



Fuah Pah: Communication Medium between the Dawan Community, Nature, and God

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Abstract: This study focused on one of the cultural heritages of the Dawan tribe, namely the *Fuah Pah* ritual. The Dawan community is generally classified as an agrarian society. To maintain harmony with nature, the Dawan people have various oral traditions. These oral traditions are generally closely related to ritual languages and formal ceremonies within the community. One of the rituals still known and practiced by the Dawan people is *Fuah Pah*. This ritual was created to overcome the arid environment and unfriendly climate. The methodology used in writing is a hermeneutic study of the *Fuah Pah* ritual from the perspective of Hans-Georg Gadamer using interview and literature study methods. This study found that the presence of Uis Neno for the Timor Dawan community arises from the experience of encountering other creations. This experience is felt as something awe-inspiring and beyond human reasoning. This experience leads the Timor Dawan community to the conclusion that "something incomprehensible is God," which for the Dawan community is Uis Neno.

INTRODUCTION

The Dawan tribe is one of the largest tribes among several others: "Tetun, Bunak, Helon, Kemak, Rote, and Sabu in the province of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) (Pinem, 2023). The Dawan tribe occupies the entire territory of West Timor, namely the districts of Kupang, South Central Timor (TTS), and North Central Timor (TTU). The Dawan community lives in groups based on kanaf (clan). Each kanaf has its own customs and traditions. The Timor Dawan people are also called atoni people (humans) (Nenohai, 2023). Atoni people usually live in remote areas where the land and nature are dry. The Dawan people generally work as farmers. Therefore, their lives are very dependent on nature. Nature can bring happiness and prosperity to humans and can also bring disasters. It depends on how humans manage it. The Dawan people maintain harmony with nature through various traditions and rituals (Toabnani, 2022). These traditions are generally closely related to ritual languages and formal ceremonies within the community. The life of the Dawan community has a close relationship between rituals and agricultural myths, which are also closely related to traditional religious beliefs (Boy, 2020).

The Dawan community living in the Timor island generally lives in groups, forming communities based on kanaf (clan). This community is almost exclusive with different cultural backgrounds. The Dawan people generally live by farming and animal husbandry. This is greatly influenced by the composition of the soil, climate, and water sources in the region. The soil conditions are porous clay soil containing lime, which is very difficult for vegetation to

grow. During the rainy season, the soil contains a lot of water and expands when full of rainwater. During the dry season, the soil becomes dry, and it is very difficult to find water sources in lower areas. Natural factors like these make people prefer to live in mountainous areas with abundant water. Mountainous areas are centers of settlement and agricultural centers. Mountainous areas are centers for the development of dry land farming dominated by crops and maize. Areas with clay soil are generally used as the basic material for crafts. For example, making pottery from clay, sculptures, flower pots, ashtrays, and other handicrafts that have high selling value. Meanwhile, for agricultural purposes, they generally choose highland areas as places to develop agriculture. The Dawan people develop agricultural businesses in mountainous areas; moving from place to place with the slash-and-burn system. Therefore, the settlements of the Dawan community are generally found in mountainous regions, namely in the inland areas of Timor island where the soil conditions are very dry. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Dawan people call themselves Atoni Pah Meto, which means "People of the dry region" or "People of the dry land".

The life of the Dawan community is always colored by various primitive rituals in every aspect of their lives. One of the rituals still known and practiced by primitive Dawan people is fua pah (de Jesus, 2021). This ritual was created to "overcome" the arid environment and unfriendly climate. Fua pah is one of the rituals closely related to the Dawan people's belief system about (God, Spirits, Universe, Earth, and Work). Fua pah is worship of the highest form that is unknown and beyond human reasoning. However, the presence of the highest form is perceived as something tremendous that exceeds human power. This will not be understood without knowing the relationship between farming, God, and worship of spirits in the fua pah ritual itself. The Fua Pah tradition is still alive and developing in the Dawan community to this day. This tradition has become a kind of constitutive symbol (forming beliefs), cognitive symbol (forming knowledge), moral judgment symbol (forming moral values and rules), and expressive symbols (expression of feelings). As a system of symbols, this tradition contains various meanings that are important for its supporting community.

