

Performing Liminal Identity: Ritual Embodiment and the Cultural Transformation of Sisingaan in West Java's Circumcision Ceremonies

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This study examines Sisingaan as an embodied ritual performance through which liminal identity is enacted in circumcision ceremonies in West Java. Rather than approaching Sisingaan solely as a symbolic tradition, the article analyzes how the performance operates as a performative medium that negotiates social transition, collective aspiration, and cultural transformation within Subang's local community. Drawing on a qualitative methodology and an interdisciplinary framework that combines sociology, performance studies, and ethnomusicology, the research is based on in-depth interviews with four key practitioners actively involved in the Sisingaan tradition. The findings demonstrate that the circumcision procession functions as a liminal space in which the child's social status is transformed through embodied ritual practices, including procession, music, and performative gestures. Parental aspirations are articulated through culturally embedded figures of bravery and nobility, revealing how identity is enacted rather than merely represented. At the same time, the musical dimension of Sisingaan reflects ongoing processes of adaptation, hybridity, and aesthetic negotiation, indicating broader cultural transformations shaped by historical memory and contemporary social dynamics. By framing Sisingaan as a site of ritual embodiment and performative identity-making, this study contributes to performance and cultural studies by expanding discussions on liminality, embodied tradition, and the transformation of local ritual practices in contemporary Indonesia.

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Introduction

Ritual performance has long been theorized within performance studies as a space where embodiment, performative liminality, and

symbolic power converge, transforming social transitions into publicly negotiated acts (Turner, 1982; Schechner, 2003). Traditional performances do more than present aesthetic display; they function as embodied ritual practices

through which communities rehearse identity, negotiate cultural authority, and reconfigure collective memory. Life-cycle ceremonies thus become performative thresholds—moments in which individuals move between social states while audiences participate in witnessing and affirming transformation. From this perspective, performance emerges not as a static cultural artifact but as a dynamic field of social practice in which meaning is continually produced and rearticulated. Positioning Sisingaan within broader debates on embodied ritual and relational performance

In West Java Province, performing arts frequently accompany life-cycle ceremonies, transforming private milestones into communal events that reinforce shared values and social cohesion (Djuhara, 2014). Performance operates here as a mediating structure through which moral narratives are articulated, hierarchies negotiated, and stages of human transformation legitimized. Scholarship has identified numerous ceremonial domains in which performing arts play a central role, including rituals surrounding pregnancy, birth, circumcision, marriage, healing, and funerary practices (Adjepong & Obeng, 2018; Brandon, 2003). Yet these traditions are often framed as heritage objects or descriptive ethnographic cases, leaving the embodied dynamics of initiation and performative agency comparatively under-theorized within contemporary performance discourse.

Circumcision ceremonies constitute a significant rite of passage in many Indonesian Muslim communities, marking the movement from childhood toward social maturity (Nurdin & Jesica, 2018; Yunus, 1993). Beyond religious symbolism, these ceremonies unfold through processions, music, and theatrical display that publicly affirm shifting social status. This study approaches initiation not simply as symbolic ritual but as an embodied performative process enacted through Sisingaan, a traditional performance originating in Subang, West Java. Historically embedded within circumcision rituals, Sisingaan transforms personal transition into collective spectacle, enabling communities to witness and validate emerging identities through movement, sound, and visual symbolism (Junaedi et al., 2017). By foregrounding embodiment and

performative action, this research examines how Sisingaan mediates ritual meaning and social transformation within a framework of performative liminality (RQ1).

The contemporary trajectory of Sisingaan reveals an ongoing negotiation between ritual continuity and performative adaptation. Once largely confined to ceremonial contexts, the performance now extends into guest-welcoming events and staged public spectacles. These shifts raise critical questions about how traditional arts sustain symbolic authority while responding to market pressures and evolving audience expectations. Through choreographic refinement, musical experimentation, and visual modification, Sisingaan operates as a form of postcolonial performative hybridity in the sense articulated by Bhabha (1994), shaped by inherited ritual frameworks and contemporary performance economies (Junaedi et al., 2017; Rachmawaty, 2013). Examining these transformations illuminates how hybridity reshapes ritual meaning and repositions traditional performance within modern cultural landscapes (RQ2).

