

Community Perceptions of the Maru-Maru Dance Performance: A Sociocultural Study in Solea Village, West Seram Regency, Maluku, Indonesia

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Abstract

The Maru-Maru dance is a rich and unique form of cultural expression for the people of Seram Island, particularly in the western part of Maluku Province. This dance serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium for conveying cultural messages and local identity. This study employs descriptive research aimed at exploring and classifying a social phenomenon or reality—and utilizes a case study approach, which involves an intensive, in-depth, and comprehensive examination of a specific case. The research findings indicate a high level of community participation in Maru-Maru dance performances, evidenced by the presence of people from various age groups at every event. Active community participation in cultural activities fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility regarding the preservation of local culture. For the people of Negeri Solea, the Maru-Maru is a traditional dance dating back to the era when their ancestors lived in Nunusaku; it is deeply rooted in local custom and heritage, making it imperative for the descendants of Negeri Solea to safeguard, preserve, and perform the dance wherever they may be. The Maru-Maru dance possesses distinctive characteristics that the Solea community has steadfastly maintained to this day without losing any elements; everyone—from young children to adults—is taught the dance, as the people of Negeri Solea view their lives as inseparable from the Maru-Maru tradition.

Keywords: Community perception, Cultural identity, Maru-Maru dance, Cultural sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The Maru-Maru dance is a rich and unique form of cultural expression among the people of Seram Island, particularly in the western part of Maluku Province. This dance serves not only as a form of entertainment but also as a means of conveying cultural messages and local identity. Over time, the performance of this dance has undergone various changes in both technical and social aspects. This study aims to explore the performance of the Maru-Maru dance and the factors influencing it in western Seram Island. Previous research indicates that traditional dances play a vital role in preserving a community's cultural identity. As noted by Jansen et al. (2016), "Traditional dances reflect the social and cultural characteristics inherent in a community and serve as a tool to strengthen local identity" (Jansen et al., 2016). Furthermore, dance functions as an effective medium of communication that fosters social bonds among community members (Amalia, 2018).

In the context of Indonesian culture, regional dances such as Maru-Maru often face the challenges of

modernization and globalization. According to Supriyanto (2018), "Globalization has a significant impact on traditional dances, influencing both their preservation and their adaptation to changing times" (Supriyanto, 2018). This creates a need for a deeper understanding of how the people of Seram Island—particularly in the western region—maintain and preserve this dance amidst dynamic conditions. Research on the Maru-Maru dance in western Seram Island is also crucial for addressing existing research gaps. Although various studies have examined traditional dances in Indonesia, very few have specifically focused on Maru-Maru. As noted by Iskandar and Setiawan (2019), "Research on traditional dances in specific regions is often overlooked, even though these dances play a vital role in the preservation of local culture" (Iskandar & Setiawan, 2019).

Furthermore, the performance of the Maru-Maru Dance is influenced by various social, economic, and cultural factors that warrant further investigation to ensure a better understanding. In this regard, this study aims to analyze the role of the local community in the performance of the dance and their responses to ongoing changes. The findings are expected to contribute to the fields of cultural and artistic studies and provide greater insight into the preservation of local culture amidst the forces of globalization. This study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing data collection methods that include observation and in-depth interviews. This aligns with the view of Prabowo (2020), who states that "a qualitative approach is highly suitable for examining complex and dynamic social phenomena" (Prabowo, 2020). Consequently, this study will offer a more holistic overview of the Maru-Maru Dance performance and how the community of western Seram Island responds to existing challenges.

The history and evolution of the Maru-Maru dance also warrant attention. This dance is believed to originate from an ancient tradition that has existed for centuries. According to Saputra (2021), "The Maru-Maru dance is a cultural heritage rich in philosophical values and profound symbolism" (Saputra, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to reflect upon the meanings and values embodied in this dance to ensure they are not lost to the passage of time. In an academic context, this research contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the fields of arts and culture while offering fresh insights for ethnographic studies in Indonesia. As stated by Lestari (2020), "Ethnographic studies can enrich our understanding of cultural and social dynamics within local communities" (Lestari, 2020). Consequently, the performance of the Maru-Maru dance in western Seram Island stands out as a key area requiring further exploration.

