

Research article

Traditions in Motion: Paolle Dance and Symbolic Identity Construction of Bantaeng Mountain Communities, South Sulawesi, Indonesia

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Abstract

Paolle Dance is one of the traditional performing arts of the mountain communities in Bantaeng Regency, South Sulawesi, which serves not only aesthetic functions but also social, spiritual, and symbolic ones. This article examines how Paolle Dance constructs and represents the symbolic identity of indigenous communities through its performance structure, movement symbols, music, costumes, and social context. This type of research is qualitative with a dance ethnography approach (ethnochoreology). In explaining this phenomenon, the study draws on ethnochoreological perspectives as developed by Kaeppeler and symbolic anthropology as proposed by Geertz, which emphasize dance as a system of meaning embedded in social and cultural practices. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and field documentation. The results show that Paolle Dance plays an important role in maintaining social and spiritual harmony through traditional rites, serving as an arena for articulating collective identity, and performing regulative functions within the community. Symbolic elements in the performance, such as body movements, traditional musical instruments, and costume attributes, carry deep meanings linked to the community's cosmology and social structure. Amid cultural change and expansion, Paolle Dance undergoes adaptation while maintaining its core values through symbolic resistance by the indigenous community. This study concludes that Paolle Dance is a living cultural expression that actively shapes, maintains, and negotiates the identity of mountain communities in changing local and global contexts. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of ethnochoreological and symbolic anthropological perspectives by providing empirical evidence of how traditional dance functions as a dynamic system for constructing and sustaining cultural identity.

Keywords

Cultural Adaptation; Cultural Identity; Ethnochoreology; Paolle Dance; Symbolic Identity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional dance is a form of cultural articulation that reflects how communities construct meaning, identity, and social relations. In traditional societies, dance is not merely aesthetic entertainment but also serves as a medium of symbolic communication, ritual expression, and the embodiment of social and spiritual values (Handayani & Farida, 2021; Hanna, 2022; Sklar, 2022). As part of intangible cultural heritage, traditional performing arts represent local knowledge systems structured through gestures, musical rhythms, and costume symbolism. Dance can therefore be understood as a living cultural text that articulates collective identity, historical memory, and power relations within society (Putri & Wibowo, 2020; Royce, 2020; Adair, 2022).

In many Indonesian indigenous communities, traditional dance plays a central role in sustaining cultural identity. One significant example is Paolle Dance, practiced among mountain communities in Bantaeng Regency, South Sulawesi. This dance emerges within a distinctive cultural landscape shaped by oral traditions, local belief systems, and ecological relationships (Ramadhani, 2021; Hasanuddin, 2022). However, its existence is increasingly shaped by contemporary pressures, including modernization, cultural commodification, and the marginalization of indigenous groups (Yuliani, 2022; Prasetyo, 2022; McLean, 2023). In this context, it is important to examine Paolle Dance not only as cultural heritage but also as a space for negotiating and articulating collective identity (Sari & Nugroho, 2023; Thomas, 2023).

This phenomenon reflects a broader global trend in which traditional dance is situated within discourses of cultural sustainability and the preservation of intangible heritage. UNESCO emphasizes that traditional performing arts must be safeguarded while allowing adaptive transformation in response to social change (UNESCO, 2003, 2022). Across global contexts, dance functions as a medium for transmitting values, reinforcing social cohesion, and negotiating identity amid globalization (O'Shea, 2021; Foley, 2021; Kraidy, 2020). Modernity reshapes traditions through global cultural flows, generating reflexive identity processes (Giddens, 1991; Brown, 2021). Thus, Paolle Dance can be situated within a broader global dynamic in which performance becomes a strategic arena for sustaining and negotiating identity.

Several previous studies have examined traditional dance from the perspectives of culture, symbolism, and identity. Recent scholarship shows that traditional dance operates as a complex symbolic system that encodes cosmological meanings, social values, and collective memory within performative structures (Giurchescu, 2020; Sklar,

2022; Hanna, 2022). Several scholars emphasize its role as a medium for articulating cultural cosmology and reinforcing social identity. For example, Putra and Murni (2020) and Suardana (2020) demonstrate that Balinese dance and music performances function not only as artistic expressions but also as symbolic representations of local cosmological systems and as instruments of cultural diplomacy. These performances actively construct and communicate collective identity within both local and global cultural arenas (Adair, 2022; O'Shea, 2021).

