

THE MOYO DANCE OF NIAS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL THEOLOGY AND ECOTHEOLOGY: CRAFTING A NARRATIVE OF ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY IN THE ERA OF CLIMATE CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

The global climate crisis calls for a renewed narrative of ecological spirituality that fosters harmonious relationships among humanity, nature, and the Divine. In response, this study examines the Moyo Dance, a traditional ceremonial dance from Nias, Indonesia, through the lenses of social theology and ecotheology, aiming to cultivate ecological awareness rooted in local culture. Rich in symbolic meaning, the Moyo Dance reflects deep interconnections between human beings and the natural world, offering insights into values of cosmic harmony, courage, and gratitude that are urgently relevant to contemporary environmental challenges. Employing a qualitative methodology, this research integrates cultural analysis, symbolic interpretation, and theological reflection on the dance's movements and rituals. The study reveals that the Moyo Dance is not merely a form of cultural expression but also a living manifestation of ecological spirituality. It conveys a theological understanding of humanity's vocation as stewards of creation, aligning with both biblical and indigenous worldviews. The findings suggest that the ecological values embodied in the Moyo Dance can enrich social theology and Christian education, especially in contexts seeking to bridge faith, culture, and environmental responsibility. This research advocates for the inclusion of the Moyo Dance in educational initiatives and intercultural dialogue as a means of promoting ecological sustainability. Ultimately, the Moyo Dance offers a valuable contextual contribution to the global discourse on theology and climate action.

Keywords: *Moyo Dance; Ecological Spirituality; Social Theology.*

ABSTRAK

Krisis iklim global menuntut narasi baru tentang spiritualitas ekologis yang mendorong hubungan harmonis antara manusia, alam, dan Sang Ilahi. Menanggapi kebutuhan ini, studi ini mengkaji Tari Moyo, sebuah tarian tradisional seremonial dari Nias, Indonesia, melalui perspektif teologi sosial dan ekoteologi, dengan tujuan menumbuhkan kesadaran ekologis yang berakar pada budaya lokal. Sarat dengan makna simbolik, Tari Moyo mencerminkan keterhubungan yang mendalam antara manusia dan alam semesta, serta mengandung nilai-nilai harmoni kosmis, keberanian, dan syukur yang sangat relevan dalam menghadapi tantangan lingkungan masa kini. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini memadukan analisis budaya, interpretasi simbolik, dan refleksi teologis terhadap gerakan serta ritual dalam Tari Moyo. Studi ini menemukan bahwa Tari Moyo bukan sekadar ekspresi budaya, melainkan juga perwujudan hidup dari spiritualitas ekologis. Tarian ini menyampaikan pemahaman teologis tentang panggilan manusia sebagai pengelola ciptaan, sejalan dengan pandangan alkitabiah maupun kearifan lokal. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai ekologis dalam Tari Moyo dapat memperkaya teologi sosial dan pendidikan Kristen, khususnya dalam konteks yang ingin menjembatani iman, budaya, dan tanggung jawab lingkungan. Studi ini merekomendasikan integrasi Tari Moyo dalam program pendidikan dan dialog antarbudaya sebagai sarana untuk mendorong keberlanjutan lingkungan. Pada akhirnya, Tari Moyo menawarkan kontribusi kontekstual yang berharga bagi diskursus global tentang teologi dan aksi iklim.

Kata kunci: Tari Moyo; Spiritualitas Ekologis; Teologi Sosial.

1. INTRODUCTION

The accelerating global climate crisis has emerged as a defining challenge of our era, threatening not only the stability of ecosystems but also the fabric of human civilization. Scientific data has consistently confirmed that rising global temperatures, melting polar ice, rising sea levels, and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events are not isolated occurrences but symptoms of a broader ecological imbalance caused largely by anthropogenic activities. These phenomena have far-reaching consequences, from the displacement of vulnerable populations to the collapse of biodiversity and the disruption of agricultural systems. In response, the global community has mobilized around policy frameworks, technological innovations, and scientific research in an attempt to mitigate and adapt to these environmental threats. Yet, despite these efforts, a fundamental aspect often remains underexplored: the moral and spiritual dimensions of the crisis.¹

Environmental degradation is not simply a matter of poor resource management or lack of scientific understanding; it is deeply intertwined with questions of human identity, purpose, and responsibility. As such, the climate crisis challenges us to reexamine our ontological relationship with the Earth and the values that shape our behavior toward it. Many religious traditions, including Christianity, regard humans not as autonomous exploiters of nature, but as stewards of creation, entrusted with maintaining harmony within the ecological order (cf. Gen. 2:15). This stewardship implies a sacred duty to protect and preserve creation not merely for human benefit, but as an expression of reverence for the Creator.¹ In this theological light, the act of caring for the environment becomes a form of worship, and ecological irresponsibility a form of spiritual failure.