Ultimately, this research is expected to provide recommendations for the preservation of the Maru-Maru dance and raise public awareness regarding the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage. This aligns with the view expressed by Rahmat (2019): "The preservation of local culture must be an integral part of community development so that traditional identity and values are maintained" (Rahmat, 2019). Thus, this research focuses not only on academic aspects but also on practical implications for the local community.

METHOD

Types of research

The type of research employed in this study is descriptive research—research intended to explore and classify a specific phenomenon or social reality—while the approach utilized is the case study method, which focuses on an intensive, in-depth, and comprehensive examination of a single case.

Research Location

This research was conducted in Negeri Solea, Taniwel Timur District, West Seram Regency. The research location is shown in Figure 1.

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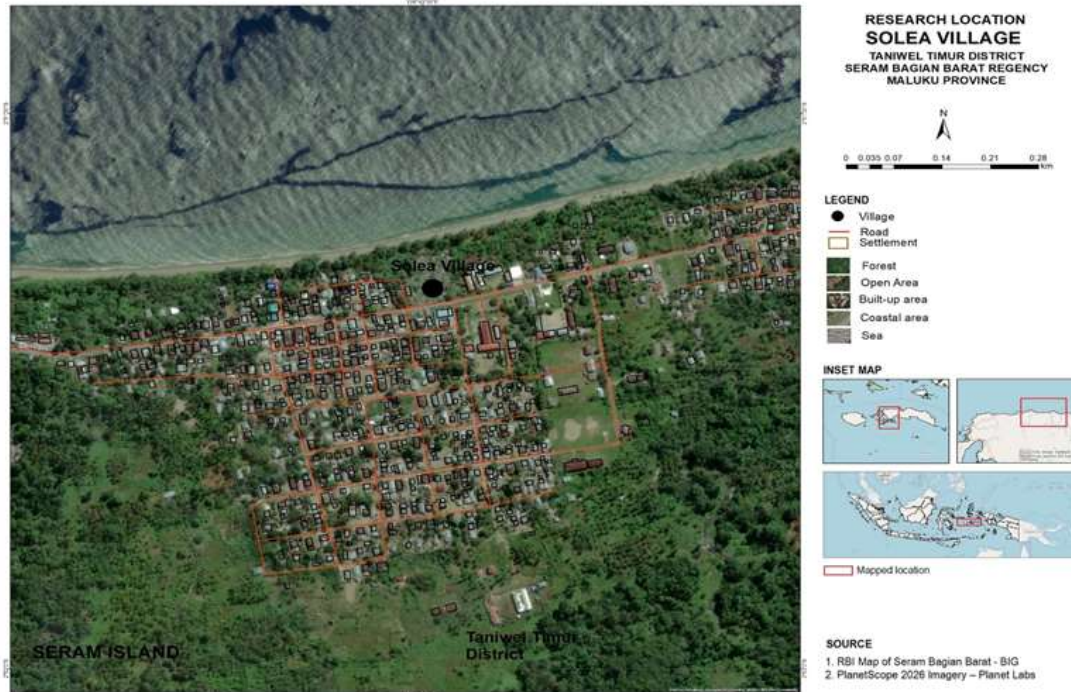


Figure 1. Research location.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis is the process of simplifying data into a form that is easier to read and interpret. The analysis employed here is descriptive, focusing on addressing actual problems; the collected data is organized, described, and subsequently analyzed.

RESULT

History of the Land of Solea

Originally, the Alune and Wemale tribes—broadly categorized as Patasiwa and Patalima—resided in the central highlands of Seram Island (Nusaina) at a place called Nunusaku. However, a conflict arose when local inhabitants killed the King's daughter, Rapie Hainuele; enraged by this act, the King ordered a mass exodus, resulting in a major schism. The people were organized into several groups, each led by a *Kapitan* (captain). They departed Nunusaku for a location known as Taamenasiwa, where they subdivided into three groups and erected *baileu* (traditional meeting houses) reflecting their respective ancestral origins. From Taamenasiwa, they dispersed in all directions—west, east, north, and south. It was from this point that the distinctions known as Patasiwa and Patalima emerged. A significant portion of the population fell under the Patasiwa grouping; this included the communities that had left Nunusaku to settle in the northern part of Seram Island or in the region known as Uli Patai.