In a similar context, Harnish (2021) shows that traditional dance in Lombok reflects gender relations and identity formation embedded in specific socio-cultural structures. This argument is reinforced by Butler (2021) and Martin (2022), who highlight that embodied performance practices play a central role in producing and reproducing identity through repetitive symbolic actions. Thus, traditional dance should not be understood merely as an aesthetic practice but as a dynamic cultural mechanism through which communities interpret their world, negotiate social positions, and sustain symbolic systems of meaning across generations.

On the other hand, a growing body of research highlights the dynamics of adaptation, transformation, and negotiation of traditional dance within contemporary socio-cultural contexts. Studies show that traditional performance is not static but continuously reshaped through interactions with tourism, globalization, and cultural policy frameworks (O'Shea, 2021; Kraidy, 2020; McLean, 2023). In the Indonesian context, Nuryanti and Fauzi (2021) demonstrate how traditional arts are recontextualized within cultural ecotourism, leading to shifts in performance structures, audience orientations, and symbolic meanings. Similarly, Aziz (2022) examines traditional dance as a performative arena in which ethnic identity is actively negotiated amid social change and the pressures of modernization. These findings are reinforced by Kurniawan (2023) and Prasetyo (2022), who argue that the intersection between local tradition and global cultural flows produces hybrid forms of performance while simultaneously challenging cultural authenticity.

Despite these contributions, most existing studies tend to focus on well-established regional traditions and broader cultural frameworks. Limited attention has been paid to localized and less-documented traditions such as the Paolle Dance, particularly regarding its role in constructing symbolic identity within specific indigenous contexts. This gap is significant, as localized performances often carry distinct cosmological structures, ritual functions, and systems of meaning that differ from mainstream cultural representations (Hanna, 2022; Sklar, 2022). Therefore, examining Paolle Dance provides an important opportunity to explore how traditional

performance operates as a site of symbolic production, identity formation, and cultural continuity within the mountain communities of Bantaeng. This study addresses that gap by focusing on the unique choreographic structure and embedded cosmological meanings that define Paolle Dance as a living cultural system.

Departing from this background, this article examines how Paolle Dance serves as a medium for the symbolic construction of the identity of indigenous mountain communities in Bantaeng. By seeing dance as a complex and contextual cultural practice, it is important to situate Paolle Dance within a discursive space that extends beyond aesthetics to understand how collective identities are formed, negotiated, and symbolically transmitted through performance practices.

Based on this, the article's problem formulation focuses on one main question: How does Paolle Dance construct and represent the symbolic identity of mountain communities in Bantaeng? The urgency of this research lies in the need to document and analyze cultural practices that are at risk of marginalization amid globalization. Within the framework of intangible cultural heritage sustainability, a deep understanding of the symbolic function of Paolle Dance will strengthen the argumentation for community-based preservation and the development of contextual cultural policies. In addition, this article theoretically contributes to the development of ethnochoreology and symbolic anthropology by showing how traditional dance serves as a field for the production and reproduction of social identity in indigenous communities.

Bantaeng Regency was selected as the research location because it is one of the few mountainous areas in South Sulawesi where the Paolle Dance is still actively practiced in its original ritual and social contexts. Unlike other regions where traditional dances have largely shifted toward performative or touristic functions, Paolle Dance in Bantaeng remains embedded in communal rites, customary deliberations, and cosmological beliefs of indigenous mountain communities. This condition provides a unique empirical setting to examine dance not merely as an aesthetic performance, but as a living symbolic system that constructs and sustains collective identity. In addition, Bantaeng's mountainous geography and strong kinship-based social structure have contributed to the continuity of ritual transmission and symbolic authority in Paolle Dance practices, making the region particularly relevant for an ethnochoreological and symbolic anthropological analysis.

2. METHODS

This type of research is qualitative with a dance ethnography approach (ethnochoreology). In explaining the phenomenon of Paolle Dance, this study draws on ethnochoreological perspectives as developed by Kaeppler (2020), which view dance as a cultural practice embedded in social structure, history, and systems of meaning. This approach enables the researcher to analyze not only the form and movement of the dance, but also its symbolic, social, and cultural dimensions within the community. Through this framework, Paolle Dance is understood as a meaningful cultural expression that reflects and constructs the symbolic identity of mountain communities in Bantaeng Regency, Indonesian province of South Sulawesi.