Against this backdrop, local and indigenous cultural expressions offer valuable insights into more holistic approaches to ecological sustainability. Traditional rituals and symbolic arts frequently embody ecological wisdom passed down through generations, often intertwining cosmology, ethics, and community identity. One such tradition is the Moyo Dance of Nias, a ceremonial dance deeply embedded in the cultural and spiritual life of the Nias people of Indonesia. The Moyo Dance, inspired by the majestic movements of an eagle, serves not merely as a performance but as a profound expression of human connectedness with the natural and spiritual realms.² Through its symbolic gestures, the dance encapsulates values of strength, freedom, harmony, and respect for life—a worldview that counters the exploitative logic of modern industrial society.

This study positions the Moyo Dance as a rich theological resource for articulating a contextual narrative of ecological spirituality. Drawing on the frameworks of social theology and ecotheology, it seeks to explore how this traditional dance can be understood not only as a

1 David E Purpel and William McLaurin Jr., *Reflections on the Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education, Counterpoints: Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education*, vol. 262 (Peter Lang, 2004): 105.

2 Meiman Putra Mendrofa Agata Suci Djawa Wulan, "Ragam Gerak Tari Moyo dalam Perspektif Masyarakat Nias: Kajian Makna Dan Simbol," *Gesture: Jurnal Seni Tari* 13, no. 2 (2024): 155, <https://doi.org/10.24114/gjst.v13i2.57882>.

cultural artifact but as a theological expression that conveys ethical imperatives for creation care. Social theology emphasizes the relevance of faith in addressing collective issues such as poverty, justice, and environmental degradation by translating religious convictions into social action. Ecotheology, meanwhile, provides a conceptual lens for examining the theological meaning of nature, emphasizing that creation is part of God's ongoing work and must be treated with reverence.³ When viewed through these lenses, the Moyo Dance emerges as a site of theological reflection, capable of nurturing ecological awareness, inspiring moral action, and fostering a deeper spiritual relationship with creation.

While scholarship in ecotheology⁴ and contextual theology⁵ has grown in recent decades, a significant research gap remains in exploring the role of embodied cultural practices—such as ritual dance—in shaping theological discourse and environmental ethics. Most existing studies focus on textual or doctrinal analysis, often neglecting the performative, symbolic, and communal dimensions of theological knowledge embedded in indigenous practices. Moreover, research on Nias culture has largely concentrated on anthropological, historical, or sociolinguistic aspects, with little attention given to how its ritual traditions can contribute to contemporary theological and ecological discussions. This study addresses this gap by offering an interdisciplinary and theologically engaged reading of the Moyo Dance, highlighting its potential as a medium of eco-theological expression.

The novelty of this research lies in its proposal to integrate indigenous ritual performance into the discourse of social theology and ecotheology. It contends that the Moyo Dance, as a living cultural tradition, possesses the symbolic power to mediate spiritual values and ecological ethics in ways that resonate with both local and global audiences. In an age when modernity often severs the ties between humans and nature, such traditions offer a counter-narrative grounded in relationality, humility, and sacred interconnectedness. By elevating the Moyo Dance as a theological text in motion, this study advocates for the inclusion of locally rooted ecological spirituality in the broader search for sustainable futures. In doing so, it contributes to the development of a more inclusive, embodied, and culturally contextual theology of creation—one that honors the wisdom of indigenous communities while addressing the global urgency of climate change.

2. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach designed to explore the cultural, symbolic, and theological dimensions embedded in the Moyo Dance of Nias. The qualitative method is particularly suitable for investigating meanings, interpreting symbolic expressions,

3 Riska, "Ekoteologi Kristen: Teologi Penciptaan dan Tanggung Jawab Terhadap Lingkungan, 1072."

4 Marthinus Ngabalin, "Ekoteologi: Tinjauan Teologi Terhadap Keselamatan Lingkungan Hidup," *CARAKA Jurnal Teologi Biblika dan Praktika* 1, no. 2 (2020): 120–21, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.46348/car.v1i2.22>.

