

Power Relations In The Myth Of *Dadong Guliang* And A Contemporary Societal Perspective

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Abstract: The myth of *Dadong* (Grandmother) *Guliang* illustrates the dialectics of *sekala–niskala* (the visible and the invisible) in Balinese cosmology, while simultaneously documenting historical and cultural power relations shaped as a response to the *grubug* plague in the 19th century. This study employs qualitative and ethnographic methods in Akah Village, Klungkung, integrating mythographic texts as critical discourse, participant observation, and in-depth interviews to reveal the socio-political dynamics embedded in the myth. The findings show that power relations are materialized through the political authority of the King of Klungkung in relocating the village, the ritual practice of *melarapan* by the Dusun Hyang Api community, and the transformation of myth into artistic forms (such as *ogoh-ogoh* and dance fragments) as well as viral digital content (TikTok and national media). The myth of *Dadong Guliang* persists as a living memory, evolving from an instrument of power legitimation in the past into a dynamic cultural identity in the contemporary era, with younger generations acting as adaptive agents of creativity.

Keywords: Balinese myth; *Dadong Guliang*; *sekala–niskala*; ethnography; power relations; cultural transformation; folklore adaptation.

INTRODUCTION

Balinese culture represents a rich and complex cosmological system shaped by the syncretic integration of *Hindu Dharma* with a pre-existing substratum of Austronesian animistic beliefs (Howe, 2001). This syncretism manifests clearly through ritual practices, social norms, and oral traditions which dynamically govern social behavior. Myth, in this context, serves not merely as a symbolic story or entertainment but as a living epistemology—one that encodes collective memory, societal norms, metaphysical beliefs, and responses to existential crises. In Bali, myths are not static; they are embodied through ritual performance, visual art, spatial organization, and everyday ethics, thereby reinforcing their function as both a cultural logic and a moral compass in society (Picard, 1996).

Balinese myths often take form as stories of supernatural beings, cosmological battles, moral exemplars, or taboo-related narratives. These narratives are deeply intertwined with everyday life, providing guidance on how to interact with the physical (*sekala*) and metaphysical (*niskala*) realms that coexist in the Balinese worldview (Eiseman, 1990). For example, the prohibition against bathing on *Kajeng Kliwon*, a sacred day believed to intensify metaphysical energies, teaches caution and reinforces the importance of bodily awareness and ritual purity. Although such prohibitions may appear irrational from a positivist standpoint, they convey hidden moral and hygienic teachings regarding times of heightened spiritual vulnerability. Similarly, the prohibition against sitting on a pillow—a weekly reminder commonly delivered to Balinese children—implicitly teaches humility and ethical behavior in treating objects considered extensions of human dignity.

From an anthropological perspective, myths in Bali operate in a liminal zone between official religion (*agama*) and folk belief (*adat*) (Geertz, 1973). These “two religions” are not contradictory but cooperative systems that collectively sustain cultural identity. Clifford Geertz describes Balinese religion as a “theatre state,” where rituals are not only religious obligations but also political expressions that reinforce authority (Geertz, 1980). Through this lens, myths become instruments that shape social hierarchy, legitimize political action, and formulate shared consciousness. For instance, myths surrounding deities who govern natural forces—such as the sea goddess variably referred to as *Ratu Kidul* or *Dewi Danu*—are embodied through elaborate ceremonies like *Labuhan Laut* and *Petik Laut*. These rituals not only express spiritual devotion but also reinforce ecological ethics, acknowledging the reciprocal relationship between humans and the natural world (Reuter, 2005).

Beyond prohibitory myths, Bali also possesses heroic legends tied to the origins of landscapes and royal dynasties, functioning as cultural maps and historical archives. Legends such as *Putri Ayu Bali*, *Kebo Iwa*, and *Manik Angkeran* illustrate the creation of Lake Batur, the Bali Strait, or the ancestral foundation of powerful clans. These myths simultaneously entertain, educate, and legitimate socio-political structures. In this tradition, the myth of *Dadong Guliang* stands as a distinctive narrative that exemplifies the dialectics of *sekala–niskala* and the embodiment of female spiritual power within a specific historical context. Originating from Desa Akah in Klungkung, the myth recounts a powerful elder woman whose supernatural acts are intertwined with collective memory of the *grubug* epidemic in the 19th century. As Wiener (1995) argues, Balinese myths often preserve traumatic histories by “transforming

violent realities into supernatural narratives,” enabling societies to make sense of suffering through metaphysical frameworks (p. 106).

