, interpretive-theological, and sociocultural. Its conclusions are limited to variations in meaning documented in earlier studies and do not purport to demonstrate changes in individual consciousness, causal relationships, or generalizations about the entire Kaili community. Its contribution therefore lies in a hermeneutical explanation of how religious symbols and understandings of God are negotiated through the continuity of Balia traditions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Changes in Symbols and Religious Meaning in the Balia Tradition

The Balia tradition is a cultural practice among the Kaili people that reveals a complex relationship among traditional belief systems, experiences of healing, and developments in Islamic religious life. Historically, Balia has been associated with beliefs in spiritual powers thought to be related to illness, protection, and the balance of human life. In his ethnographic study, Saprillah describes Balia as a traditional healing ritual that continues to be practiced despite the development of modern healthcare systems and religious criticism of certain ritual elements. His findings indicate that Balia persists because of the community's belief in its healing function, the transmission of tradition, and its position as part of Kaili cultural identity.[22] These findings show that Balia cannot be understood simply as a healing practice; it is also a social space in which the community preserves and reinterprets relationships among human beings, the spiritual realm, and religious beliefs.

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[21] Lorelli S. Nowell, Jill M. Norris, Deborah E. White, and Nancy J. Moules, "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847.

[22] Saprillah, "'Balia – Perayu Amuk Dewata': Pengobatan Tradisional di Antara Modernitas dan Agama di Masyarakat Kaili," *ETNOSIA: Jurnal Etnografi Indonesia* 2, no. 1 (2017): 40–54

Changes in Balia are evident in the incorporation of Islamic elements into ritual language and procedures. Darlis Dawing found that the Kaili community engages with the Qur'an at three stages of the Balia ritual: before, during, and after its performance. At particular stages, Islamic recitations such as the basmalah and Surah al-Fātiḥah form part of the proceedings, while Qur'anic surahs and prayers for protection are recited at the ritual's conclusion. His study also demonstrates that the use of a physical Qur'an is not always associated with interpreting the content of its verses; in some practices, it is connected to belief in the sacredness of the holy book as a means of obtaining guidance.[23] These different forms of use suggest that the Qur'an may serve several functions within Balia, including ritual recitation, a symbol of sacredness, and a means of seeking divine protection. The presence of scripture within a cultural practice therefore does not necessarily signify a uniform form of religious understanding.

The use of Qur'anic recitations in Balia constitutes an important symbolic change, reflecting the adaptation of ritual language to the community's religious environment. Symbolic change, however, cannot be equated directly with the transformation of an entire belief structure. The recitation of al-Fātiḥah, for example, may be understood as part of Islamic prayer traditions, yet previous research has not fully documented how each Balia participant understands the surah's content. The evidence thus more strongly supports the conclusion that Qur'anic recitations have been incorporated into cultural practices than the claim that all participants have acquired a reflective understanding of their theological meaning. Distinguishing the use of a text from the interpretation of its meaning is essential if religious reinterpretation is not to be inferred solely from the presence of religious symbols within a ritual.

The complex relationship between Islamic language and traditional beliefs is apparent in Gazali, Ulinsa, Yunidar, and Indra's study of Balia Tampilangi. They document incantations containing

[23] Darlis Dawing, "Living Qur'an di Tanah Kaili (Analisis Interaksi Suku Kaili terhadap Alquran dalam Tradisi Balia di Kota Palu, Sulawesi Tengah), 77–83

appeals for Allah's forgiveness and requests for protection and healing. One expression reads, *"Tupu nompaka belo dua, Tupu nompaka salama, Tupu tampa merapi doa,"* which the researchers translate as an affirmation that God grants healing and protection and is the one to whom prayers are addressed.[24] This expression shows that language referring to God has become part of the structure of religious communication in Balia Tampilangi. Yet the same study also documents the *Nolili* and *No Vadi* stages, which involve communication with ancestral spirits or supernatural beings. The coexistence of these elements shows that assertions of God's power may appear alongside symbols derived from traditional cosmology.