5 Agustinus Setiawidi, "Menjembatani Teks Dan Konteks: Membangun Teologi Perjanjian Lama Kontekstual di Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Theology* 2, no. 5 (2017): 256–73, <https://doi.org/10.46567/ijt.v5i2.30>.

and understanding cultural practices within their broader religious and ecological contexts. Through this approach, the research seeks to uncover how the Moyo Dance serves as a medium for conveying profound messages about ecological spirituality, particularly in light of the climate crisis. By analyzing the dance through both cultural and theological lenses, this study aims to illuminate the connections between traditional cultural expressions and contemporary ecological concerns. As Clifford Geertz emphasizes in cultural anthropology, such an approach helps to decode the cultural symbols and practices that shape and are shaped by social and environmental dynamics.⁶

Data collection for this study includes a comprehensive literature review and non-participatory observation of Moyo Dance performances. The literature review spans scholarly works on the Moyo Dance, Nias culture, social theology, and ecotheology, drawing on both primary theological sources and interdisciplinary ecological studies. Observational data were gathered by analyzing live and recorded dance performances, with particular focus on the gestures, expressions, attire, and ritual sequences involved in the Moyo Dance. These observations are critical for understanding the symbolic and performative aspects of the dance, which play a vital role in conveying cultural and ecological messages. This method aligns with Geertz's concept of "thick description," where the researcher aims to provide a deep, interpretive account of the cultural context under study.⁷

In terms of data analysis, the study employs thematic analysis alongside a reflective-normative framework. Thematic analysis allows for the identification of recurring symbols and values within the Moyo Dance, while the reflective-normative approach enables the interpretation of these themes through the lenses of social theology and ecotheology. This dual approach not only helps in uncovering the deep meanings behind the dance but also provides insights into how these symbolic elements reflect theological beliefs about creation and ecological responsibility. As David J. Bosch argues in missiology, understanding cultural practices through a theological lens offers the opportunity to connect faith and action within specific social and ecological contexts.⁸ By combining these methodologies, the study ensures a comprehensive understanding that is both contextually grounded in the culture of Nias and theologically informed, addressing the urgent need for ecological action in the era of climate change.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Social theology and ecotheology are two branches of theology that focus on the relationship between humans, nature, and God within social and ecological contexts. Social theology studies how religious teachings influence, and are influenced by, social, economic, and political structures, and how faith can be applied to promote social justice. Meanwhile, ecotheology exam

6 Clifford. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures, Selected Essays* (London: Hutchinson & Co (publishers) Ltd, 1973): 10-11.

7 Geertz: 30.

8 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991): 399.

ines the relationship between faith and the environment, highlighting human responsibility in caring for and protecting God's creation. Both aim to understand and address the challenges humanity faces in social and ecological contexts.

The core principle of ecotheology is the understanding that the relationship between humans, nature, and God is integral and interconnected.⁹ From this perspective, nature is seen as God's creation, which has intrinsic value and is not merely a resource to be exploited. Humans are viewed as stewards with a moral responsibility to care for and protect the environment. This principle emphasizes the importance of ecological balance and sustainability, calling on religious communities to view nature as part of God's divine plan that must be honored and protected.

Ecological spirituality becomes crucial in responding to the climate crisis because it offers a perspective that connects both the spiritual and ecological dimensions. By recognizing that environmental degradation is not only a technical or scientific issue, but also a moral and spiritual one, ecological spirituality encourages a shift in attitudes and behaviors that promote greater harmony between humans and nature.¹⁰ This approach invites individuals and communities to reflect on their core values, such as simplicity, gratitude, and responsibility, in efforts to preserve and care for the environment. In this way, ecological spirituality can serve as a strong foundation for tangible actions to address the climate crisis.



Picture1. Moyo Dance¹¹

In this context, the Moyo Dance from Nias can be seen as a cultural expression that reflects the values of ecological spirituality.¹² Through the movements and symbolism in this dance,

9 Subaedah Luma. Meily Meiny Wagiu, Jekson Berdame, "Menjaga Relasi Manusia dengan Alam: Konstruksi Ekoteologis Pada Religi Budaya" Allah dalam Tubuh" Masyarakat Desa Musi, Kecamatan Lirung, Kabupaten Talaud," *KURIOS (Jurnal Teknologi dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen)* 8, no. 2 (2022): 596.

10 Roberto Reno, "Spiritualitas Ekologis dalam Agama-Agama Di Indonesia dan Kaitannya dengan Universitas Atma Jaya Yogyakarta Sebagai Salah Satu 'Universitas Laudato SI,'" *Syntax Idea* 6, no. 4 (2024): 1832, <https://doi.org/10.46799/syntax-idea.v6i4.3179>.