The Dadong Guliang myth encapsulates several core Hindu-Balinese concepts, including *moksa* (liberation of the soul) and *karma phala* (moral causality). At the same time, it implicitly documents power relations between the community and the Kingdom of Klungkung, particularly during periods of forced relocation and crisis management. The transformation of history into myth enables political authority to be framed as cosmologically sanctioned. This demonstrates that myth is not merely a spiritual narrative but also a political discourse that legitimizes, negotiates, or challenges power structures (Barker, 2004). Thus, the myth of Dadong Guliang must be understood not solely as folklore, but as a cultural mechanism that shapes collective identity and navigates authority.

Despite the richness of this narrative, academic research that specifically examines the myth of Dadong Guliang from the perspective of cultural studies, power relations, and contemporary identity remains limited. Existing references are mostly fragmented in *babad* (chronicles), oral interviews, and local documentation produced by community leaders. The narrative continues to evolve in modern media, appearing in *ogoh-ogoh* (ritual puppets), dance fragments, visual art, and more recently viral digital content on platforms such as TikTok and national entertainment programs. These new modes of representation signify how traditional myths are adapted by youth as creative agents who reinterpret local knowledge for contemporary consumption (Ramstedt, 2018). The younger generations’ engagement with the myth illustrates how folklore functions dynamically—as both cultural heritage and a mutable symbol that responds to modernity.

Accordingly, this study seeks to analyze how the myth encodes historical power relations in its original context and how these relations are reinterpreted today. By drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, mythographic analysis, and critical cultural theory, this research aims to uncover the nuanced interplay between myth, authority, creativity, and identity within Balinese society. Ultimately, the study argues that the myth of Dadong Guliang functions as a living memory that continues to legitimate, negotiate, and creatively resist power in both traditional and contemporary forms.

METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative methodology grounded in ethnographic inquiry to explore the complexity of power relations embedded within the myth of Dadong Guliang and its reinterpretation in contemporary Balinese society. Ethnography enables researchers to investigate cultural meaning through long-term engagement, observation of ritual practices, and interaction with local actors (Spradley, 1980). Data collection was conducted through *triangulation of sources*, combining mythographic text analysis, oral tradition, and lived cultural practices to ensure interpretative validity (Denzin, 2012). The analysis of mythographic texts employs critical discourse analysis to deconstruct symbolic expressions of spirituality, gendered authority, and historical trauma conveyed in narrative structures, oral storytelling, and ritual vocabulary. This approach allows examination of how myth communicates collective memory and power, in line with symbolic anthropology that views culture as a system of meaning encoded through symbols and practices (Geertz, 1973).

Fieldwork was carried out in Desa Akah, Klungkung Regency, through participant observation and in-depth interviews with religious figures, community leaders, villagers, dancers, and youth creators who reinterpret the myth within digital media. Participant observation facilitated direct witnessing of ritual forms such as *melarapan*, discussions during communal gatherings, and artistic expressions like *ogoh-ogoh* construction, which embody contemporary myth adaptation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Thematic analysis was applied to code collected data based on categories drawn from symbolic anthropology and the concept of liminality, which examines how myths mediate boundaries between the visible (*sekala*) and invisible (*niskala*) realms, as well as between historical fact and supernatural interpretation (Turner, 1969). The findings were synthesized through descriptive interpretation, emphasizing meaning-making processes rather than generalization, consistent with qualitative research aims to produce thick descriptions of cultural reality (Geertz, 1973).

DISCUSSION

a. Power Relations in the Myth of Dadong Guliang

Mythology is not merely a collection of speculative stories or supernatural tales. In anthropological discourse, myth functions as a deeply embedded epistemological framework through which societies interpret existence, ethical conduct, socio-political structures, and collective memory. It simultaneously becomes a vehicle for knowledge transmission, intergenerational education, and symbolic power reproduction (Eliade, 1963; Lévi-Strauss, 1969). Within Balinese cosmology, myth operates as a dynamic bridge between *sekala* (the physical realm) and *niskala* (the metaphysical realm), forming a holistic worldview that shapes social behavior, religious practice, and moral philosophy. As Geertz (1980) argues, Balinese religion is not merely a system of beliefs but a “model for reality” and a “model of reality,” encoding the ways Balinese communities think, interpret nature, and institutionalize norms. In this sense,

myth does not just accompany ritual but forms its foundation; it legitimizes ritual authority and provides symbolic justification for political and social order.