The Dawan community is an agrarian society with various oral traditions. Oral traditions are often related to ritual languages and formal customary ceremonies prevailing in the community (Elu, 2019). In accordance with the demands and needs of the Dawan community's lives, which are generally dry field farmers, there is a close relationship between rituals and agricultural myths with traditional religious beliefs. This is especially evident in this Fua Pah ritual. Fua Pah is emotionally related to the mythology and belief system of the Dawan community (about God, spirits, the universe, earth, and work). The Fua Pah ritual is based on the local beliefs or religion of the Dawan community, which has various symbolic meanings.

METHOD

Based on Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, the author will examine the Fua Pah ritual, especially from the literary aspect (cf. Nenohai, 2018). In the field of literature, there

are four types of Dawan oral literature generally, namely Bonet, Heta, Tonis, and Nu'u (Banusu, 2020). Bonet is a type of rhythmic discourse or oral poetry often sung; Heta, when viewed from a structural perspective, is similar to bonet. Bonet is a type of formal ritual poetry sung in traditional ceremonies, while heta is an oral poetry spoken in a relaxed atmosphere without being sung; Tonis is a variety of customary language, so tonis narration is always in the context of custom. Tonis is a type of Dawan oral literature expressed in rhythmic language (poetry) with a touch of regular prose (lyrical prose); while Nu'u is a type of folk prose spoken in everyday language. In the Dawan community, there are two types of Nu'u, namely Nu'u that can only be narrated by tonis because it is related to the truth of customary law and its history, and ordinary nu'u, which can be narrated by anyone, usually in the form of folk stories.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Long before Christianity entered the island of Timor, the Dawan people already had a concept of the "Divine." The experience of the "Divine" is encountered in every aspect of human life. Life experience serves as the starting point for religious or spiritual life. Since ancient times, the Dawan community has faced the reality of life that cannot be grasped rationally. What is experienced in their lives is perceived as a mystery. This mystery is not the same as a puzzle. It is a great mystery that is never understood, yet its truth is undeniable in every human experience. Therefore, the Dawan people refer to the "Supreme Being" as Uis Neno. In addition to the sky god, the Dawan community also acknowledges the existence of an earth god or the ruler of the universe. This earth god is called Uis Pah or Pah Tuaf (pah meaning world or nature). Uis Neno and Uis Pah or Pah Tuaf are recognized as forming a divine unity. However, the superiority of Uis Neno remains evident. The power of Uis Neno surpasses that of any other deity (Tarno, 1993).

Uis Neno and Uis Pah or Pah Tuaf have different characteristics. Uis Neno is the creator, sustainer, and Almighty. Uis Pah or Pah Tuaf is seen as a harbinger of calamity for humans. Therefore, humans must strive to appease them through various ritual ceremonies. One such ritual ceremony, as discussed in this article, is the Fua Pah ceremony.

Uis Neno comes from the word Uis or Usi, meaning King, Master, Owner, while Neno means day, sky, Supreme Being. Uis Neno is interpreted as a God or "Deity." Uis Neno is the "Sky God" or the "Supreme Deity," possessing higher power and dominion over the sky and earth believed by the Dawan people to be "God." Uis Neno is considered the origin of everything; the creator, sustainer, and ruler of the universe. Uis Neno is also depicted as apinat ma aklaat or "The Burning and Blazing," afinit ma amnaut or "The Highest and The Overcoming of Everything." Uis Neno is also believed to be the giver of manikin ma oetene or "The one who provides us with food and health." Uis Neno's name cannot be mentioned directly. He is the god of rain, sunlight, or for obtaining offspring, health, and prosperity. In their tradition, Uis Neno is the most special deity among the other gods in the Dawan community (Taum, 2004:8).