11 Merdeka.com, "Mengenal Tari Moyo, Indahnya Tarian Unik Mirip Elang Dari Nias," 2020, <https://www.merdeka.com/sumut/mengenal-tari-moyo-indahnya-tarian-unik-mirip-elang-dari-nias.html>.

12 Trinitas Nuryani Dakhi, "Tari Moyo: Eksplorasi Budaya Masyarakat Nias Dan Spritualitas Kristen," *Jurnal Teologi Injili Dan Pendidikan Agama* 3, no. 1 (22025): 236, <https://doi.org/10.55606/jutipa.v3i1.472>.

the community is invited to reflect on their relationship with nature and God. The Moyo Dance not only functions as entertainment or ritual but also as an educational and awareness tool regarding the importance of maintaining ecological balance. By integrating the values embedded in the Moyo Dance into the practice of ecological spirituality, it is hoped that collective awareness will be created, leading to concrete actions for environmental preservation.

Furthermore, integrating traditional cultural values, such as those found in the Moyo Dance, into the narrative of ecological spirituality can enrich our understanding of the relationship between humans and nature. Local cultures often hold wisdom that has been tested over time and remains relevant to modern challenges. By elevating and utilizing this local wisdom, we can find more contextual and sustainable solutions to address the climate crisis.

The importance of ecological spirituality in addressing the climate crisis is also reflected in various studies and research, which show that individual attitudes and behaviors toward the environment are often influenced by spiritual and cultural factors. Approaches that combine spiritual and ecological aspects have proven to be more effective in encouraging environmental preservation actions than those that focus solely on the scientific or technical aspects. Therefore, further research and development on the relationship between social theology, ecotheology, and local cultures like the Moyo Dance is crucial. By understanding and integrating spiritual and cultural values into environmental preservation efforts, we can create a more holistic and effective approach to tackling the climate crisis.

Overall, social theology and ecotheology provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the challenges humanity faces in social and ecological contexts. By integrating ecotheological principles and ecological spirituality, as well as leveraging local cultural wisdom, we can foster greater awareness and collective action to care for and preserve God's creation.

MOYO DANCE AS CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL EXPRESSION

Moyo Dance is one of the traditional cultural expressions from Nias that is rich in symbolic and spiritual meaning. This dance not only serves as entertainment but also as a means to convey life values, beliefs, and the harmonious relationship between humans and nature.¹³ Every movement in Moyo Dance carries deep meaning related to the life of the Nias people, reflecting their philosophy of balance and harmony in life.

The basic philosophy of Moyo Dance is a symbol of harmony between humans and nature. This dance depicts a mother's joy upon the return of her child from war, symbolizing perseverance and collective spirit in realizing aspirations.¹⁴ Through movements inspired by nature, such as the eagle's flight symbolizing strength and freedom, Moyo Dance teaches the importance of maintaining ecological balance and respecting nature as part of God's creation.

The elements of movement in Moyo Dance reflect a deep spiritual and ecological relationship. These movements are not only beautiful but also carry symbolic meaning related to life,

¹³ Dakhi, 235.

¹⁴ Arvika Sari, "Nilai Pendidikan Sosial Dalam Tari Moyo (Tari Elang) Pada Masyarakat Nias di Kota Medan," *Gesture : Jurnal Seni Tari* 6, no. 2 (2017): 2, <https://doi.org/10.24114/senitari.v6i2.7198>.

beliefs, and the cultural values of the Nias people. For example, movements imitating animal behavior in the forest show humanity's adaptation to nature and respect for other creatures.¹⁵ Additionally, movements in Moyo Dance reflect values such as love, sacrifice, courage, and joy, which can be integrated with Christian values, creating harmony between faith and local culture.

In the context of ecological spirituality, Moyo Dance plays a role as an educational and awareness tool for the importance of maintaining balance between humans and nature. Through this dance, the community is invited to reflect on their relationship with the environment and how their actions impact ecosystems. Moyo Dance reminds us of the importance of maintaining harmony with nature as part of our spiritual responsibility.

The importance of ecological spirituality in addressing the climate crisis is also reflected in various studies, which show that changes in individuals' attitudes and behaviors toward the environment are often influenced by spiritual and cultural factors.¹⁶ Approaches that combine spiritual and ecological aspects have proven to be more effective in promoting environmental conservation actions than those focusing solely on scientific or technical aspects.

Therefore, integrating the values contained in Moyo Dance into the practice of ecological spirituality can enrich our understanding of the relationship between humans and nature. Local cultures, like Moyo Dance, hold wisdom that has been tested over time and remains relevant to modern challenges. By elevating and utilizing this local wisdom, we can find more contextual and sustainable solutions to address the climate crisis.