The mythic landscape of Bali is rich and multifaceted. Textual traditions like *kakawin*, *tutur*, *geguritan*, and *purana*, alongside performative arts such as *wayang*, *topeng*, and *sendratari*, as well as oral transmissions within ritual contexts, represent layered systems of cultural knowledge (Vickers, 2012). Such diversity requires multidisciplinary interpretative methodologies, from structuralism to symbolic anthropology and poststructural critique. Myths like those of Dewi Sri, Kebo Iwa, Manik Angkeran, and Ratu Gede Mecaling are not only narrations but cultural infrastructures encoding values of fertility, defense, cosmic balance, and metaphysical governance (Lansing, 1991; Picard, 1996). Among these, the myth of Dadong Guliang stands out as an important case for understanding the nexus between spiritual authority, female shamanism, community anxieties, political legitimacy, and shifting cultural representations in the contemporary era.



Picture 1. Associated site to Dadong Guliang

Source: Detik Bali.com (2024)

Dadong Guliang: Female Spiritual Power and Marginalization

Dadong Guliang is remembered as a female *balian* (shaman) whose spiritual abilities were both feared and revered. Oral narratives and historical fragments indicate that she originated from Desa Guliang in Bangli. However, her presence was perceived as dangerous due to her extraordinary metaphysical practices, leading to her expulsion (Documentation Project of Klungkung Culture, 2020). This reveals a gendered dimension of mythical authority: unlike *pedanda* (Brahmin high priests), whose legitimacy is institutionally recognized, female shamans often exist in liminal spaces of religious structure, possessing power but simultaneously facing marginalization. Such tension echoes Ortner's (1974) argument that women are frequently positioned as mediators between "nature" (instinctive, magical, and mysterious) and "culture" (institutional order), an ambivalent role that generates both reverence and suspicion.

Upon relocation to Desa Akah, Dadong Guliang was associated with a catastrophic epidemic (*grubug*) that decimated populations. Whether factual or symbolically narrated, this disaster became the causal explanation for drastic political action: the King of Klungkung ordered the displacement of the entire settlement, including relocation of Pura Dalem, to a safer location (Bali Heritage Trails, 2023). The myth thus transforms historical trauma into metaphysical narrative, converting public fear into a socially binding explanation. As Wiener (1995) notes, Balinese myths frequently project political and social crises into supernatural frameworks, offering metaphysical answers for historical contingencies.

Myth as Spatialization of Authority

From a Structural Functionalist standpoint, Dadong Guliang's myth explains the spatial origin of Desa Akah and legitimizes collective memory of relocation. Villagers narrate that the *balian*'s unseen force was too powerful to coexist with human habitation; thus, physical distance had to be established. Based on a field interview conducted with Agung Mirah (June 13, 2025), the relocation moved the village from the eastern riverside (*Dangin Tukad*, specifically Dusun Hyang Api) to its current area on the western side. Spatial reconfiguration becomes a symbolic act: moving away from the powerful *niskala* presence is framed as both ritual precaution and political obedience.

Moreover, the existence of five Batu Pengancing (spiritual anchors) distributed across the village functions as metaphoric and physical mechanisms meant to “contain” the unseen energy associated with Dadong Guliang. These stones are treated like metaphysical boundaries that regulate the interaction between the visible and invisible worlds. Spatial anthropology views this as encoding power into territory (Tilley, 1994); ritual mapping becomes political mapping.

Binary Oppositions and Ritual Negotiation

Through a Structuralist lens, specifically Lévi-Strauss’s binary oppositions, the narrative of Dadong Guliang renders symbolic tensions between:

Sekala (Seen)	Niskala (Unseen)
Relocation	Mystical Threat
King’s Command	Female Shaman’s Power
Batu Pengancing	Spiritual Containment
Ritual Offerings	Supernatural Influence

Interviews with Agung Gde Agung (June 13, 2025) show that residents in Dusun Hyang Api regularly present *sesajen melarapan* to avoid disturbance from the unseen forces linked to Dadong Guliang. Although she is believed to have reached moksa, her unseen influence remains active. Balinese society responds through ritual action—*sekala* acts to negotiate with the *niskala* force. Thus, ritual is not symbolic alone; it is a practical negotiation with power.