The research was conducted in 2024 in the mountainous community area of Bantaeng Regency, an area known for its strong oral traditions and ritual-based cultural practices. The study involved six key informants who were purposively selected for their cultural authority, active involvement, and in-depth knowledge of Paolle Dance. These informants consisted of two traditional elders, one senior dancer, one dance trainer and cultural practitioner, one community leader, and one traditional musician. In addition to in-depth interviews, participatory observation was conducted with male and female dancers during ritual and non-ritual performances to capture the embodied and performative dimensions of Paolle Dance. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that the data reflected the symbolic, social, and ritual contexts of the dance as practiced within the community.

Data collection techniques are carried out through three main methods. *First*, participatory observation was conducted to directly observe the implementation of Paolle Dance in both ritual and public performance contexts. This observation includes observing the structure of movement, use of space, body expression, and the relationship between dancers and audiences (Deans et al., 2019). *Second*, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants to explore the symbolic meanings, historical background, and social dynamics behind the performance. *Third*, documentation was used to record visually and in writing various aspects of the performance, including the use of costumes, musical instruments, and performance locations.

Data analysis was conducted inductively through data reduction, thematic categorization, and symbolic interpretation. In interpreting the data, this study draws on interpretative-hermeneutic approaches articulated by Langer (2021), which emphasize understanding cultural meaning through symbols and expressive forms. In addition, the analysis is informed by symbolic anthropology, particularly Geertz's (2020) perspective, which views culture as a system of symbols through which

individuals construct and communicate meaning in social life. These theoretical frameworks were used as analytical tools to identify and interpret symbolic patterns in the movements, narratives, and performance structures of Paolle Dance. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation, as well as reflective discussions with informants to maintain the consistency and credibility of the findings.

With this approach, the research not only aims to reveal the form and structure of Paolle Dance, but also to explore the symbolic meaning it contains as a construction of the identity of mountain communities in South Sulawesi.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before discussing the specific findings of this study, it is important to outline the socio-cultural context of the research location briefly. Bantaeng Regency, located in the southern part of South Sulawesi, has historically been inhabited by mountain communities with strong agrarian traditions, oral cultural transmission, and ritual-based social systems (Pelras, 1996; Mattulada, 1985). Although administratively and linguistically influenced by broader Bugis–Makassar cultural spheres, the mountain communities of Bantaeng maintain distinctive local identities shaped by their geographical isolation, kinship structures, and ancestral belief systems (Pelras, 1996). These communities do not position themselves strictly as Bugis or Makassar in an ethnic sense, but rather as indigenous mountain groups whose cultural practices, including Paolle Dance, reflect localized cosmologies and social values (Mattulada, 1985). Historically, Paolle Dance emerged and developed within this socio-cultural landscape as a ritual performance connected to agricultural cycles, ancestral reverence, and communal harmony (Kaeppler, 2020). Understanding this local historical and cultural background is essential for interpreting Paolle Dance not merely as a regional variant of Bugis–Makassar traditions, but as a symbolic expression rooted in the lived experiences of Bantaeng’s mountain communities.

3.1. Paolle Dance in Social Structure and Community Rituals

Paolle Dance plays an important role in the social structure and rite system of the mountain communities of Bantaeng Regency. Based on observations and interviews with traditional elders and dance performers, Paolle Dance serves not only as an artistic expression but also as a social mechanism regulating relationships among individuals, groups, and spiritual forces. In indigenous communities, this dance is

usually performed during local religious rituals, such as *akkatteang* (harvest thanksgiving), *abbulo sibatang* (customary deliberations), and the healing procession for diseases believed to result from a disturbance in the balance between humans and ancestral spirits. Dance in this case becomes part of a collective rite system that functions to restore social and spiritual harmony in the community (Becker, 2019).

One of the traditional leaders, La Naba (65 years old), explains that, "Paolle dance is not just an entertainment dance. It is a kind of traditional message that we convey to nature and to the ancestors. If it is not performed, something is missing in the life of the people here." This statement shows that this dance cannot be separated from the community's ritual structure, and is part of the overall life system.