The encounter between these two forms of meaning indicates that religious change within Balia does not take place through a complete replacement of earlier structures of meaning. On the one hand, expressions identifying God as the source of assistance reveal the use of language consistent with Islamic teachings. On the other, communication with spirits demonstrates the persistence of inherited spiritual elements. Nevertheless, these practices should not automatically be taken as proof that all Balia participants hold contradictory beliefs. Differences in meaning may arise from the diversity of participants, the functions of particular ritual stages, and the positions occupied by symbols in cultural experience. The relationship between language about God and traditional symbols is therefore more appropriately understood as an interpretive problem requiring attention to the contexts in which they are used.

Similar findings appear in Ilma Melinea Putri's research on the Balia tradition in Taipa, North Palu District. Her study explains that Islamic influences have prompted several adjustments to ritual performance, including purification practices, the use of ritual implements, and the orientation of supplications. A religious leader interviewed in the study explained that prayers within Balia are directed

[24] Gazali, Ulinsa, Yunidar, and Indra, "Representasi Nilai dalam Ritual Balia Tampilangi Etnik Kaili: Kajian Hermeneutik," , 72-75

to Allah as the source of healing. However, the descriptions of the proceedings in the same research still include stages associated with summoning spirits and spiritual mediation.[25] This difference between religious explanations and ritual arrangements indicates that changes in meaning do not necessarily proceed uniformly. Statements identifying Allah as the source of assistance may reflect a theological reinterpretation of Balia's purpose, while the persistence of traditional spiritual elements suggests that parts of its symbolic structure remain intact.

Putri, Syamzan Syukur, and Rahmawati further demonstrate that Islamic values in Balia in Taipa are expressed through deliberation, purification, and social relationships associated with ukhuwah Islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood).[26] These findings broaden the understanding of change within Balia beyond recitations and spiritual beliefs to include social behavior accompanying ritual performance. Nevertheless, deliberation and solidarity cannot automatically be identified as direct consequences of changing theological interpretations, because such values are also embedded in the community's social system. It is therefore necessary to distinguish social practices that acquire Islamic religious explanations from practices that were already part of an earlier tradition. This distinction helps demonstrate how the reinterpretation of religious meaning can proceed through the attribution of new interpretive foundations to cultural practices already familiar to the community.

Changes in Balia also occur within the context of broader social transformation. Fakhrurrozi and colleagues show that changes in life in Palu following the 2018 disaster were associated with the transformation of Balia into Sakaya. The latter form reflects adaptations to community

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[25] Ilma Melinea Putri, *Tradisi Balia pada Masyarakat Etnik Kaili Kelurahan Taipa Kecamatan Palu Utara (Perspektif Budaya Islam)* (master's thesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, 2024), 68–80, https://repositori.uin-alauddin.ac.id/28523/.

[26] Ilma Melinea Putri, Syamzan Syukur, and Rahmawati, "Implementasi Nilai-Nilai Islam dalam Tradisi Balia pada Masyarakat Etnik Kaili di Kelurahan Taipa," *Rihlah: Jurnal Sejarah dan Kebudayaan* 12, no. 2 (2024): 99–111, https://doi.org/10.24252/rihlah.v12i02.47602.

needs and altered social circumstances, while retaining certain elements linked to the ritual's spiritual dimension.[27] These findings indicate that changes in cultural forms are not necessarily driven by theological considerations. Ritual transformations may relate to changes in the social environment, healing needs, and the means by which communities preserve the functions of their traditions. Adjustments to Balia practices must therefore be distinguished from reinterpretations of religious meaning so that social change is not automatically regarded as proof of changed beliefs.

A comparison of studies by Saprillah, Dawing, Gazali and colleagues, and Putri and colleagues identifies three major tendencies in the documented changes to Balia. First, ritual symbols have been adapted through the use of Qur'anic recitations, Islamic prayers, and purification practices. Second, the sources of assistance and healing have been reinterpreted through explanations positioning Allah as the supreme authority. Third, traditional symbols and practices have persisted, indicating that the adoption of Islamic language does not necessarily entail the elimination of earlier cultural elements. These tendencies should not be treated as stages of change applying to all Kaili people, but rather as empirical patterns identified in studies involving different sites, informants, and ritual characteristics. The principal finding of this subsection is therefore that change within Balia emerges from the relationship among symbolic adaptation, theological reinterpretation, and cultural continuity. This relationship provides the basis for examining the reinterpretation of religious meaning through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics.