At the same time, other interpretations exist. A resident from Nyanglan, Hari Mukti (June 14, 2025), stated that the site is seen positively as a place for *nunas tamba* (healing). This highlights the interpretive multiplicity of myth: its power is not static but negotiated by individual needs, social anxieties, and communal desires. This resonates with Ricoeur’s (1976) view of myth as a multivalent symbol, open to continuous reinterpretation depending on historical context.

Myth and Political Power: A Poststructuralist Reading

From a poststructural and discourse critique perspective, particularly Foucault (1972), myth does not merely explain reality—it produces power relations by legitimizing authority. The relocation of Desa Akah, enacted through a royal decree, transforms myth into political technology. The King of Klungkung’s action is narrated not as administrative control but as metaphysical salvation. The community’s subordination thus becomes spiritual obedience, making political dominance invisible. This illustrates Foucault’s argument that power is most effective when internalized through discourse, not coercion.

In addition, the continued ritual of *melarapan* implies that political power persists in ceremonial practice. Picard (1996) notes that Balinese myths are constantly reshaped to preserve hegemonic structures, particularly during socio-economic changes like tourism and modernization. As such, the myth of Dadong Guliang remains active in both ritual space and communal identity, ensuring the continuation of symbolic authority in Akah.

b. The Myth of Dadong Guliang in Contemporary Societal Perspective

The myth of Dadong Guliang in contemporary Balinese society illustrates how cultural narratives do not merely survive through memory, but actively transform in response to shifting social, political, and technological realities. Contemporary Folklore Studies emphasizes that myths do not persist because they remain static; rather, they endure because they are flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the society that tells them (Ben-Amos, 2020). In Bali, the myth of Dadong Guliang remains deeply embedded in the identity of the Akah community, functioning as a symbolic repository of history, spirituality, trauma, and resistance, especially related to the *grubug* (plague) event and village displacement in the nineteenth century.

From the lens of Cultural Memory Studies, myths operate as a reconstructive process in which the past is continuously reshaped in the present (Assmann, 1995). The continuity of the Dadong Guliang myth clearly demonstrates how society selectively remembers, reformulates, and revives tradition for its present-day cultural needs. The preservation of Dadong Guliang’s sacred burial site, still visited by villagers for spiritual reasons, is a compelling example of how memory becomes material, embedded not only in narratives but also in ritual practices and spatial arrangements. As Assmann (2011) explains, cultural memory requires both storage (in physical forms such as ritual sites) and activation (through performance, narration, and community practices).

In Akah village, the younger generation becomes an active agent in the activation process. This contradicts previous anthropological assumptions that the youth are disengaged from traditional narratives due to modernization or digital lifestyles (Robinson, 2021). As demonstrated in field interviews, younger residents express creative enthusiasm in transmitting, reshaping, and even commercializing the myth through various media forms. In an interview on June 13, 2025, I Gusti Agung Gde Agung, a resident of Desa Akah, stated that the myth continues to be *“not only believed but also celebrated as a source of artistic inspiration and local pride.”* His statement reflects how belief is not merely religious but also identity-driven.

The artistic reinterpretation of Dadong Guliang is visible particularly during Tawur Kesanga, when Balinese communities produce ogoh-ogoh, large demonic effigies symbolizing destructive energies. In Akah village, some youth create ogoh-ogoh inspired by the image of Dadong Guliang as an ancestral guardian, but framed in monstrous aesthetics to represent her liminal status between the benevolent and the dangerous. As Turner (1969) explains, liminal figures are culturally powerful because they inhabit the threshold between binary categories—life and death, purity and impurity, beauty and fear. In this context, Dadong Guliang as a post-plague ancestral spirit embodies both danger and protection, becoming a symbolic guardian whose terrifying presence represents communal authority.

Furthermore, Adi Putra (2022) notes that Balinese artistic practices are not merely entertainment but function as spiritual negotiation, a way of communicating with the invisible realm (*niskala*). When young people produce ogoh-ogoh inspired by ancestral mythology, they are actively engaging in a cultural dialogue across generations, reactivating inherited spiritual frameworks into new aesthetic forms. During performances such as simple sendratari based on the Dadong Guliang story, young actors dramatize conflict, displacement, and transformation, allowing the audience to reflect on trauma and resilience through symbolic storytelling.