This concept is also corroborated by Mrs. Cella (senior dancer, 58 years old), who states that, "The movements in Paolle have meaning. Every footstep can mean asking for rain or warding off bad luck. So, the dancer must understand well before he can dance." In the perspective of symbolic anthropology, as explained by Geertz (2020), ritual actions carried out symbolically are a way for people to structure meaning in their social life - and Paolle Dance shows this through its layers of movements that are full of cosmological values. This symbolic meaning is also reflected in specific foot movement patterns, particularly those associated with gestures of protection and harmony, as illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Foot movement patterns in Paolle Dance representing symbolic gestures associated with protection (*tolak bala*) and harmony with nature (field documentation, 2024)

The social structure of the Bantaeng mountain community, rooted in kinship relations, also determines the transmission of the Paolle Dance. This dance is generally passed down from generation to generation within certain families, who are symbolically considered to have "body rights" over the tradition. Another informant, Daeng Sila (45 years old), who is a traditional dance trainer, mentioned that "Not

everyone can teach the core movements of Paolle Dance. Some parts must be protected because they are considered sacred." This demonstrates a form of cultural authority in the transmission of tradition, which strengthens the position of Paolle Dance as both a symbol of communal identity and a medium of social legitimacy within the community. As explained by Kaeppler (2020) in ethnocoreology, the social structure of the community plays a key role in determining the form, meaning, and inheritance of dance movements performed collectively.

In terms of ritual function, Paolle Dance has a strong performative dimension that builds a narrative of unity among humans, nature, and spiritual forces. Movements such as opening hands upwards, bowing to the ground, and circling three times, according to Indo' Dalle (72 years old), "symbolize the request for the season to remain balanced, so that the harvest does not fail." In traditional ceremonies, this dance is usually accompanied by traditional beating music such as *gandrang* and *kacaping*, which are chosen not solely for aesthetics, but to open "lines of communication" with the ancestors. In the perspective of cultural performativity, the body's actions in Paolle Dance function as a means of conveying meaning that cannot be reduced only to aesthetic symbols, but as a form of cultural "agency" (Taylor, 2021).

The presence of Paolle Dance in community rituals also shows how local performing arts function as a means of social control. In the context of traditional deliberations, for example, this dance can serve to legitimize collective decisions. As expressed by Ambo Talib (community leader), "If there is Paolle Dance, it is a sign that everyone must agree. No one can go against it." This statement shows that dance performances also function as a symbol of social consensus. Dance, in this context, becomes an instrument of norm enforcement, symbolization of customary power, and a medium of affirmation of the prevailing social structure (Schechner, 2020). This role emphasizes that Paolle Dance presents not only the body in movement but also the body in social structure.

Thus, Paolle Dance is not only a cultural artifact but also a medium for reproducing social and spiritual values in indigenous mountain communities. It not only conveys collective messages through movement symbols, but also embodies the social relations that bind the community morally and culturally. In the ethnochoreological framework, this shows that dance is a system of meanings embedded in the social structure, cosmology and life practices of the community (Foster, 2019).

3.2. Symbolism of Movement, Music, and Costume in Paolle Dance

Paolle dance contains a complex and rich symbolic system, which is manifested in body movements, musical rhythms, and costume elements used during the performance. Each element is not merely a decorative form but functions as a representation of the spiritual, social, and cosmological values of the Bantaeng mountain community. In an ethnochoreological perspective, symbolism in dance is part of a living and dynamic cultural structure, which demands interpretation of visual forms as a cultural language (Kaeppler, 2020).

The movement structure in Paolle Dance consists of a series of basic motifs performed repeatedly and arranged according to the stages of the rite or the purpose of the performance. For example, the gesture of opening both hands to the sky, then slowly bending the knees, is considered a symbol of respect for divine power and ancestors. According to Mrs. Cella, a senior dancer, "The upward movement of the hands is not just for beauty. It's a form of request to the sky for blessings and balance." The three circular movements performed by the lead dancer symbolize the human life cycle and the cycle of the seasons, a concept closely related to the cosmology of agrarian society. This interpretation is in line with the theory of cultural performativity that places the body as a medium for the production of meaning and social experience (Taylor, 2021).

The music in Paolle Dance generally combines traditional instruments such as *gandrang* (drum), *kacaping* (Bugis-Makassar harp), and, sometimes, ritualized vocal exclamations called *passura*. The rhythm of the music not only accompanies the tempo of the movements but also provides spiritual cues for the rite participants and the audience. Mr. La Sulle, an indigenous musical instrument craftsman, explains that "Certain notes in the *kacaping* are believed to summon the spirits of the ancestors. That's why it can't be played just anywhere." This musical symbolism reinforces the function of Paolle Dance as a space for spiritual communication, which is not only representational but also operational in the structure of the rite (Becker, 2019). In this context, music acts as an "acoustic mediation" that connects the material and immaterial worlds, as described by Foster (2019) in her study of empathetic choreography and sensory engagement in ritual.