Overall, Moyo Dance is not only a cultural expression but also a means to foster ecological awareness and deep spirituality. Through understanding and appreciating the philosophy and elements of movement in Moyo Dance, we can develop a more holistic approach to maintaining and caring for nature as part of our spiritual responsibility.

CLIMATE CRISIS AND THE CHALLENGES OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

The escalating climate crisis has impacted various aspects of human life, including spirituality and religious practices. Climate change has caused destructive natural disasters, such as floods, droughts, and storms, which not only have physical effects but also emotional and spiritual impacts on many individuals and communities.¹⁷ In this context, many people turn to religious practices to seek comfort, understanding, and solutions to the challenges they face. For example, in Japan, the increased visits to Kisho Jinja, a Shinto shrine dedicated to weather, demonstrate how communities are seeking spiritual support in the face of climate change impacts.¹⁸ The Te

15 Hulu et. al., "The Existence of Tuwu Dance in Nias Society," *Warisan: Journal of History and Cultural Heritage* 5, no. 2 (2024): 190, <https://doi.org/10.34007/warisan.v5i2.2309>.

16 Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, "Agama dan Kerusakan Ekologi: Mempertimbangkan 'Tesis White' dalam Konteks Indonesia," *GEMA TEOLOGIKA: Jurnal Teologi Kontekstual dan Filsafat Keilahian* 5, no. 2 (2020): 127, <https://doi.org/10.21460/gema.2020.52.614>.

17 Faturohman Faturohman, Lucki Hidayanto, and Muhamad Fahrurroji, "Analisis Dampak Perubahan Iklim Terhadap Hak Pada Manusia," *Terang : Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Sosial, Politik dan Hukum* 1, no. 3 (2024): 6, <https://doi.org/10.62383/terang.v1i3.346>.

18 Ike Iswary Lawanda Program Studi Ilmu Perpustakaan dan Informasi and Fakultas Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya, "Interpenetrasi Antara Amaterasu Oomikami dan Lingkungan Jepang" 12, no. 2 (2008): 61.

ngger community in Indonesia, predominantly Hindu, has increased their prayer practices to request rain in response to the erratic weather patterns caused by the climate crisis. The Kasada ritual they perform has become even more important to ensure the survival of their agriculture.¹⁹

In addressing these challenges, theology based on local culture becomes highly relevant. Contextual theology, which integrates local cultural values and practices, can offer solutions better suited to local conditions. For instance, transforming religious values and teachings to address climate change becomes part of social piety, promoting living in harmony with nature. This approach allows communities to adapt their religious teachings to a local context, making them more effective in tackling the impacts of climate change.

Furthermore, Christian ecotheology, which emphasizes humanity's responsibility toward God's creation, has become an integral part of the church's mission in a world facing a climate crisis. Churches are involved in activities such as tree planting, environmental education, and campaigns against climate change, demonstrating how culture-based theology can contribute to climate change mitigation efforts.

A theology based on local culture can also strengthen community awareness and participation in environmental conservation efforts. By integrating spiritual and cultural values into religious practices, communities are more likely to accept and implement actions that support environmental sustainability.²⁰ For example, the knowledge and traditional practices applied by local communities are key in preventing biodiversity loss and achieving sustainable development.

The climate crisis demands a holistic and contextual response. Contextual theology, which integrates local cultural values, can be an effective approach to addressing this challenge, empowering communities to take actions suited to their context while supporting global efforts in mitigating climate change.

The Symbolism of Moyo Dance as a Representation of the Relationship Between Humanity, Nature, and God

Moyo dance, as an expression of the Nias community's culture, carries deep symbolism that reflects the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and God. The movements in this dance depict cosmic balance and harmony, which form the core of the Nias people's life philosophy. For instance, the movement imitating the behavior of an eagle symbolizes freedom and strength, while movements imitating other animals reflect the relationship between humans and the surrounding nature. This indicates that humans are not separate from nature but are an integral part of a larger ecosystem.

In the context of social theology and ecotheology, the symbolism of Moyo dance can be interpreted as a representation of the concept of *imago Dei*, that is, the creation of humanity in t

19 Endang Kumala Ratih and Anik Juwariyah, "Konstruksi Sosial Upacara Adat Karo Suku Tengger Di Desa Tosari, Kecamatan Tosari, Kabupaten Pasuruan," *Jurnal Analisa Sosiologi* 9, no. 2 (2020): 529, <https://doi.org/10.20961/jas.v9i2.42103>.