Digitalization accelerates these processes of reinterpretation and circulation, extending the myth's reach beyond village boundaries into regional and national networks. The role of digital media in myth regeneration reflects a major shift in cultural transmission models. Traditionally, myths in Bali were preserved through oral practices tied to ritual cycles (Covarrubias, 1973). However, contemporary studies indicate that digital platforms now serve as new ritual arenas where mythic knowledge is recontextualized (Suryani, 2021; Paramita, 2023). Social media accounts such as @lontarbali and the augmented reality application Baly Myth AR, for instance, visually simulate mythic figures, enabling younger users to “summon” Dadong Guliang through mobile cameras. This technological mediation transforms mythic performance into participatory interaction, creating what Lugosi (2008) terms “digital ritual engagement.”

In an interview on June 13, 2025, Ni Luh Agung Mirah, another young resident of Akah, described how the myth has been transformed into *“content that is not frightening anymore but more exciting and mysterious.”* Her statement reflects how digital mediation reframes the myth to suit contemporary tastes that value entertainment, curiosity, and shareability. TikTok videos narrating Dadong Guliang's backstory, often accompanied by eerie sound effects and drone shots of the burial site, exemplify what Jenkins (2009) calls “spreadable media”, where cultural narratives survive by becoming easily shareable across platforms.

Moreover, the myth has also penetrated mainstream national television. In 2014, the TV program Mister Tukul Jalan-Jalan on Trans7 visited the sacred site of Dadong Guliang. National exposure situates the myth within broader Indonesian popular culture, negotiating its status between local sacredness and modern entertainment. According to Medina (2019), when local myths enter national media frameworks, they undergo cultural commodification, yet such exposure can paradoxically strengthen local identity by validating its uniqueness and increasing symbolic capital.

The widespread adoption of Dadong Guliang in the digital landscape demonstrates that myth is not merely a relic of the past but a cultural resource that communities use to articulate identity, negotiate modernity, and participate in economic and technological transformations. As Lury (2011) states, culture in the contemporary era functions as an asset, leveraged symbolically and economically. In this sense, Dadong Guliang becomes a “creative capital,” empowering youth to generate artistic works, digital products, and even tourism appeal while sustaining spiritual heritage.

Contrary to the fear that digitalization will lead to cultural erosion, the case of Dadong Guliang illustrates how technology facilitates a renewed intimacy with myth. Rather than distancing young people from tradition, digital media enables them to reinterpret and share ancestral stories in ways that align with their lived realities. The myth becomes an evolving narrative space where youth creativity, economic interests, community identity, and spiritual continuity converge. Therefore, Dadong Guliang is not merely a surviving myth but a living, adaptive, and productive cultural force shaping the contemporary imagination of Balinese society.

c. Myth as Cultural Resistance and Identity Negotiation

The myth of Dadong Guliang does not merely record past relations of political power; it also functions as a space for cultural resistance and identity negotiation among the people of Akah village in the present day. From the perspective of political anthropology, myth can serve as a strategic tool for marginalized communities to revise, reinterpret, or even challenge dominant

power structures that seek to control how they understand history, spirituality, and even their bodies (Scott, 1990). The case of Dadong Guliang illustrates how the community of Akah employs myth not only to preserve cultural memory, but also to maintain social agency in relation to collective trauma stemming from historical events such as the *grubug* (plague) and the forced relocation of the village by the Klungkung royal authority in the 19th century. Thus, the myth is not simply narrated; it is creatively re-produced as a means to reclaim identity and power.

According to Homi K. Bhabha (1994), communities living under political or cultural domination often develop forms of *cultural hybridity* as a strategy to negotiate identity within asymmetrical power relations. In the context of Dadong Guliang, such hybridity is evident in how contemporary youth combine sacred traditions (such as the *melarapan* ritual, pilgrimage to the sacred grave, and offerings) with modern artistic and digital expressions, including ogoh-ogoh constructions themed after Dadong Guliang, contemporary dance fragments, and digital storytelling on TikTok, Instagram, or augmented reality applications. These hybrid cultural practices highlight that myth is not frozen in tradition; instead, it evolves as an active resource for identity-making amid globalization and digital modernity.