The costumes worn in Paolle Dance are also full of symbolism. Generally, female dancers wear yellow or red bodo clothes, with silver metal headdresses or ethnic motif fabrics. Meanwhile, male dancers wear sarongs and passapu headbands as a symbol of courage and unity with nature. Daeng Sila, a dance trainer, confirms that "The red

color is used during the ceremony to ward off bad luck, while yellow is used to ask for sustenance and harvest." The meaning of colors, decorative forms, and costume materials is believed to have a symbolic relationship with the power of nature and ancestors. In symbolic analysis, as proposed by Geertz (2020) symbols are not just visual signs, but a system of meanings integrated in the structure of social life.

All elements of Paolle Dance-movement, music, and costume construct a "symbolic network" that represents and reproduces community values. They are interrelated and mutually reinforcing in shaping collective meaning, strengthening social identity, and clarifying humans' position in the order of the cosmos according to the local worldview. In this case, Paolle Dance emphasizes the function of traditional dance as a living cultural semiotic system, which is continuously negotiated in the social and spiritual practices of the community (Schechner, 2020); (Langer, 2021).

3.3. Performance as an Arena for Communal Identity Construction

Paolle dance is not only an aesthetic expression but also a social space where the collective identity of the Bantaeng mountain community is constructed and negotiated. In every performance, both sacred and profane, this performance shows the symbolic relationship between the dancers, the community, and the binding customary values. Paolle Dance performances become articulate moments where people not only watch but also practice their social identity through symbolic participation. This is in line with Hall's (2019) view that identity is not something fixed, but culturally shaped through representation and social performativity.

In the context of ritual performances such as *abbulo sibatang* (annual customary deliberations), Paolle Dance often opens and closes the event, as a sign of respect for ancestors and a marker of social legitimacy for community decisions. Mr. La Naba, one of the traditional leaders, stated that "If Paolle Dance has been performed, it is a sign that the community has one voice. The dance is a sign of agreement, not just entertainment." This expression shows that performance is not just a spectacle but a concrete form of social consensus, a place where community values, norms, and hierarchies are symbolically affirmed.

In non-ritual performances performed at district-level cultural activities or cultural tourism, Paolle Dance retains its sacred elements, although some forms of adaptation occur. For example, the performance duration is shortened, and adjustments are made to costume elements or oral narration to make it more accessible to outside audiences. However, despite the adjustments, the symbolic essence and

main choreography are maintained by the dancer community. According to Daeng Sila, a dance trainer, "We can adjust to the times, but the core meaning and symbols must not change. Because that is who we are." This opinion emphasizes that performance is an important tool for affirming cultural identity in a changing social context.

From a performative perspective, Paolle Dance shows how the body becomes a vehicle for representing communal identity. Every movement and body expression displayed by dancers is a manifestation of collective values, such as harmony, courage, and loyalty to ancestors. This is reinforced by Butler (2021) performativity theory, which states that identity is formed through the repetition of symbolic actions in social space. In this case, the Paolle Dance performance is a collective repetition that sustains community identity.

Furthermore, Paolle Dance performances also become a field of negotiation between local identity and the dynamics of modernity. The involvement of indigenous communities in national cultural forums or contemporary art festivals raises new challenges in maintaining cultural authenticity. However, in this context, performance becomes an important tool to emphasize the existence of indigenous communities as culturally autonomous entities. As stated by Yuliani (2022), Traditional performing arts in Indonesian local communities often serve as an arena for symbolic resistance to cultural homogenization driven by globalization.

Thus, Paolle Dance, as a form of performance, not only displays artistic movements but also becomes an articulate space to declare who "we" are within a cultural frame. This performance is a social practice that reproduces collective memory and affirms the identity narrative of the Bantaeng mountain community through every meaningful footstep and hand swing. Within the framework of cultural identity theory and performance anthropology, Paolle Dance functions as an "identity stage" (Schechner, 2020), where the community not only performs before the public, but also performs to itself as a socio-cultural unit.

3.4. Cultural Change, Adaptation, and Resistance

Paolle dance, like other cultural forms, is not static. It changes as the local community interacts with external influences such as tourism, social media, cultural policies, and modern education. The changes can be seen in the technical aspects of the performance, such as duration, performance location, music, and costume elements. In this context, Paolle Dance is caught in a tug-of-war between the need to remain

relevant in the contemporary era and the commitment to maintaining the continuity of the traditional values attached to it.