Uis Neno is the "Supreme Deity" whose name cannot be mentioned directly. He is the "God" who reigns over the sky and earth. The Dawan community refers to this "Supreme Deity" as Uis Neno, the god of the day or the sky. The naming of their "God" as Uis Neno by the Dawan Christians was by the missionaries during the Portuguese colonial era. However, Uis Neno here is understood as the "King of the Sky" by the Dawan people themselves, who never directly refer to Uis Neno as the highest form. In various religious ceremonies, the designation for Uis Neno is always combined with other names or titles such as Uis Pah or Uis Naijan (the king of the earth or land). This indicates the Dawan community's mindset as a complementary parallel duality. However, these designations cannot be separated from each other but must always be preceded by the name Uis Neno. Therefore, we often encounter designations such as Uis Neno Uis Pah or Uis Neno Uis Naijan. The Dawan people maintain this understanding with the aim of preserving and acknowledging the aspects of transcendence and immanence. Uis Neno is believed to be far above the sky yet near. His closeness is shown in nature represented by his deities.

The presence of Uis Neno for the Dawan people of Timor arises from the experience of encountering other creations. This experience is felt as something awe-inspiring and beyond human reasoning. This experience leads the Dawan people to conclude that "something incomprehensible is God, which for the Dawan people is Uis Neno." The presence of Uis Neno, according to the understanding of the Dawan people, is through water, land, sky, and other natural objects such as large stones, sacred trees, believed to have power. Uis Neno, the creator and sustainer, plays a significant role in human life. Uis Neno's role in the Dawan community, based on his divine attributes, are: First: Apinat ma Aklaat: fiery and blazing. This indicates Uis Neno as the sun. The tremendous heat and light of the sun cannot be matched by any other heat or light. Uis Neno, who is Almighty, cannot be surpassed by any power. Uis Neno is the sun and the true light. Second, Amoet ma Apakaet: creator and sustainer. Uis Neno is the creator of the universe and everything in it. He is the cause of everything. He is the ruler of heaven and earth, and all creatures must submit to him. Third: Alikin ma Apean: the opener of paths and the ruler of life. Uis Neno is the initial cause of everything. He is the one who initiates everything, and all creatures depend on him. He also governs the entire journey of human life. He is

Uis Pah is the term for the spirits believed to rule over the land. According to the beliefs of the Dawan community, these spirits inhabit large trees, big rocks, rivers, and mountains. This deity is considered a female goddess who accompanies Uis Neno. Each spirit residing in these places has its role. "These spirits and deities are various manifestations of the highest god of the Dawan people, Uis Neno. This highest deity manifests in various types of lower deities and is authorized to handle specific areas or aspects of life."

The Dawan community, in the implementation of certain rituals, is always marked by the use of ritual language, which is one form of oral poetry. Ritual language is the highest point recognized in the process of learning, understanding, and systematizing culture, which usually belongs to the elderly. The ritual language created by oral poets (*lasi tonis*) indeed has aesthetic

effects, but its main function is to secure the value system in the community for generations. To understand the implementation of the Fua Pah ritual, it is necessary to further understand the agricultural ritual cycle, a series of activities where the Dawan community performs these ceremonies.

The arid and dry conditions of the land make the Dawan people generally practice shifting cultivation. For land preparation, the Dawan community must go through several stages: the stage of clearing the forest/clearing the garden (ta'nelat hun mau); the stage of burning the forest (polo nopo/sifo nopo); the planting stage (tapoen fini buke); the stage of plant growth (eka ho'e); and the first harvest stage (eka pen a smanan ma anne smanan) (Taum, 2000:10).

It has been said that besides the Supreme God (Uis Neno), the Dawan people also acknowledge the existence of the Earth God (Uis Pah or Pah Tuaf). It has also been said that they each have their own characteristics. Uis Neno has good traits, while Uis Pah or Pah Tuaf has traits that are not good or detrimental. Therefore, humans must appease them by holding ritual ceremonies.

Etymologically, Fua Pah comes from the root word fuat, which means worship, look up, and pray with the hope that prayers will be answered, while Pah means earth, world, or nature. In relation to the agrarian world, Fua Pah means worshiping the king or ruler of the earth or nature. The Fua Pah ritual ceremony is a worship ceremony to the Supreme God by offering sacrifices. This ceremony is carried out with various intentions according to needs, for example, when preparing new agricultural land, giving thanks for harvests, and so on. The places commonly used to hold this ceremony are on mountains or in fields. Places like these are considered powerful and sacred. The belief in sacred places like mountains, hills, and large rocks is not only acknowledged by the Timor Dawan community but also by various tribes in Indonesia (Taum, 1998: 208-216).