The multiplicity of terms associated with the tradition—Sisingaan, Gotong Singa, and Singa Depok—further reflects its evolving cultural semantics. Centered on a lion effigy used to carry a circumcised boy (*anak sunat*) during rhythmic processions, the performance foregrounds collective participation and communal visibility (Rachmawaty, 2013). Variations in effigy design, including the shorter-legged Singa Depok, demonstrate practical adaptations shaped by performer creativity and community needs (Yosef Iskandar, personal interview, 2015). Although alternative animal figures such as horses, swans, garudas, and *buraq* have appeared in certain contexts, the lion remains the dominant iconographic symbol, embodying resilience and communal pride within the Subang cultural landscape. These evolving visual forms reveal how performers and communities actively negotiate symbolic meaning through aesthetic innovation and cultural agency (RQ3).

Tracing the historical origins of Sisingaan presents challenges typical of many folk traditions, as collective authorship and oral

transmission obscure precise documentation (Miharja, 2014, 2015). Rather than emerging from institutionalized artistic frameworks, Sisingaan developed organically within village communities, shaped by shared cultural practices and social needs. This collective dimension shifts analytical attention away from individual authorship toward the ongoing processes through which communities sustain and reinterpret tradition. The endurance of Sisingaan therefore lies not in fixed historical lineage but in its capacity to remain socially resonant across changing cultural contexts.

Despite a growing body of literature on Indonesian folk performance, a significant theoretical gap persists. Existing studies frequently emphasize preservation, regional identity, or descriptive ethnography, overlooking how ritual performance operates as an embodied negotiation between initiation, hybridity, and cultural power. Consequently, the interplay between ceremonial authority and contemporary performative innovation remains conceptually underdeveloped within performance studies discourse. By positioning Sisingaan as an embodied initiation practice shaped by hybrid performance strategies and negotiated cultural symbolism, this study advances a theory-driven perspective that moves beyond documentation toward a critical understanding of traditional performance as an evolving site of social transformation.

Performatively, Sisingaan unfolds through a structured procession combining music, dance, and theatrical spectacle. Typically staged in the late afternoon, the parade moves from a relative's or neighbor's yard toward the penanggap's residence, culminating in a dramatic lion-fight attraction that serves as the performance's climax (Mulyadi, 2003). Emerging from rural communities in Subang Regency, the art form reflects the collective ethos and spontaneity of village life (Djuhara, 2014; Mulyadi, 2003; Rachmawaty, 2013). Over time, Sisingaan has expanded into urban and national arenas, gaining broader recognition while retaining local cultural roots. Through sustained experimentation and interaction with neighboring art forms, it has evolved into a refined performance that simultaneously functions as ceremonial

enactment, cultural spectacle, and regional identity marker, contributing to wider debates on embodied ritual practice and contemporary performance transformation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ritual Performance, Embodiment, and Performative Liminality

Ritual performance has been widely theorized as a transformative process in which embodiment mediates social transition and collective meaning-making. Turner (1982) conceptualizes liminality as a threshold condition through which individuals move between established social roles, while Schechner (2003) frames performance as restored behavior—repeated yet continually reinterpreted embodied actions. Together, these perspectives position ritual not as a fixed structure but as an event constituted through movement, temporality, and spectatorship. Expanding this view, Fischer-Lichte (2008) highlights the autopoietic feedback loop between performers and audiences, emphasizing that meaning emerges relationally through embodied interaction rather than through static symbolic representation. Within this framework, initiation rituals can be understood as performative events in which identity is enacted through bodily practice.

Recent discussions on embodiment further challenge representational models of ritual by foregrounding the body as an archive of cultural memory (Taylor, 2003). Performance becomes a repertoire through which knowledge is transmitted and transformed across generations. Yet studies of Indonesian folk performance often remain grounded in descriptive ethnography or heritage discourse, leaving the embodied dimensions of initiation comparatively under-theorized. Reframing traditional arts through performative liminality and embodied ritual practice therefore enables a more nuanced understanding of how social identities are materially enacted and collectively negotiated through performance.

2.2 Postcolonial Hybridity and the Transformation of Traditional Performance

The concept of hybridity provides a critical lens for examining how traditional performances

evolve within changing socio-cultural landscapes. Bhabha (1994) conceptualizes hybridity as a “third space” in which cultural meanings are rearticulated through negotiation rather than preserved as fixed origins. In performance contexts, hybridity becomes visible through shifts in choreography, musical structure, visual aesthetics, and modes of spectatorship. Indonesian performing arts have increasingly been analyzed through this perspective, particularly in relation to urbanization, tourism, and cultural commodification. However, much of this scholarship focuses on structural change without fully addressing how hybridity reshapes embodied experience and ritual authority.