The first most visible change is the adaptation of the performance format into formal agendas and cultural festivals. The dance, previously performed only in ritual and sacred contexts, is now also featured in local government ceremonial events. According to Daeng Sila, a dance trainer, "Now Paolle Dance can be performed at the district anniversary or when state guests come. However, we still choose dancers from traditional families, so as not to lose the spirit." This adaptation, while allowing the expansion of the dance stage to a wider public, also raises concerns about the desacralization of meanings and symbols in the performance structure. This phenomenon is an example of what is referred to as cultural hybridity, the process of mixing traditional and modern elements in the context of globalization (Bhabha, 2020).

In addition to changes in form, cultural resistance arises within the community as an effort to maintain the authenticity of the Paolle Dance. Indigenous communities tend to set certain limits on who can dance certain movements or in what contexts performances are allowed. For example, in the spring purification ceremony (*mangngara' sumanga*), only female dancers from traditional families who are considered sacred are allowed to perform. This is confirmed by Indo' Dalle, a traditional elder, "School children can learn Paolle, but not all can perform Paolle in rituals. It is not just a movement, it is an ancestral oath." This statement shows that the community is symbolically resisting the banality of dance that often occurs when traditions are brought into overly secularized public spaces (Baumann, 2021).

Other adaptations can be observed in the aspects of narration and presentation. Some Paolle Dance performances outside the traditional context have been accompanied by opening narratives in Indonesian or English, so that audiences outside the tradition can understand the performance's meaning. This narration replaces traditional oral practices, such as mantras or advice, that are usually recited before the performance begins. Although this change demonstrates cultural flexibility, there is still a tension between educational and spiritual values in conveying meaning. Within the framework of the theory of performativity and local culture, this can be understood as a strategy for negotiating meaning (Schechner, 2020) amid global cultural homogenization.

However, these changes and adaptations do not merely reduce the original values of Paolle Dance. Instead, through the community's efforts to organize space, time, and actors in the performance, cultural identity is maintained and actively

produced. As explained by Hall (2019), cultural identity is always in the process of reshaping, where old and new elements meet and are negotiated through representational practices. In this case, the Bantaeng mountain community managed to place Paolle Dance as a form of living identity, not as a museum object, but as a flexible but rooted cultural practice.

Thus, the dynamics of change in Paolle Dance do not necessarily erase its traditional meaning but rather show the determination of indigenous communities to reproduce their identity through selective and strategic forms of adaptation. This process shows that resistance is not always in the form of rejection but also in control over the change itself. Paolle dance, in this framework, becomes a concrete example of how local performing arts can survive, transform, and remain central to the production of cultural meaning amid a constantly moving world.

4. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how Paolle Dance functions as a medium for constructing and representing the symbolic identity of mountain communities in Bantaeng Regency, South Sulawesi. The findings demonstrate that Paolle Dance operates as a cultural system through which identity is continuously produced, expressed, and legitimized within ritual and social practices. Rather than functioning solely as an aesthetic performance, Paolle Dance embodies a complex symbolic structure that integrates movement, music, and costume as elements of spiritual communication, social regulation, and the transmission of ancestral values. Furthermore, the study reveals that Paolle Dance serves as an articulative space where collective identity is not only represented but also actively reproduced through repeated ritual performances. Through these practices, the community reinforces social cohesion, legitimizes customary authority, and situates human existence within a broader cosmological order. This confirms that identity is not static, but is continuously constructed through embodied cultural practices.

In the context of contemporary social change, Paolle Dance demonstrates a dynamic process of cultural adaptation and symbolic resistance. The community's ability to regulate performance contexts, participants, and symbolic elements reflects a strategic effort to preserve core cultural values while responding to external pressures such as modernization and cultural commodification. This finding highlights that cultural sustainability is not defined by rigid preservation, but by the community's capacity to negotiate continuity and change in a meaningful way.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of ethnochoreological and symbolic anthropological approaches by providing empirical evidence that traditional dance operates not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a structured symbolic system embedded in ritual practices and social relations. This study shows that the meanings of movement, spatial patterns, and performance contexts in Paolle Dance are actively used by the community to construct and reinforce collective identity. In this regard, Paolle Dance offers a concrete example that supports and extends existing theoretical arguments that performance practices play a central role in the production of meaning and identity in local communities, particularly in indigenous mountain societies. Finally, this study opens opportunities for further research on the transformation of traditional dance in relation to digitalization, education, and cultural diplomacy. Future interdisciplinary approaches integrating perspectives on gender, ecology, and technology are needed to deepen understanding of how traditional performances continue to evolve in contemporary contexts.

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