Rather than being treated merely as a supernatural legend, the myth acts as *cultural memory* that is actively selected, reinterpreted, and reproduced according to the needs of the community. As Jan Assmann (1995) states, cultural memory consists of “*reusable meanings that communities reinterpret in order to create coherence in the present*” (p. 127). Therefore, practices of ritual remembrance toward Dadong Guliang—especially among members of Dusun Hyang Api who continue to perform *melarapan*—can be read as acts of identity negotiation, in which the community asserts authority over its own past. Rather than merely following a fixed narrative, they employ myth to define who they are today and how they want to be remembered.

Myth as Agency Against Political and Economic Structures

Within James Scott’s (1990) theoretical framework of *everyday resistance*, ordinary people often use symbols, stories, humor, art, and ritual as subtle strategies to resist domination. Resistance does not always take the form of rebellion; it can also appear as reinterpretation, satire, or reclamation of narrative authority. The myth of Dadong Guliang can therefore be seen as a postcolonial resistance to the domination of the Klungkung royal dynasty, which relocated the village and structured ritual systems according to political needs.

In the present era, this resistance shifts toward a new direction: the resistance against economic and institutional domination—particularly cultural commodification driven by the tourism industry and national media. Rather than allowing their myth to be commodified solely as a tourist spectacle detached from its cultural roots, the people of Akah reproduce the myth through community-based media, such as ogoh-ogoh creation, local festival performances, and controlled digital storytelling. This strategy ensures that cultural authority remains within the community even as their cultural products enter wider audiences.

This form of cultural control is reflected in the testimony of Agung Mirah (interview, June 13, 2025), who explained: “*We make ogoh-ogoh not only to frighten people, but also to tell who we are as Akah villagers.*” His statement reveals that artistic expressions of the myth are not designed merely for entertainment; they are assertions of identity, autonomy, and cultural authorship.

Michel de Certeau (1984) calls such strategies *tactical practices*, wherein ordinary communities creatively “take back” cultural spaces controlled by powerful institutions. In Akah, the *re-writing* and dramatization of the myth is a form of cultural tactic: villagers become *producers* rather than *consumers* of their own narrative. They select, edit, exaggerate, parody, or creatively dramatize the myth as a way of reclaiming authority over meaning. This proves that, rather than being passive preservers of tradition, the people actively shape and direct the representation of their myth in the public domain.

Hybridity and Liminal Power in Artistic Negotiation

The representation of Dadong Guliang in ogoh-ogoh—ritual effigies paraded during *Tawur Kesanga*—constitutes a unique manifestation of cultural hybridity. Contemporary youth reinterpret Dadong Guliang as a witch, a female healer, a protector spirit, or even as a heroic symbol of community resilience. These creative interpretations demonstrate an ongoing negotiation of identity in which the myth becomes a flexible symbolic resource.

During the night of the ritual parade, the ogoh-ogoh embodies what Victor Turner (1969) theorizes as *liminality*: a threshold state where social norms are temporarily suspended, and identities are renegotiated publicly. In this liminal sphere, moral boundaries are questioned, satire becomes possible, and new identities can be temporarily assumed. This liminal power of myth allows communities to critique power structures, perform symbolic resistance, and assert previously marginalized identities.

This is particularly significant for gender representation. In a cultural context where ritual authority is typically dominated by male Brahmanical structures, the re-emergence of a female spiritual figure through myth and artistic embodiment becomes an implicit

critique of symbolic gender hierarchy. By elevating Dadong Guliang as a revered ancestral healer and protectress, the community reclaims female agency within its spiritual memory. Thus, myth becomes a site of symbolic resistance against gender marginalization.

Digital Media as a New Myth-Making Arena

Digital transformation brings the myth into a new arena of negotiation: the virtual space. Augmented reality myth apps (*Baly Myth AR*), horror-themed TikTok content, YouTube documentaries, and Instagram community pages such as @lontarbalı create a participatory myth-making environment. In this participatory space, authority is no longer centralized; it is shared between content creators, audiences, and traditional cultural custodians.

According to Suryani (2021), digital media in Bali “acts as a negotiation medium in which cultural authority is shared between community creators and digital consumers” (p. 95). This phenomenon is evident in how myth-based content from Akah goes viral, not as a product removed from its origin, but as a self-authored cultural articulation.