Location, Area, and Accessibility

Negeri Solea is geographically located in Taniwel Timur District, West Seram Regency. The distance from Negeri Solea to the district administrative center is approximately 10 meters, while the distance to the regency capital is 287 kilometers.

The territorial boundaries of Negeri Solea, Taniwel Timur District, are as follows:

- North : Musihuwey Village
- South : Mountains

- West : Tounussa Village
- East : Waraloin Village

Solea features a land area of approximately 2,000 square meters and a population of 433 people, comprising 219 males and 214 females.

Population of Solea Country

Based on the research results and field data collection, the population of Negeri Solea is 433 people, comprising 219 males (50.57%) and 214 females (49.42%). Table 1 presents the population figures for Negeri Solea.

Table 1. Population of Solea by Age Group and Sex

No	Age Group	Gender		Amount	Percentage
		Man	Woman		
1	0 – 10	40	38	78	18.01
2	11 – 20	30	29	59	13.62
3	21 – 30	35	34	69	15.93
4	31 – 40	37	35	72	16.62
5	41 – 50	30	34	64	14.78
6	51 – 60	32	30	62	14.31
7	over 60	15	14	29	6.69
Amount		219	214	433	100

Based on the results of field research and data collection, the population of Negeri Solea is 433 people, consisting of 219 males (50.57%) and 214 females (49.42%).

Religious

The entire population of Negeri Solea is Protestant Christian; consequently, there is a single church building serving the religious needs of several villages—namely Uweng Pantai, Tounussa, Solea, Musihuwey, and Waraloin—which are united under a single congregation known as the Uweng Gabungan Congregation.

Education

Education is essential today for developing high-quality human resources across all sectors, a process greatly supported by adequate facilities, infrastructure, and teaching staff. The educational landscape in Negeri Solea is already well-established, featuring Early Childhood Education (PAUD), Kindergarten, and Elementary, Junior High, and Senior High schools. Details regarding the levels of education in Negeri Solea are presented in the table below; specifically, these levels are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Educational Attainment of the Population in Solea Village

No	Level of education	Population Count	Persentase
1	Not yet in school	20	5.19
2	TK	12	3.11
3	SD	164	42.59
4	SMP	86	22.33
5	SMA	97	25.19
6	Academy/Higher Education Institution	6	1.55
Amount		842	100

Table 2 indicates that the level of education among the people of Negeri Solea is quite good; this is due to the community's awareness regarding the importance of sending their children to school.

The Origins of the Muru-Muru Dance

The Maru-Maru dance originated with the ancestors of the Maluku people during their time in Nunusaku—believed to be their place of origin—before they dispersed across Seram Island and the surrounding regions. Initially, the community lived in peace and harmony; however, this tranquility began to shift as the population grew and feelings of jealousy and envy emerged among the people. Eventually, a certain group harbored malice toward the daughter of a *Kapitan Elake* (a high-ranking chieftain)—a woman renowned for her beauty and charm—and plotted to harm her. They chose the occasion of a traditional Nunusaku festival to execute their scheme; as the festivities unfolded, the group surrounded the beautiful daughter, forming a circle and dancing while singing, effectively masking their murderous intent from the other revelers who remained engrossed in the celebration, unaware of the plot against her.

The malicious group pushed the daughter into a pre-dug pit; once she was inside, they covered her with earth and trampled the ground flat, causing her death. When the festivities concluded, the *Kapitan Besar* (Elake) realized his daughter was missing but did not know her whereabouts; he and his group searched for seven days before finally discovering her lifeless body. This incident sparked a major conflict between the killers and the *Kapitan Besar*'s faction. As unease spread among the populace, various small groups departed the ancient settlement of Nunusaku in search of safe havens; the Soslaltu (Solea) group, traveling alongside six other groups, arrived at Sapulau Latale (Waraloin) to rebuild their lives before eventually settling in their current home. The dance known as *maru-maru* originated from the events surrounding the *Kapitan Besar*'s daughter's death; the group continued to perform this dance after arriving at Sapulau Latale and has preserved the tradition to this day.