From a performance studies perspective, hybridity does not necessarily signal the erosion of tradition; rather, it reflects ongoing processes of adaptation through which performers exercise agency over cultural form. Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity provides further insight into how repeated acts generate new meanings through variation and reiteration. Within traditional performance contexts, repetition allows ritual practices to remain recognizable while accommodating innovation. Examining Sisingaan through a postcolonial performative framework thus enables hybridity to be understood as an active process of cultural negotiation rather than a departure from authenticity.

2.3 Symbolic Negotiation, Cultural Agency, and Community-Based Performance

Contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasizes that community-based performance emerges through ongoing symbolic negotiation rather than passive preservation. Visual elements such as costumes, props, and spatial arrangements operate as sites where identity, power, and memory intersect. Fischer-Lichte (2008) underscores the transformative potential of live performance, while Taylor (2003) highlights how embodied practices transmit cultural knowledge beyond textual archives. Together, these perspectives position symbolic forms as dynamic rather than fixed, shaped by the interactions between performers, audiences, and socio-cultural contexts.

In Indonesian folk arts, symbolic negotiation often occurs through the adaptation of visual motifs and performative structures that respond simultaneously to local values and broader cultural influences. Animal effigies, processional choreography, and rhythmic accompaniment function as cultural signifiers whose meanings shift across contexts. Rather than viewing these adaptations as deviations from authenticity, scholars increasingly recognize them as expressions of cultural agency. Nevertheless, research rarely integrates symbolic negotiation with analyses of performative liminality and postcolonial hybridity, leaving a conceptual gap in understanding how community-based performances sustain ritual authority while enabling creative transformation.

2.4 Toward an Integrated Framework: Embodied Initiation and Hybrid Performance

Drawing together ritual theory, postcolonial hybridity, and symbolic negotiation, this study advances an integrated framework for examining Sisingaan as an embodied initiation performance. By situating the tradition within intersecting processes of performative liminality (Turner, 1982), restored behavior (Schechner, 2003), hybrid cultural production (Bhabha, 1994), and embodied repertoire (Taylor, 2003), the framework moves beyond descriptive ethnography toward a relational understanding of traditional performance. Initiation, hybridity, and symbolic negotiation are therefore approached not as separate analytical categories but as interdependent processes through which cultural meaning is continuously produced and transformed.

Conceptual Bridge to Methodology.

Understanding Sisingaan through this integrated framework requires a methodological approach capable of engaging performance not only as an object of observation but as an embodied event shaped by relational interaction. If ritual meaning emerges through performative liminality, and hybridity manifests through repeated yet adaptive bodily practices, then analysis must attend to movement, spatial dynamics, and symbolic negotiation as lived processes rather than static representations. Consequently, this study adopts an interpretive performance-oriented

methodology that foregrounds embodied observation, relational analysis, and contextual interpretation, enabling the theoretical concepts outlined above to guide both data collection and analytical interpretation. Thereby necessitating a performance-oriented methodological approach.

3. Methods

Grounded in a framework of performative liminality, embodied ritual practice, and postcolonial performative hybridity, this study advances an interpretive performance ethnography orientation to examine Sisingaan as a lived cultural process. Rather than treating performance as a fixed cultural artifact, the methodology understands Sisingaan as a relational event produced through interactions among performers, audiences, sound, movement, and socio-historical context. This perspective aligns with performance studies approaches that emphasize embodiment, repetition, and symbolic negotiation as central analytical dimensions (Schechner, 2003; Turner, 1982).

An interdisciplinary orientation was employed, integrating perspectives from sociology, ethnomusicology, and anthropology to address the multilayered nature of Sisingaan performance (Keeling, 2017; Saifuddin Mujtaba, 2015). Data were generated through literature analysis, field observation, and semi-structured interviews, enabling a dialogical reading of performance practices. Observational work focused on embodied interaction—spatial positioning, rhythmic coordination, choreographic sequencing, and audience participation—allowing the analysis to move beyond descriptive documentation toward interpretive engagement with performative processes.

Interviews were conducted with four key cultural practitioners whose artistic authority and long-term involvement reflect both historical continuity and contemporary transformation within the Sisingaan community: Yoseph Iskandar; Mang Ongka; Mang Supandi; and Mang Robot. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on cultural expertise, generational knowledge, and active participation in performance practice. The researcher's positionality was situated within a reflexive interpretive stance, acknowledging that meaning

emerges through dialogue between researcher, participants, and performance context.