20 Tuti Mutia Martha Abymanyu Ragil Atmaja, "'Memayu Hayuning Bawana': Implementasi Nilai Luhur Kebudayaan Jawa Sebagai Gaya Hidup Ramah Lingkungan dalam Perspektif Masyarakat Desa Bajulan Nganjuk," *GEOGRAPHY: Jurnal Kajian, Penelitian Dan Pengembangan Pendidikan* 12, no. 2 (2024): 882, <https://doi.org/10.31764/geography.v12i2.26027>.

he image and likeness of God. The movements in the dance reflect humanity's responsibility to preserve and care for God's creation, including nature. Thus, Moyo dance is not only an expression of culture but also a medium for conveying a theological message about humanity's responsibility toward nature as part of the divine mandate.²¹

Furthermore, Moyo dance teaches values such as love, sacrifice, loyalty, and steadfast faith, all of which contribute to the understanding of ecological spirituality.²² The lyrics of the song accompanying the dance invite the congregation to live in love and harmony, while the musical instruments used serve as symbols of praise and gratitude to God. The folk story behind the dance reminds Christians of God's protection and love, which continually safeguard His people.

Thus, Moyo dance functions as a bridge between local culture and theological values, integrating the understanding of ecological spirituality into everyday cultural practices. This shows that traditional culture can serve as an effective means of conveying theological messages that are relevant to contemporary challenges, such as the climate crisis. Through the understanding and preservation of Moyo dance, the community can become more aware of the importance of maintaining harmony between humans, nature, and God.

Therefore, further research on the symbolism of Moyo dance in the context of social theology and ecotheology is crucial to uncover the potential of local culture in shaping a narrative of ecological spirituality that is relevant to current global challenges. This approach can provide new insights into environmental conservation efforts and the strengthening of spirituality based on local culture.

The Role of Moyo Dance in Shaping the Narrative of Ecological Spirituality

Moyo dance, originating from Nias Island, North Sumatra, Indonesia, holds significant potential as an ecological education medium within local communities. The movements in this dance, which imitate the behavior of eagles, symbolize freedom and strength, as well as the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Through the teaching and preservation of Moyo dance, ecological values such as respect for nature and the importance of ecosystem balance can be instilled in younger generations. Moyo dance is not only an expression of culture but also a social education tool that imparts essential values in the Nias community.²³

Moreover, Moyo dance has the potential to serve as an inspiration for environment-based social theology. The cultural elements within this dance can be integrated with Christian values such as love, sacrifice, courage, and joy, creating harmony between faith and local culture. Interpreting Moyo dance within the context of contextual theology can strengthen relevant and authentic spirituality, while also raising ecological awareness in religious practices.²⁴

21 Dakhi, "Tari Moyo: Eksplorasi Budaya Masyarakat Nias Dan Spritualitas Kristen, 237."

22 Dakhi, "Tari Moyo: Eksplorasi Budaya Masyarakat Nias Dan Spritualitas Kristen, 235."

23 Sari, "Nilai Pendidikan Sosial dalam Tari Moyo (Tari Elang) Pada Masyarakat Nias di Kota Medan, 6-8."

24 Setiawan Larosa, "Membangun Teologi Lokal: Akulturasi Nilai-Nilai Kristiani Melalui Pemaknaan Tari Moyo dalam Masyarakat Nias," *TEVUNAH Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristen* 2, no. 2 (2024): 169.

Analysis of videos or documentation of Moyo dance can provide profound insights into the symbolism of its movements within the framework of ecological spirituality.²⁵ For example, the movements that imitate the behavior of eagles reflect the relationship between humans and nature, as well as the responsibility to maintain ecosystem balance. Through theological interpretation based on an ecotheological framework, one can understand how Moyo dance reflects the ecological values embedded in religious teachings. Moyo dance holds significant social educational value within the Nias community, which can be integrated with Christian values to build relevant and authentic spirituality.

Thus, Moyo dance functions not only as a cultural expression but also as a medium for ecological education and inspiration for environment-based social theology. Through the interpretation and preservation of this dance, communities can enhance ecological awareness and build harmonious spirituality between humans, nature, and God. Further research on the symbolism and meaning of the movements in Moyo dance within the context of ecological spirituality can contribute significantly to efforts in preserving both culture and the environment.

Moyo Dance in the Context of the Climate Crisis

Moyo dance, as a cultural heritage of the Nias people, holds values that are relevant in addressing the challenges of the global environmental crisis. The movements in this dance reflect the harmony between humans and nature, reminding us of the importance of maintaining ecosystem balance. In the context of the climate crisis, these values can serve as a foundation for building ecological awareness and promoting environmental conservation actions. The elements within Moyo dance can be integrated with Christian values, creating harmony between faith and local culture.