In the eyes of the Maluku people, the Maru-Maru dance was created as a social dance symbolizing the unity of the Maluku people. Historically, the Maru-Maru dance was performed as a concluding act following traditional ceremonies—such as celebrations marking initiation into the *Takehan* society (a rite of passage for Nuaulu boys transitioning into manhood), the construction of a *Baileo* (communal meeting house) or a chieftain's residence, and the inauguration of a village leader (*Raja Negeri*). The Maru-Maru dance itself is inextricably linked to the legend of Princess Hanuele. Legend has it that Nunusaku was the oldest kingdom on Seram Island, ruled by a *Kapitan Besar* (or *Elake*) who had a daughter named Hanuele. Princess Hanuele was the most beautiful woman in the kingdom, and as a result, she was highly sought after by the men.

Attire and Types of Maru-Maru Dance

Maru-maru is a type of dance found in the western part of Seram Island—specifically in the districts of Kairatu, Piru, Taniwel, and others. The word *maru-maru* means "to walk." The Maru-maru dance is characterized by relatively slow movements. It is a communal dance involving almost the entire population of a village, requiring a spacious venue for its performance—such as the courtyard of the *baileo* (traditional meeting house) or the chief's (raja's) courtyard, which are typically large. Originally, the costumes reflected a traditional, early societal style: men wore *Cidaku* or *Aiunte*, while women wore *Kanune*. Other elements of the attire included:

- *Pua-puane* or earrings, and
- *Wanue* or beads
- *Lopa-lopa* or a traditional Maluku bag
- A headband made from *laleba* (bamboo pith) and adorned with chicken feathers.

However, over time, the attire for this dance has been influenced by the advancement of civilization; men wear *malarikano* trousers and a *cele* shirt or *kebaya*, while women wear a *cele* shirt with a *salele* cloth.

The maru-maru dance is divided into five types, namely:

a) Maru Tinai

This is a type of *maru-maru* that incorporates *kapata*—oral narratives—recounting the diaspora from Nunusaku. This specific form was originally performed involving 99 circles, prior to the dispersal of the various groups of Seram people. *Maru Tinai* is recognized as a *kapata* that chronicles the locations visited by the ancestors as they departed from Nunusaku..

b) Hope

It is a type of *maru-maru* that recounts daily life; the content of the *kapata* within the *maru-maru hope* typically depicts the virtues or vices of a specific individual or group.

c) Ihalehuwei

It is a type of *maru-maru* characterized by an exchange similar to the trading of *pantun* (traditional poetic verses). In this format, one person initiates a greeting and another responds, creating a form of dialogue through song.

d) Torule

It is a type of *maru-maru* dance featuring lyrics that tell stories about the lives of young men and women, performed while standing and moving in a circle.

e) Lakena

It is a type of *maru-maru* similar to the *torule*. The *kapata* involves a narrative concerning young men and women, yet it is performed while seated—unlike other forms of *maru-maru*. Within the *lakena* context, *kapata* verses can be used either to praise one another or to disparage one another.

Each type of *maru-maru* has its own unique story, centering on a specific moment that serves as both the subject and the object of the message conveyed through chanted verses and accompanying movements that enact the narrative. *Maru tinai*, for instance—as previously mentioned—refers to the historical lore of the Wemale sub-tribe (an ethnic group in West Seram) and other sub-tribes currently inhabiting Seram Island and the surrounding islands. *Maru tinai* recounts a tragic event for the Wemale people: the killing of Rapiye Hainuwele, who was revered as the Princess of Seram.

Maru-Maruk Dance Performance

The Maru-maru dance is open to everyone—both men and women—to participate. There is no limit on the number of dancers; the more dancers who join, the more layers of concentric circles are formed. The dance becomes lively as participants dance together, and the movements themselves are simple.