Within the ethnomusicological dimension, two musical repertoires—Kembang Gadung and Kangsreng Tepak Ewag—were analyzed as embodied sonic practices that structure ritual temporality and collective affect. Rather than examining music solely as sonic text, the study interprets musical performance as a repertoire through which cultural memory is enacted (Taylor, 2003).

Data analysis followed an iterative interpretive process combining thematic engagement with interview narratives and performance-based analysis of movement, sound, and symbolic elements. This approach enables the research to articulate how liminality, hybridity, and cultural negotiation are materially enacted through Sisingaan performance, ensuring methodological alignment with the theoretical framework established in the preceding sections. This interpretive approach does not seek to generalize statistically but to illuminate relational processes through which ritual performance produces meaning. The researcher's engagement with the community was approached reflexively, acknowledging that interpretation emerges through relational interaction rather than detached observation.

4. Results

4.1 Circumcision Initiation and the Elevation of Anak Sunat

Empirical observations reveal how performative liminality is materially enacted through the ritual elevation of anak sunat within the Sisingaan procession. Folk performing arts function as symbolic systems that reflect the values and worldview of the communities in which they develop (Rachmawaty, 2013; Sandström, 2015). In Subang, Sisingaan serves as a cultural medium that accompanies circumcision ceremonies, positioning anak sunat as the central figure of the ritual. Field observations indicate that circumcision remains a highly celebrated life-cycle event, often associated with psychological and spiritual significance. According to Yoseph Iskandar (personal interview, June 2015), circumcision is perceived not merely as a

biological transition but as an event imbued with mystical and symbolic meaning.

Psychologically, anak sunat is treated with special attention and affection, symbolized by the concept of Raja Sadinten ("king for a day"). Family members and the surrounding community grant the child privileges and fulfill requests as part of ritualized care. Practices such as dicecep (monetary gifts) and pakaulan (fulfillment of promises) reinforce the social importance of the event.

Physically, the child is positioned in elevated and highly visible spaces within the ceremonial setting. The peak of this physical elevation occurs during the Sisingaan parade, when anak sunat sits on a lion effigy carried by dancers through the village. The procession attracts communal participation, transforming the ritual into a collective celebration.

4.2 Animal Effigies in Circumcision Processions

Historical accounts and field data reveal that circumcision parades in Subang once featured diverse animal effigies, including birds, ducks, horses, and mythological creatures. Each effigy carried symbolic meanings associated with strength, vigilance, spiritual guidance, or leadership (Endraswara, 2013). Over time, however, the lion effigy became the most dominant form.

The lion's symbolism has multiple cultural references, including Hindu mythology, Islamic narratives, and colonial-era imagery. Interviews with cultural practitioners indicate that the lion gradually became associated with aspirations for dignity, prosperity, and social mobility, particularly during periods of economic hardship and colonial exploitation.

4.3 Musical Structure and Performance Practice

Music constitutes a central element in Sisingaan performances, shaping the atmosphere and guiding choreographic movement. Musical repertoires such as Kembang Gadung and Kangsreng Tepak Ewag are commonly performed during the parade. The Kembang Gadung song is considered spiritually significant, often presented at the beginning of performances

to invoke ancestral presence and ensure ritual harmony.

Sisingaan musical ensembles typically include kendang indung, kendang anak, gong, kempul, kecrek, trumpet, and sometimes a singer. Static rhythmic patterns help maintain tempo and create a solemn atmosphere, while dynamic drum motifs encourage audience participation.

4.4 Assimilation and Adaptation in Music and Dance

Initially, Sisingaan lacked standardized musical and choreographic structures. Over time, the performance assimilated elements from surrounding traditions such as Ketuktilu, Kiliningan, Pencak Silat, and Jaipongan. These adaptations shaped the development of distinctive rhythmic motifs, dance movements, and musical arrangements.

Choreographic vocabularies evolved from spontaneous footwork into more complex movement patterns combining martial arts gestures with folk dance idioms. The integration of various artistic influences contributed to the formation of a recognizable Sisingaan performance style that continues to evolve.

5. Discussion

5.1 Performative Liminality and Embodied Initiation

The elevation of anak sunat as Raja Sadinten reveals Sisingaan as a performative enactment of liminality rather than a symbolic representation of transition. Drawing on Turner's (1982) concept of liminal ritual, the circumcision procession situates the child within a temporary threshold between social identities. This liminal positioning is not only narrated through ritual discourse but materially enacted through embodied practice: the child is elevated spatially, visually framed as a central figure, and moved through communal space as part of a collective performance.