Fua Pah is a unique tradition in the traditional agricultural cultural realm. The ritual of offering sacrifices as offerings to Uis Pah or Pah Tuaf is always carried out in six stages of agricultural activities, from clearing new gardens to harvesting, picking garden produce, and expressing gratitude to Uis Neno for abundant harvests. Oral poets (lasi tonis) in the Dawan community are believed to be blessed individuals with religious magical powers. They are believed to play a primary role in all traditional ceremonies and other formal ceremonial events. Oral poets are often depicted as 'highly knowledgeable' individuals with high status in society because they master literature-creator" (Benu, 2023). Their utterances are considered more valuable than pearls. Their words are believed to convey and demonstrate the truth.

Table 1. Dawam Poets

Verses	Meaning
Hi lof es mpao neten, Ma esa mpao kobe Neu anin, Neu kolo Neu sabuin, Ma neu kauna huma Es nbi nifu, Es nbi pah Es Enam Mnasi, Tua Es Amam Mnasi	You are the one who guards the hills, And watches over the valleys As well as the wind, And the birds and the ants, and the snakes Also in the pond, also in the earth

Neu kolo, Es anem usi ke mnasi Ho lof es muaib, Ma mupikab Ho honi, Ma ho ta'os Muhike nfaen, Ma mupanen nfaen	also the Old Mother, Also the Old Father For the birds, who are the rice and the king You are the one who protects, and saves Those you bear, and those you create Preserve them again, Save them again
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A significant note that needs to be understood from the passage above is that concerning the Fua Pah tradition, the worship, offerings, and hopes of the Dawan people are directed not towards a singular entity, but towards the "tri-unity": the ancestors (Abo, Uis Nitu), Uis Pah, and Uis Neno. The highest subject and object of Dawan society's belief are Uis Neno, Allah, or the Creator of the Universe and all its contents. So, even though the ritual series is known by the name Fua Pah, meaning 'offering to Uis Pah,' their offering's object and subject are these three divine powers.

Fua Pah is one of the ritual ceremonies of the Timor Dawan community towards Uis Neno or uis pah or Pah Tuaf as the ruler of the sky and earth. This ritual ceremony is performed when the Timor Dawan community is about to prepare new agricultural land or to give thanks for a new harvest. The Timor Dawan community believes that Uis Neno and Uis Pah or Pah Tuaf are the ones responsible for all bountiful harvests as well as crop failures. This ritual ceremony is usually held in places considered sacred and possessing mystical powers such as mountains, hills, large rocks, and large banyan trees. Places like these are acknowledged by the Timor Dawan community as places where Uis Neno and Uis Pah or Pah Tuaf reveal themselves. It is in these places that the Timor Dawan community performs this ritual ceremony. The key figure in this ritual ceremony is the tobe, the "priest." The person playing the role of the "priest" in this ritual ceremony is the customary elder or tribal chief respected in Timor Dawan society. In this ritual ceremony, the necessary items include sacrificial animals (cattle, pigs, chickens, or goats), muti or iun leko (a red stone necklace worn by Dawan people, some made of gold), puah ma manus (betel nuts and betel leaves), tua nakaf (the chief's liquor, the finest alcoholic beverage of the Dawan people). Puah-manus and tua nakaf function as religious communication and maintaining a good and harmonious relationship with Uis Neno, and the last one is bete-tais (the sarong of the Dawan people). The ritual ceremony to offer sacrifices to Uis Neno is carried out in five or six stages, starting from preparing new agricultural land to the harvesting stage.