### 2. Reinterpretation of Religious Meaning from the Perspective of Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics

[27] Hatta Fakhrurrozi, Saepudin Mashuri, Ilham Dwitama Haeba, and Ulfun Khoirotun, "Sakaya: Balia Tradition Transformation in the Kaili Tribe Community of Palu, Central Sulawesi," *El Harakah: Jurnal Budaya Islam* 24, no. 2 (2022): 175–192, https://doi.org/10.18860/eh.v24i2.17238.

Changes in religious symbols and language within Balia raise philosophical questions about how a cultural practice can acquire new meanings without entirely losing its inherited structures of significance. This question can be examined through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, which understands interpretation as a process of disclosing meaning through the relationships among language, texts, and human experience. In *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Ricoeur explains that the meaning of discourse is not wholly confined to the event in which it was uttered but can be understood anew in different interpretive contexts.[28] In the study of Balia, this insight provides a basis for understanding prayers, incantations, and religious explanations not only in terms of their linguistic form or participants' stated intentions but also through the relationships among expressed meanings, structures of action, and the surrounding cultural context.

The first relevant interpretive tool is *distanciation*: the establishment of distance in understanding texts and meaningful actions. In Ricoeur's hermeneutics, distancing permits an expression to be analyzed beyond its original situation and the speaker's subjective intention, without neglecting the context that makes it meaningful.[29] Within the study of Balia, this concept can be applied by distinguishing three elements: the language used during a ritual, participants' explanations of its purpose, and documented sequences of action. This distinction matters because statements concerning God's power do not necessarily have a straightforward relationship with the entirety of ritual practice. Researchers must examine whether religious expressions function as prayers, theological explanations, justifications for ritual practices, or several of these simultaneously.

The application of *distanciation* can be illustrated by a customary leader's explanation in Saprillah's research. The leader described Balia

[28] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

[29] Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

as an effort to seek healing from Allah, while placing supernatural beings within the category of His creations.[30] This statement indicates a religious interpretation of a tradition historically associated with spiritual powers. However, critical distancing prevents it from being treated immediately as a comprehensive account of the beliefs of the Kaili community. It is more appropriately read as one participant's articulation of meaning, seeking to position Balia practices within an Islamic understanding of God. *Distanciation* therefore helps differentiate participants' own interpretations from analytical conclusions supported by the entire body of ritual documentation.

The second interpretive tool is the relationship between *explanation* and *understanding*: the dialectic between explaining structures of meaning and *understanding* experiences and contexts. Ricoeur rejects an absolute separation between *explanation* and *understanding* because they are complementary aspects of interpretation. Paolo Furia explains that Ricoeur's thought allows the objective analysis of phenomena to be brought into dialogue with an *understanding* of human experiences and lifeworlds.[31] Applied to Balia, this relationship enables researchers to describe the structures of prayers, incantations, and ritual sequences and then connect them with beliefs about illness, healing, spiritual authority, and the persistence of customary practices. An analysis of linguistic structures that disregards cultural contexts risks becoming excessively textual. Conversely, accepting participants' *explanation*s without analyzing ritual actions risks overlooking tensions arising in actual practice.

The Balia Tampilangi incantations documented by Gazali and colleagues provide an example of this dialectic. At the level of *explanation*, expressions positioning God as the source of healing and protection can be analyzed according to their propositional structures,

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[30] Saprillah, "'Balia – Perayu Amuk Dewata'," 50–52.