The *Maru-maru* dance troupe consists of a *kapitan* (leader), a *mamiri*, *Maru* dancers, *tifa* drummers, a *tahuri* player, and a *kapata* chanter. The *kapitan* is responsible for directing and encouraging the dancers, issuing commands through distinctive shouts. The *kapitan* takes the lead position in the dance formation; as the dance progresses, he runs around the dancers while shouting.

The *mamiri* is responsible for guiding the dancers; they walk alongside the dancers, accompanying them with waving hand movements. The *tifa* drummers are categorized by the type of drum they play: the small *tifa* known as *Ihaanairo* and the large *tifa* known as *Ihahinandalo*. Like the dancers, there is no fixed limit on the number of drummers. One of the drummers often also plays the *tahuri* (shell trumpet) at the beginning and end of the performance to signal the start and conclusion of the *maru-maru* dance. The *kapata* chanter is sometimes also one of the *tifa* drummers.

In terms of formation, they typically position themselves at the front of the line; however, if the group of dancers grows large, they will sit in the center of the circle. Both male and female dancers perform the *maru-maru* barefoot.

The Maru-maru dance consists of two types of basic movements, namely:

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A slow movement known as Maru-maru.

Initially, the dance begins with the slow, rhythmic beat of the *tifa* drum, prompting the dancers to move at a measured pace; this phase is known as *maru-rapu*. As the tempo and movement quicken, a variation known as *rapu-rapu* (meaning "somewhat fast") emerges. These movements symbolize the beginning of a bond, progressing from initial acquaintance to the process of adapting to one another's personalities within a friendship.

A rapid movement known as Toti or Amatoti.

Midway through the performance, the tempo of the *tifa* drums accelerates, requiring the dancers to quicken their movements as well. This phase is known as *Toti* or *Amatoti*. These rapid movements are cheerful and joyful in nature, symbolizing the bond of camaraderie established within the group.

Additionally, the basic directional movements are as follows:

Forward movement

In this movement, the dancer remains standing while taking a step forward.

Gerak mundur

The dancers maintain a slightly stooped posture while holding hands, moving forward and then backward. The bending or squatting motion occurs when the pace of the steps quickens—a movement known as *toti* or *amatoti*.

The Maru-maru dance follows a circular formation, with dancers moving from left to right around the musicians. The circle can be expanded into multiple rings depending on the number of participants and the size of the performance area. Before the Maru-maru dance begins, a ritual known as *Manuru* is performed to invite people to join in the dance; this ritual is carried out by the *tifa* drummers and the *kapata* chanter.

To accompany the maru-maru dance, kapata is sung. Kapata is a form of traditional Maluku song performed in the language of the land. Kapata has poetry with historical meaning and is expressed in the form of songs, poetry and rhymes. Kapata tells, among other things, the history of the ancestors of the Maluku people, the war in Nunusaku, and the daily activities of the ancestors, such as fishing or gardening. One example of kapata that is often used is kapata Maru.

Maru

Uru patasiwa uru siwa rima o..

Uru siwa rima o..

Uru nusa ina o..

(The People of Siwalima. The People of Nusa Ina.)

Nunu saku o...

Nunu saku..nunu o...

Nunu nusa ina.

Nunu siwa rima o..

(Hurry to Nunusaku. On Nusa Ina.)

Sei hale hatu

Hatu lisa pey o..

Sey lesy sou

Sou lesi pey o..

(Whoever turns over a rock, the rock hits him. Whoever breaks the oath, swears to kill him).

This *kapata* is chanted at both slow and fast tempos to accompany the dancers' movements in the *maru-maru* and *amatoti* footwork.

DISCUSSION

The schism at Nunusaku triggered the formation of new groups led by *Kapitans*. Each group migrated from Nunusaku to Taamenasiwa, where they further organized into three subgroups based on their origins. This was highlighted by Nurhidayah (2020), who noted that such social migrations often influence the cultures and traditions that develop in a region.