The fact that Trans7 featured the myth in *Mister Tukul Jalan-Jalan* (2014) further exemplifies the negotiation of cultural representation. Rather than being passive subjects, villagers actively curated what aspects of the ritual and myth could be broadcast nationally. This indicates that viralization does not always equate to exploitation; it can function as a community-led branding strategy rooted in self-representation. As Assmann (1995) asserts, cultural memory thrives only when communities act as *co-authors* of their own history.

Myth as Healing and Post-Trauma Identity Reconstruction

The historical trauma of plague and forced displacement does not disappear; it is reinterpreted. The figure once feared as the cause of plague is reframed as a healer—someone who offers medicinal protection and spiritual resilience. As expressed by Hari Mukti (interview, June 14, 2025), “People come to the grave not only to seek protection, but also to seek calmness and regrounding.” This shows that myth functions as a mechanism of healing and the rebuilding of post-traumatic community identity.

Scott’s (1990) concept of *hidden transcripts* explains how communities construct alternative histories that challenge dominant narratives. By transforming Dadong Guliang from a feared source of calamity into a spiritual protector, the community reclaims power over historical interpretation. Myth thus becomes a symbolic pathway for recovering dignity and rewriting collective identity.

CONCLUSION

The myth of Dadong Guliang demonstrates how Balinese cosmology becomes inseparable from political authority, cultural expression, and identity negotiation. Historically, the myth functioned as a mechanism of power relations through which the King of Klungkung exercised political control. The relocation of Akah Village from Dangin Tukad to its present location—interpreted as a response to the supernatural turmoil attributed to Dadong Guliang—reflects the king’s effort to “stabilize disorder” during the 19th-century *grubug* (plague) crisis. The establishment of the *batu pangider* (Stones of Locking) illustrates the materialization of power through sacred spatial engineering: the community’s safety was secured not only administratively but cosmologically. Thus, the myth served as a cultural instrument that legitimized authority, conveyed discipline to the population, and maintained social order through a dialectic of fear, reverence, and ritual piety.

The continued practice of *melarapan* in Hyang Api Hamlet, where offerings are routinely made to the spiritual presence of Dadong Guliang, further shows how ritual becomes a living archive of cultural memory. This belief, rooted in the assumption that Dadong Guliang attained *moksa*, transforms a figure once associated with terror into a respected spiritual entity. The community engages with the unseen (*niskala*) through visible (*sekala*) practices, allowing the myth to mediate the relationship between historical trauma and spiritual protection. Through ritual continuity, the myth transcends its narrative function and becomes a mechanism for remembering, healing, and maintaining cosmological balance.

In contemporary society, the myth undergoes creative reinterpretation without losing its local core. Young people in Akah Village actively participate in the regeneration of meaning through artistic and digital media. Traditional performances such as *ogoh-ogoh* and dance fragments staged during *Tawur Kesanga* highlight how myth becomes embodied in collective aesthetics. These performative expressions illustrate how cultural narratives are transmitted affectively—through spectacle, play, humor, and community participation—rather than merely through oral storytelling. Meanwhile, the myth’s increasing presence on TikTok, Instagram, augmented-reality myth applications, and even national television reinforces its transformation into a viral commodity and a medium of identity showcase. The shift in platforms—from oral transmission to digital circulation—does not dilute its sacred value; instead, it expands its reach and cultural legitimacy among the younger generation.

Finally, Dadong Guliang represents cultural resistance and identity negotiation in modernity. Rather than passively inheriting the myth, villagers tactically reinterpret it to assert agency against dominant forces, including state cultural policies, tourism

commodification, and mass-media commercialization. By rebranding the myth as a symbol of local pride, Akah residents challenge narratives that reduce their heritage to exotic spectacle or supernatural entertainment. Through practices such as creating thematic *ogoh-ogoh*, preserving the sacred site as heritage instead of tourist attraction, and producing grassroots digital content, the community performs what Scott (1990) calls everyday resistance, rewriting the meaning of myth without direct confrontation. Amid hybridity (Bhabha, 1994), Dadong Guliang becomes neither purely sacred nor purely commodified, but a negotiated identity marker that situates the community within modernization while preserving its cultural autonomy.

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