[31] Paolo Furia, "Understanding and Explanation: Paul Ricœur and Human Geography," *Continental Philosophy Review* 55 (2022): 193–214, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-021-09554-9.

the objects of supplication, and their theological orientation. Yet *understanding* these expressions requires consideration of other ritual elements that still involve communication with ancestral spirits.[32] At the level of *understanding*, both elements are interpreted in the context of Balia as an inherited healing practice connected to the community's spiritual beliefs. This reading shows that language referring to God does not invariably replace every function of traditional symbols; it may instead coexist within a ritual structure containing multiple layers of meaning. Reinterpretation therefore involves not only changes in expression but also the ways those expressions are situated within relationships between religion and culture.

The relationship between explanation and understanding can also be applied to Putri's findings concerning the *no gane* stage. One religious leader explained that supplications in the ritual are directed to Allah. Nevertheless, the description of the same ritual stage also includes incantations and elements of spiritual mediation. This difference should not immediately be regarded either as a contradiction that has already been resolved or as evidence of inconsistency in individual beliefs. Hermeneutically, the researcher must distinguish informants' normative explanations from the symbolic structures inherited through practice. Reinterpretation can thus be understood as a process in which a tradition acquires a new theological explanation while some actions continue to perform functions grounded in earlier systems of meaning. The data suggest interpretive tension, but are insufficient to establish how every participant experiences or understands that tension internally.

The third interpretive tool is the *world of the text*, Ricoeur's proposition that texts can disclose a world of meaning that opens new possibilities for human understanding. In this view, a text not only communicates information but also presents horizons of understanding

[32] Gazali et al., "Representasi Nilai dalam Ritual Balia Tampilangi Etnik Kaili," 72–75.

that can be interpreted within different life contexts.[33] Its relevance to Balia is evident in the use of Qur'anic recitations and references to God during rituals. The recitation of Surah al-Fātiḥah, for example, introduces a text that affirms devotion to Allah and the seeking of His assistance, as expressed in Qur'an 1:5. Conceptually, this content helps illuminate a possible theological horizon opened by Qur'anic recitation within the ritual. However, analysis of the verse's meaning must be distinguished from empirical evidence concerning how Balia participants understand it. Dawing documents the use of al-Fātiḥah in Balia, but his study does not provide sufficient grounds to conclude that every participant interprets the verse in the same way.

Within the framework of the *world of the text*, the encounter between Qur'anic recitations and traditional symbols opens the possibility of interaction between two horizons of meaning. The first is associated with Islamic teachings about God, which identify Allah as the source of assistance and protection. The second is associated with the symbolic system of Balia, historically involving beliefs in spiritual powers and ancestral spirits. Their encounter need not be interpreted as a completed transition from one belief to another. Rather, it can be read as an interpretive space in which religious meanings are negotiated through language, action, and social practices. This interpretation is consistent with the openness of Ricoeur's hermeneutics to diverse meanings when texts or actions are read within different interpretive contexts.

Nevertheless, the application of textual hermeneutics to rituals requires caution. Marianne Moyaert warns that religious practices cannot be reduced entirely to textual structures because rituals also possess performative, material, and experiential dimensions formed through embodied participation and collective action.[34] This insight is important

[33] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, especially the discussion of *distanciation*, *explanation–understanding*, and *appropriation*.

[34] Marianne Moyaert, "Ricoeur and the Wager of Interreligious Ritual Participation," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 78, no. 3 (2017): 173–199, https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2017.1312491.

for Balia because ritual meaning resides not only in prayers and incantations but also in movements, ritual objects, relationships among participants, and the social experiences accompanying performance. Ricoeur's approach is therefore used here to analyze expressions and meaningful actions as documented in previous studies, not to suggest that every aspect of Balia can be understood merely by reading transcriptions of prayers. The limitations of secondary data also mean that the present study cannot replace insights derived from direct participation in ritual practices.

Applying these three hermeneutical tools shows that the reinterpretation of religious meaning in Balia can be explained through the relationship among critical distancing from ritual explanations, analysis of linguistic and practical structures, and exploration of the possible horizons of meaning disclosed by religious symbols. The interpretation suggests that Islamic language concerning God does not necessarily eliminate traditional meanings, but may provide new explanations for rituals that continue to be maintained. Ricoeur's contribution to this study, therefore, is not to prove a transformation in the consciousness of the entire Kaili community, but to clarify how one tradition can remain open to multiple interpretations through the interplay of texts, actions, and cultural contexts. The reinterpretation of religious meaning is best understood as an open process that does not necessarily produce uniform understanding.