Additionally, the inculturation of Moyo dance in Christian education and intercultural dialogue can promote sustainability. By integrating local cultural elements such as Moyo dance into religious education practices, ecological values can be instilled more effectively. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of human responsibility toward nature, in alignment with religious teachings. Active participation in inculturated liturgical music can strengthen spiritual and ecological understanding within the community.²⁶

25 Nias Channel, *Tari Moyo Nias* (Indonesia, 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e24ymKY5vyw>.

26 Esther Gunawan, "Menuju Liturgi Yang Kontekstual : Suatu Tinjauan Terhadap Liturgi Gereja-Gereja Tionghoa Indonesia," *Veritas: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pelayanan* 15, no. 1 (2014): 127, <https://doi.org/10.36421/veritas.v15i1.288>.



Picture 2. Moyo Dance²⁷

Analysis of available videos²⁸ or documentation of Moyo dance can provide profound insights into the symbolism of its movements within the context of ecological spirituality. For example, the movements imitating the behavior of eagles reflect the relationship between humans and nature, as well as the responsibility to maintain ecosystem balance. Through theological interpretation based on an ecotheological framework, it can be understood how Moyo dance reflects the ecological values embedded in religious teachings. Interpreting Moyo dance within the context of contextual theology can strengthen relevant and authentic spirituality, as well as raise ecological awareness in religious practices.

Thus, Moyo dance functions not only as a cultural expression but also as an ecological education tool and an inspiration for environment-based social theology. Through the interpretation and preservation of this dance, communities can enhance ecological awareness and build harmonious spirituality between humans, nature, and God. Further research on the symbolism and meaning of Moyo dance's movements in the context of ecological spirituality can significantly contribute to efforts in preserving both culture and the environment.

In facing the climate crisis, it is important to integrate local values, such as those found in Moyo dance, into education and religious practices. This approach can strengthen ecological awareness and encourage more effective environmental conservation actions. Active participation in inculturated liturgical music can enhance spiritual and ecological understanding within the community. Therefore, it is essential to continue studying and developing an understanding of Moyo dance in the context of the climate crisis. This approach can provide new insights into efforts to preserve both culture and the environment, as well as build spirituality that is relevant to today's global challenges.

27 Merdeka.com, "Mengenal Tari Moyo, Indahnya Tarian Unik Mirip Elang Dari Nias."

28 Museum Pusaka Nias, *Tari Moyo Dan Musik Tradisional Nias* (Indonesia: <https://www.youtube.com>, 2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5oglwbfZE7Q>.

INTEGRATION OF ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY IN THE CHURCH AND EDUCATION THROUGH MOYO DANCE

In the contemporary theological response to the climate crisis, the integration of ecological spirituality within ecclesial and educational settings emerges as a vital discourse. The Moyo dance of Nias, Indonesia, traditionally performed in ceremonies to express gratitude and invoke blessings, embodies a rich symbolic relationship between humans and the natural world. Through the interpretive lens of Clifford Geertz, this dance can be seen not merely as ritual performance but as a cultural text that conveys deeply embedded values of ecological harmony and reverence for life. The eagle-like movements of the dancers, which mimic the flight and grace of nature's majestic bird, signal a worldview in which nature is not passive matter but active participant in the sacred order.²⁹

David J. Bosch's theology of mission emphasizes the necessity of engaging the Gospel with cultural forms, advocating for a dynamic interaction in which theology is not imposed but discovered in local expressions.³⁰ Interpreted through Bosch's paradigm, Moyo dance becomes a theological act—one in which the people of Nias affirm their relationship with the Creator through embodied celebration of creation itself. The dance thus challenges the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, as local traditions are revalorized as conveyors of spiritual truth. In this sense, the eagle symbol within the dance resonates with scriptural imagery—particularly Isaiah 40:31—where renewal and strength are likened to the flight of an eagle, suggesting divine empowerment and cosmic alignment.

Lynn White Jr. famously critiqued Western Christianity for fostering an anthropocentric view that justified environmental domination.³¹ His call for an ecological reformation within Christianity finds resonance in the symbolic ecology of Moyo dance. Rather than reflecting control over nature, the dance enacts mutuality and reverence. It invites a theological shift from dominion to stewardship, one grounded in traditional ecological knowledge. White's critique underscores the importance of contextual theology that learns from the wisdom of indigenous cultures and reorients Christian ethics toward creation care as central to discipleship.