This event has had a significant impact on the cultural identity of the communities on Seram Island. According to Sari et al. (2019), the separation and migration of individuals from one location to another often lead to the formation of new traditions and adaptation to new environments. In this context, the Maru-Maruk dance stands as a symbol of a cultural identity shaped by a rich history, with every movement and rhythm within the dance embodying profound meaning.

The Maru-Maruk dance can be viewed as a form of cultural expression that is not only enjoyable but also holds deeper significance as a symbol of unity and group identity. As explained by Putra (2021), traditional dances often serve as a means to reinforce a community's sense of identity. This dance is not merely entertainment; it also plays a role in conveying the values and norms prevalent within the society. Furthermore, the division of the community into the Patasiwa and Patalima groups has significant implications for the performance of this dance. The Patasiwa community, primarily inhabiting the Uli Patai region, exhibits variations in the performance of the Maru-Maruk dance, reflecting the cultural richness inherent to each group. This aligns with findings reported by Alamsyah (2018) regarding the importance of ethnic identity in the performance of traditional arts.

The performance of the Maru-Maruk dance reveals how a history of division influences social interactions between groups. Research by Hartati (2022) indicates that traditional dances often serve as a bridge to overcome differences and rebuild relationships between previously separated groups. With its distinctive movements and rhythms, the Maru-Maruk dance acts as a medium to celebrate diversity while fostering a sense of commonality among the Patasiwa and Patalima communities. Furthermore, research by Susanto (2019) demonstrates that artistic activities, such as dance, have the potential to generate social cohesion within fragmented societies. This dance is not merely a cultural activity; it can also be interpreted as an effort to mend ties between members of groups that were once divided.

The Maru-Maruk dance is an integral part of the culture of the Maluku people, boasting a long history and reflecting profound social values. According to research by Sulistiyono (2021), traditional dances in Indonesia often serve as a medium to strengthen community identity and preserve local culture amidst the tide of globalization (Sulistiyono, 2021). In the context of Negeri Solea, this dance acts as a means to strengthen social bonds among community members, introduce the younger generation to their cultural heritage, and ensure the continuity of the tradition.

Research findings indicate a high level of community participation in the performance of the Maru-Maruk dance, evidenced by the presence of people from various age groups at every performance. According to Sihombing (2020), active community participation in cultural activities fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility regarding the preservation of local culture. The participation of both men and women in the Maru-Maruk dance demonstrates that gender is not a barrier to cultural preservation; rather, it serves as a platform for social collaboration.

The performance of the Maru-Maruk dance also generates economic benefits for the community. As noted by Handayani et al. (2019), cultural activities involving local residents can serve as a source of income through the development of cultural tourism. Dances performed during specific celebrations attract not

only locals but also tourists, thereby holding the potential to boost the regional economy. Thus, the Maru-Maru dance serves not merely as entertainment but also as a means of economic empowerment for the community.

While the performance of this dance offers numerous benefits, the community also faces challenges. Research by Rinaldi (2018) indicates that globalization and modernization often threaten the continuity of local traditions, including the Maru-Maru dance (Rinaldi, 2018). The people of Negeri Solea must adapt to changing times without sacrificing their cultural values. Conversely, these challenges also create opportunities for innovation in the practice of art and culture. According to Widiastuti (2022), creativity in the development of performing arts can attract the interest of the younger generation and strengthen the position of local culture within a global context (Widiastuti, 2022).

CONCLUSION

In today's changing times, the emergence of traditional dances blended with modern styles risks altering the public's perception of the dance's original structure; while the result may be visually appealing, it can simultaneously lead to a shift away from the customs and cultural essence inherent in the traditional form—demonstrating how, amidst rapid technological advancement, such traditions and cultural elements may gradually fade away.

For the people of Solea, the *maru-maru* is a traditional dance that dates back to the era when their ancestors lived in Nunusaku. Deeply rooted in local custom and culture, it is considered essential for the descendants of Solea to safeguard, preserve, and regularly perform the *maru-maru* dance wherever they may be. The dance possesses unique characteristics that the Solea community has steadfastly maintained to this day, preserving every aspect of the tradition; everyone—from young children to adults—is taught the *maru* dances, as the people of Solea view the *maru-maru* as inseparable from their lives..

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