**Religious Meaning and the Traditions of the Kaili Community**

The relationship between religious meaning and Kaili traditions demonstrates that the persistence of a cultural practice does not necessarily signify an absence of change in how it is understood. According to previous studies, Balia continues to be maintained by some members of the community even as its recitations, implements, and orientations of supplication have been modified. This situation indicates that a tradition can preserve symbolic continuity while remaining open

to different interpretations. In ritual studies, Catherine Bell emphasizes the importance of understanding ritual practices as actions related to the formation and organization of social relationships, not merely as expressions of preexisting beliefs.[35] This perspective helps explain why changes in the meaning of Balia must be understood in relation to ritual actions, religious authority, and the social life of the Kaili community.

The religious dimension of Balia is especially apparent in explanations that identify God as the source of assistance and healing. In studies by Saprillah and Putri, several community figures interpret Allah as the one to whom ritual supplications are addressed. These explanations can be read as attempts to situate the Balia tradition within an Islamic theological horizon. Nevertheless, the use of the language of tawhid does not automatically mean that every ritual element has acquired a meaning entirely consistent with that explanation. The continued presence of stages associated with ancestral spirits reveals a more complex symbolic structure. The relationship between tawhid and tradition therefore cannot adequately be understood as a simple process of acceptance or rejection. Rather, it concerns how conceptions of God are employed to reinterpret inherited practices.

Religious interpretations of Balia are also connected to customary and religious authorities. In traditional practice, the *sando* occupies an important position as the ritual leader and the person knowledgeable about the sequences of actions and symbols involved. Meanwhile, Dawing's and Saprillah's studies show that religious leaders participate in reciting prayers for protection at certain ritual stages.[36] The encounter between these two forms of authority demonstrates that religious meaning is shaped not only by individuals' relationships with scripture but also through social relationships among those empowered to interpret and conduct rituals. The involvement of religious leaders may introduce or reinforce Islamic explanations of some Balia elements,

[35] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[36] Dawing, "Living Qur'an di Tanah Kaili," 80–83;

but it does not automatically displace the customary leader's position. Thus, the reinterpretation of religious meaning is also connected to negotiations over authority in determining which explanations a community considers acceptable.

In the context of social life, Balia's persistence is inseparable from solidarity and the transmission of cultural heritage. Putri and colleagues show that Balia in Taipa incorporates deliberative practices and social relationships interpreted in light of Islamic values. Fakhrurrozi and colleagues, meanwhile, demonstrate that changes in ritual form are connected to shifting community needs and circumstances. Both findings suggest that cultural practices possess social dimensions not necessarily identical to theological concerns. Communities may maintain traditions because of solidarity, family experiences, or their status as cultural heritage, even when interpretations of their religious aspects have changed. Analysis of religious meaning in Balia must therefore consider the relationship between theological and sociocultural motivations, so that the continuity of a tradition is not explained simply as endorsement of every belief historically associated with it.

Comparisons with more recent studies reinforce the complexity of the relationship between religion and Kaili traditions. In their 2025 examination of the Pompoura and disaster-prevention rituals of the Kaili people, Kadir and colleagues show that adaptations to Islamic teaching can occur while preserving the social functions of tradition.[37] Although their research does not directly address Balia, it offers comparative context suggesting that religious change in Kaili culture may involve negotiation between Islamic values and customary continuity. Similarly, in a 2026 study of the Petambuli tradition in Sigi Regency, Syarif and colleagues identify connections between cultural practices and religious

[37] Surni Kadir, Hamdi Rudji, Normawati, Kamal, and Mukhlis Lubis, "Transformation of Kaili Tribe Rituals Post-Islamization: Integrating Islamic Values into Local Traditions," *Ilmu Ushuluddin* 12, no. 1 (2025): 1–22, https://doi.org/10.15408/iu.v12i1.46781.

values such as sincerity, gratitude, respect, and social ethics.[38] Their findings indicate that local traditions can acquire religious meanings through explanations of values regarded as consistent with Islamic teachings. Neither comparative study, however, constitutes direct evidence of change within Balia, because each examines different rituals and social contexts.