In the previous section, we have seen the five stages of agricultural activities: the stage of clearing the forest or clearing the garden, the stage of burning the forest, the planting stage, the stage of crop growth, and the stage of the first harvest. This ritual ceremony is carried out with the recitation of prayers or mantras to offer praise, requests, and gratitude to Uis Neno. The prayers or mantras in Timor Dawan society are called lasi tonis. These prayers or mantras are delivered by a tobe or "priest," a customary elder trusted by the local community. In Timor Dawan society, the tobe plays an important role in all customary ceremonies and other ceremonial events. The tobe in Timor Dawan society is considered blessed and possesses magical religious powers. All prayers or mantras spoken by a tobe are believed to have a power

exceeding that of a sword. The words of prayer or mantra spoken by a tobe are considered effective and convey truth. After the tobe recites the lasi tonis (prayer or mantra), the ritual ceremony continues with the sacrifice of sacrificial animals. The blood of the sacrificial animal is smeared on a faot bena or a flat stone that has been prepared and serves as a mesbah. Besides the faot bena, the blood of the sacrificial animal is also smeared on the seeds to be planted. After that, the meat of the animal is cooked and then offered to Uis Neno-Uis Pah or Tuaf. The meat to be offered to Uis Neno-Uis Pah or Tuaf must be the best meat. For quadruped animals like cattle, goats, and pigs, the best meat for offering is the heart and the best meat, while for birds like chickens, the best meat is the thigh and breast. The meat is then placed together with rice on the mesbah as an offering to Uis Neno-Uis Pah or Tuaf with a special lasi tonis recitation. This special lasi tonis contains an invitation to Uis Neno-Uis Pah or Tuaf that the offering is ready and may Uis Neno-Uis Pah or Tuaf be pleased to accept it. After the tobe delivers the lasi tonis invitation, the offering must be eaten by the "congregation" present (Tamelab, 2020).

Discussion

In its tradition, the Dawan people, through the Fua Pah tradition, move towards unity with God. Unity with God is achieved through a harmonious relationship with the natural creation of God itself. Fua Pah is one of the bridges to build a harmonious relationship with nature. Furthermore, this harmonious relationship will lead humans (the Dawan community) towards unity with God. Unity with God is felt through love, peace, and prosperity in this world.

Linguistic experts believe that language contains cultural elements and human activities are formed through linguistic assistance. Hans-Georg Gadamer built his hermeneutic philosophy by using language as his primary concern. Language then plays a significant role in aiding human understanding, but language is only one "tool" in the interpretation process. In other words, language alone is not sufficient to help humans understand the diversity and complexity of language and human actions. This task is the responsibility of hermeneutics because for Gadamer, the main vision of hermeneutics is renewal. Language also serves as a medium for humans to express their views about the world.

Gadamer's hermeneutical task is to help humans narrow the gap between subjects. The process of understanding is always done in a specific context, space, and time. Humans never exist on their own but are always formed through various dimensions behind them. The following process that is equally important is his understanding of humans as historical beings. The consciousness of the historical life places humans in a condition that causes them to always stand on certain awareness. Understanding can always be applied to our current situation, even though it relates to historical events, dialectics, and language. All life experiences, language, and understanding are historical. Thus, human (community) experiences with nature and culture (Fua Pah) are also historical.

The hermeneutical situation is the gateway to the process of interpretation and understanding. This situation arises because there is a dialogue between subjects who are

talking to each other. Dialogue then opens up the horizons of each subject's thinking by involving various life experiences, thus leading to new understanding. At this stage, the subject has activated a cognitive state called the horizon of understanding. Understanding means making an interpretation. Explicit interpretation is a form of understanding. Understanding is inseparable from the action of what is understood. Therefore, Gadamer divides hermeneutics into three parts: understanding (*subtilitas intellegendi*), interpretation (*subtilitas explicandi*), and application (*subtilitas applicandi*).

For Gadamer, every human action has a hermeneutical value that can be understood not only through methods alone but also through rational reasoning involving all cultural elements. This is because what is known as the human way of life has been passed down through generations. At this stage, Gadamer shows the connection between the historical dimension of the past and the present dimension. Actions in the present, such as culture and way of life, continue to occur in the present through the power of "understanding" and "application." Perhaps this concept can be found in the Fuah Pah tradition.