Social theology, concerned with the transformation of society through justice and compassion, gains a new dimension through cultural forms like Moyo dance. The communal nature of the dance—performed collectively with synchronized movements and circular formations—symbolizes interconnectedness not only among people but also between humanity and the earth. As a public ritual, it models the kind of inclusive community envisioned in Christian ethics. Such performative theology becomes a prophetic witness in the face of ecological injustice, calling faith communities to embody solidarity with the vulnerable—both human and non-human.

²⁹ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures, Selected Essays*: 89-90.

³⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 447-450.

³¹ White, Jr., Lynn, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203-1204, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.155.3767.1203>.

The Church, as both a theological and cultural community, is uniquely positioned to integrate ecological spirituality through local art forms.³² When Moyo dance is brought into Christian liturgy or formation programs, worship becomes a multisensory experience that educates and transforms. Here, theology is not only taught but danced; the body becomes a vessel of divine meaning. Such integration revitalizes liturgical life and provides congregants with a tangible connection between faith and ecological action. It also reinforces the theological claim that the earth is not merely background for salvation history but a beloved part of God's good creation.

Christian educational institutions also bear responsibility for fostering ecological consciousness. Integrating Moyo dance into curricular or extracurricular programs enables students to encounter ecological theology in lived, creative ways. Drawing on Paulo Freire's model of conscientization, such learning cultivates critical awareness and active participation in environmental stewardship. The dance becomes not only a cultural artifact but also a pedagogical tool—a way to internalize ecological values through movement, story, and ritual.³³

This educational approach challenges the dominance of abstract, text-based theology by promoting embodied and contextual learning. It respects the epistemological authority of local culture and affirms that knowledge is not only cognitive but also affective, symbolic, and communal. In this view, sustainability is not merely a scientific or policy issue, but a moral and spiritual calling rooted in cultural memory and theological imagination.³⁴ By lifting up traditions like Moyo dance, Christian educators affirm that ecological spirituality is not foreign to the faith but deeply woven into its practice.

Ultimately, the Moyo dance of Nias offers a compelling theological narrative for our time. It bridges the gap between tradition and transformation, culture and creation, ritual and responsibility. It calls the Church and its educational arms to reimagine their mission in light of the ecological crisis—not through abandonment of culture, but through its sanctification. In doing so, communities of faith can recover a holistic spirituality that dances with the rhythms of the earth and sings with the Spirit who renews all things.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that the Moyo dance of Nias embodies a rich tapestry of ecological symbolism and spiritual meaning, serving as a cultural expression that promotes the harmony between God, humans, and nature. Through cultural and symbolic analysis in the tradition of Clifford Geertz, the study identified key symbols in the dance—such

32 Dorte Anu et al., "Peran Gereja dalam Mewujudkan Tanggung Jawab Budaya Manusia dan Pelestarian Lingkungan Hidup," *TEVUNAH: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristen* 2, no. 1 (2024): 10, <https://doi.org/10.59361/tevunah.v2i1.16>.

33 P. Freire, *Pedagogy of The Oppressed* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 2000), 64-65.

34 Sayida Nafisah Jamilah Nur Baiti, Nadhifah Hanna Rosyidah, Tiara Nur Afidatul Isma, "Pendidikan dan Lingkungan Sosial, Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan, Pendidikan Sebagai Agen Perubahan," *Mutiara: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Karya Ilmiah* 2, no. 6 (2024): 141-142, <https://doi.org/10.59059/mutiara.v2i6.1821>.

as bird-like movements and earth-centered choreography—that reflect the community’s reverence for the natural world. The theological interpretation, inspired by David J. Bosch, revealed that these symbols resonate with Christian values of stewardship and interconnectedness, while Lynn White Jr.’s ecotheological perspective contextualizes the dance as a narrative medium that resists anthropocentric domination and promotes a theocentric ecological ethic. These findings show that Moyo dance is not merely artistic performance but a theological narrative that can inform and inspire a deeper ecological spirituality within faith communities.

Concretely, the study finds that Moyo dance can be implemented as a medium for ecological education within church and school settings, particularly through liturgical incorporation, contextual theology workshops, and cultural-based sustainability programs. It offers a viable model for integrating local cultural wisdom into Christian teaching and learning, contributing to curriculum development in theological education, religious studies, and environmental ethics. Scientifically, this research contributes to the interdisciplinary discourse between anthropology, theology, and environmental studies by presenting a culturally grounded model for eco-spiritual formation. It encourages faith-based institutions to engage more intentionally with indigenous cultural expressions as a way to cultivate a holistic ecological consciousness responsive to the current climate crisis.

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