Based on a synthesis of research on Balia and interpretations informed by Ricoeur's hermeneutics, this study proposes that the reinterpretation of religious meaning in Balia can be understood through three interrelated dimensions. The first is the symbolic dimension, encompassing changes in ritual language, the use of Qur'anic recitations and Islamic prayers, and adjustments to ritual implements. The second is the interpretive-theological dimension, concerning interpretations of the position of God, ancestral spirits, sources of healing, and the religious legitimacy of the ritual. The third is the sociocultural dimension, including the persistence of custom, relationships between religious and customary authorities, and the position of Balia within Kaili communal identity. These dimensions are analytical constructions developed from secondary data; they are not presented as categories of belief directly employed by community members themselves.

The symbolic dimension encompasses those forms of change most readily identifiable in documentation of ritual practices. Examples include the use of the basmalah, al-Fātiḥah, prayers for protection, and purification practices. Yet symbols do not necessarily carry a single meaning, because the function of a recitation or action depends on the context in which it is used. From Ricoeur's perspective, an expression can disclose interpretive possibilities beyond the event of its original use; accordingly, the presence of Islamic symbols in Balia must be examined in relation to both structures of meaning and ritual contexts. The

[38] Ahmad Syarif, Aisyah Arsyad, Rahmi Damis, Firdaus, and Alamsyah Halim, "Religiosity in the Petambuli Tradition among the Kaili People of Sigi Regency: A Qur'anic Review," *Kasyful Murad: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 3, no. 2 (2026): 101–119, https://doi.org/10.24252/kmjsqt.v3i2.64360.

symbolic dimension thus provides an entry point for analyzing reinterpretation, but is insufficient on its own to explain the full range of changes in religious meaning.

The interpretive-theological dimension concerns how symbols and practices are explained through participants' conceptions of God. Statements identifying Allah as the source of healing reveal attempts to interpret the purpose of the ritual within an Islamic framework. However, where elements of spiritual mediation persist, such interpretations raise questions about the relationship between theological explanations and inherited sequences of action. Reinterpretation is not understood here as proof that the community's beliefs have changed completely, but as a reconfiguration of the relationships of meaning among God, spiritual beings, and ritual purposes, as articulated in the research sources. Differences between normative explanations and actual practices are central to the interpretive process, because they show how religious meaning may involve both continuity and tension.

The sociocultural dimension highlights that reinterpretations of religious meaning do not occur independently of social relationships. The transmission of custom, experiences of healing, the roles of ritual leaders, the involvement of religious figures, and changing community needs all help shape the contexts in which the meaning of Balia is preserved or reinterpreted. Bell explains that ritualization is linked to social practices and the formation of positions within community life, meaning that rituals cannot be understood solely through the belief formulations attached to them.[39] In the case of Balia, this perspective helps explain how a practice may adjust its religious language without losing its entire cultural form. The persistence of Balia can thus be interpreted through the interplay of religious values, social experiences, and cultural identity, although the relative weight of these elements cannot be presumed identical across all Kaili groups.

[39] Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, especially the discussion of ritual practices and social relationships.

The relationships among the three dimensions suggest that the reinterpretation of religious meaning does not follow a fixed sequence. Symbols can change without giving rise to an entirely new theological interpretation; understandings of God's position can change without the elimination of all ritual forms; and a tradition's social functions can transform without demonstrable theological change. These dimensions are therefore better understood as reciprocal relationships that enable researchers to distinguish forms of change on the basis of available evidence. This distinction constitutes an analytical contribution of the study because it prevents the Islamization of symbols, theological reinterpretation, and sociocultural transformation from being treated as the same phenomenon.