Talking about Fuah Pah from Gadamer's hermeneutical perspective would be clearer if seen from the function of the Fuah Pah ritual itself. The rituals and actions in the Fua Pah tradition can be categorized into four functions. These functions are closely related to the mythical elements behind them. These four functions are not only mythical but primarily sociological in nature. These four functions are as follows:

Magical Function. This function is closely related to the use of materials in the Fua Pah ceremony believed to work because of mythical powers. For example, divination through the heart of animals. From the heart of the sacrificial animal, one can determine whether our requests and prayers are accepted or not. This action is clearly a magical act, through which humans can know the will of the divine (*Uis Neno* or *Uis Pah/Pah Tuaf*). Through the Fua Pah ceremony, the Timor Dawan community intends to win the hearts of *Uis Neno* and *Uis Pah* or *Pah Tuaf* so that they do not disturb and damage the crops. This is shown through the beautiful poetic language of *lasi tonis* and through the offering of sacrificial animals.

Religious Function. The performance of the Fua Pah ritual is an action that can be classified as a creative and socially dimensioned religious act. In this ceremony, all members of the community gather together with the tribal chief and creatively perform this ceremony for the common good. Our ancestors also did something similar, and it is considered sacred. Therefore, the Fua Pah ritual in Timor Dawan society also has a religious function and serves as a local religious symbol for the Timor Dawan community.

Factual Function. This function is closely related to increasing the productivity and strength of the Timor Dawan community to meet material needs collectively or in groups. The motivation to improve collective welfare within the tribe is a factual action evident in the Fua Pah ritual. This function is not only manifested through sacrifices to the ancestors but more so as their active role in every action for the common good.

Identification Function. The identification function is related to efforts for renewal and improvement of life. This renewal is evident in group ritual ceremonies in identifying fertility,

availability of game, and harvests. For example, if many stars are visible in the sky at night, the Dawan people start saying that there are many fish in the river. Such identification is considered mythical, but at the level of human behavior, it cannot be separated from ritual and mythical phenomena. The Fua Pah ceremony is based on an identification motivation because the community wants their harvest to succeed.

Based on the functions of Fua Pah as described above, a common thread can be drawn connecting it to Gadamer's hermeneutics. Its relevance refers to four concepts about human beings that enrich hermeneutics. Fua Pah is a historical tradition; a past experience inherited by the ancestors of the Dawan tribe; a spirituality; an expression; a ritual rich in meaning and abundant in language and symbols. Fua Pah is also a form of oral literature containing magical or sacred elements. The life of the Dawan community is always colored by various primitive rituals in their daily lives. Fua pah is one of the rituals closely related to the Dawan community's belief system regarding (God, Spirits, Universe, Earth, and Work). Fua pah is worship towards the highest unknown entity and beyond human reasoning. However, the presence of this highest entity is perceived as something tremendous that surpasses human capabilities. This cannot be understood without knowing the relationship between farming, God, and reverence for spirits within the Fua Pah ritual itself.

CONCLUSION

The Timor Dawan community is a ritualistic society that has numerous ritual ceremonies that color every aspect of their lives. The demand for livelihood due to the harsh nature and unfriendly climate, the Fua Pah ritual was created as a way to cope with these challenges. With the barren and dry conditions of the environment, the Dawan people must work hard. One way to "tame" nature is through worship and reverence to Uis Pah, believed to be responsible for the fertility of the land. Uis Neno is the core and deepest center of this belief and faith. Uis Neno is the perfect God, the God of light, and the God of the entire universe. This is the essence of the belief of the Timor Dawan people.

Similarly, the Dawan community practices worship to Uis Neno through the Fua Pah ceremony. The rituals of belief and worship to Uis Neno through the Fua Pah ceremony have indirectly formed a belief in a higher and divine being. These beliefs ultimately lead them to an understanding of the one and Almighty God. Understanding the one and Almighty God becomes clear with the advent of Christianity in Timor. The understanding of Uis Neno began to undergo a shift in meaning and significance. Uis Neno is no longer understood as the highest vague deity, but as the true and known God.

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