Within this framework, the reinterpretation of religious meaning in Balia can be explained as an ongoing process in which Islamic religious symbols and traditional practices are placed in relationships of meaning that remain open to interpretation. Language referring to God may be used to affirm the source of assistance, while the persistence of ritual demonstrates that cultural identity is not necessarily abandoned through religious adaptation. In Ricoeur's hermeneutics, human action can be analyzed as meaningful action open to interpretation, such that a practice cannot be reduced entirely to its original intention or to one supposedly definitive explanation.[40] This understanding makes it possible to read Balia neither merely as a remnant of older beliefs nor simply as evidence of the acceptance of Islamic teachings, but as a cultural practice illustrating the dynamic relationships among meaning, action, and identity.

The philosophical contribution of this study lies in developing a three-dimensional framework of reinterpretation that connects symbolic change, theological interpretation, and sociocultural continuity in the Balia tradition. Whereas earlier research has mapped the reception of the

[40] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, especially “The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text.”

Qur'an, representations of ritual values, or transformations in cultural forms, this study places the relationships among these three dimensions at the center of analysis. The framework shows that the presence of Islamic symbols alone cannot establish a comprehensive change in religious meaning, because symbols are always interpreted in relation to the structures of practice and the community's social context. However, as a product of literature-based synthesis, the framework remains conceptual and has not been tested through new interviews or observations. It does not claim that all Kaili people have undergone uniform changes in belief, but offers a philosophical account of possible forms of reinterpretation and the relationships among them in Balia.

The discussion as a whole indicates that the relationship between religion and the Balia tradition is characterized by religious meanings that are neither invariably fixed nor transformed through an entirely linear process. Religious language, ritual symbols, and cultural practices may change to different degrees and in different directions. Ricoeur's hermeneutics provides a basis for understanding these relationships through a critical reading of expressions and meaningful actions, while the three-dimensional framework shows that reinterpretation has symbolic, theological, and sociocultural aspects. Accordingly, the study extends scholarship on Islam and Kaili culture beyond the identification of religious values within traditions toward a philosophical explanation of how religious meaning may be preserved, negotiated, and reinterpreted through the continuation of cultural practices.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the reinterpretation of religious meaning in the Kaili community's Balia tradition takes place through complex relationships among changes in religious symbols, interpretations of God, and the continuity of cultural identity. Based on analysis of previous research, these changes can be seen in the use of Qur'anic recitations, Islamic prayers, purification practices, and explanations identifying Allah as the source of assistance and healing. However, the presence of traditional belief elements at certain ritual

stages indicates that the acceptance of Islamic symbols does not necessarily entail the elimination of the entire earlier system of meaning. Changes within Balia therefore cannot be regarded as a uniform process of Islamization, but as interpretive dynamics that reflect the interplay between religious adaptation and the continuity of local traditions.

Through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, this study finds that the reinterpretation of religious meaning can be explained through relationships among ritual language, symbolic action, and cultural context. *Distanciation* enables a distinction between participants' religious statements and documented structures of practice; the *explanation–understanding* dialectic illuminates the relationship between language concerning God and the community's social experiences; and the *world of the text* opens possibilities for understanding how Qur'anic recitations and religious language introduce new horizons of meaning into the Balia tradition. The analysis shows that changes in ritual symbols and language do not always result in comprehensive changes in meaning. Instead, they may introduce new interpretations that coexist with the continuation of earlier cultural elements.

The principal contribution of this study is its formulation of three dimensions of religious reinterpretation: symbolic, interpretive-theological, and sociocultural. The symbolic dimension explains changes in recitations and forms of religious expression; the interpretive-theological dimension concerns revised interpretations of the positions of God and ancestral spirits and the source of healing; and the sociocultural dimension highlights the relationships among customary authority, religious legitimacy, and Kaili cultural identity. These dimensions are interrelated analytical constructions, not stages of change that every participant in the tradition must experience. The study's novelty therefore lies in providing a philosophical explanation of how religious meaning may be preserved, negotiated, and reinterpreted within cultural practices. Because the research relies on library sources and secondary empirical data, its conclusions are not intended to demonstrate changes in individuals' beliefs or consciousness directly. Further research

involving observations and interviews is needed to deepen understanding of how religious meanings are reinterpreted in the lived experiences of Balia participants.

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