From a performance studies perspective, this transformation reflects Schechner's (2003) notion of restored behavior, in which repeated ritual actions reproduce cultural memory while allowing reinterpretation. The gestures of care, the ceremonial costumes, and the act of lifting the

child onto the lion effigy constitute a sequence of embodied actions that transform everyday social relations into ritualized performance. Liminality, therefore, operates not as an abstract concept but as a lived experience produced through movement, sound, and collective participation.

Moreover, the performative staging of anak sunat as a “king” demonstrates how ritual temporarily suspends ordinary hierarchies. The inversion of everyday roles—where a child becomes the center of communal authority—creates a space for renegotiating social values. This process suggests that Sisingaan functions as a ritual technology through which communities rehearse ideals of leadership, maturity, and social recognition.

5.2 Symbolic Negotiation and Postcolonial Hybridity

The historical transformation from diverse animal effigies to the predominance of the lion reflects a complex process of symbolic negotiation shaped by layered cultural encounters. Rather than representing a linear evolution, this shift illustrates what Bhabha (1994) describes as a hybrid “third space,” where meanings emerge through interaction between local traditions and external influences. The lion effigy embodies traces of Hindu cosmology, Islamic symbolism, and colonial visual culture, demonstrating how Sisingaan operates within a postcolonial field of cultural production. Hybridity here does not denote cultural mixture alone but a site of negotiation where symbolic authority is continuously rearticulated through performance.

Hybridity here does not denote cultural mixture alone but a site of negotiation where symbolic authority is continuously rearticulated. This hybridity challenges essentialist notions of authenticity often associated with folk performance. Instead of preserving a singular origin, Sisingaan reveals tradition as a dynamic process in which symbols are continually reinterpreted according to historical circumstances. The community’s reinterpretation of the lion as a projection of aspiration during periods of economic hardship exemplifies how performance becomes a medium for articulating collective desire.

In this sense, symbolic change does not signal cultural loss but indicates the capacity of local communities to appropriate and transform external symbols into meaningful cultural expressions. The lion effigy thus functions as a site of negotiation where historical memory, spiritual belief, and socio-political experience intersect.

5.3 Performativity, Social Hierarchy, and the Construction of Raja Sadinten

The ritual construction of Raja Sadinten can be understood through Butler’s (1990) concept of performativity, in which identity is produced through repeated acts rather than inherent attributes. The child’s temporary elevation is not simply symbolic; it is enacted through a series of performative gestures that collectively produce the identity of a “king for a day.” Practices such as dicecep, pakaulan, and ritualized speech acts contribute to the iterative production of status within the ceremonial framework.

These performative acts reveal how social hierarchy is constructed through embodied interaction. The community’s participation—through attention, offerings, and movement—transforms the ritual into a collective enactment of social values. Rather than reinforcing rigid hierarchy, the temporary nature of the child’s elevation suggests a fluid understanding of status, where authority is negotiated through performance rather than permanently assigned.

The use of wayang-inspired costumes further amplifies this performative construction. By dressing anak sunat as heroic figures such as Gatotkaca or Arjuna, the ritual connects contemporary initiation practices with mythological narratives of heroism and transformation. This visual scripting transforms the child into a living embodiment of cultural ideals, reinforcing the symbolic continuity between past and present.

5.4 Music as Embodied Repertoire and Relational Performance

Music within Sisingaan operates as more than accompaniment; it functions as an embodied repertoire that structures the temporal and affective dimensions of the ritual. Drawing on Taylor’s (2003) distinction between archive and

repertoire, musical practices such as *Kembang Gadung* can be understood as living archives transmitted through performance rather than textual preservation. Rhythmic repetition synchronizes bodily movement and collective affect, positioning music as an embodied practice rather than merely a sonic accompaniment. The repetition of rhythmic motifs and melodic patterns enables cultural knowledge to circulate across generations through bodily memory.

The belief that the absence of *Kembang Gadung* may result in trance or disruption highlights the relational dimension of ritual sound. Music mediates interactions between performers, audiences, and ancestral presence, producing a shared affective atmosphere. Fischer-Lichte's (2008) concept of the autopoietic feedback loop becomes particularly relevant here, as musical rhythm shapes audience movement while audience participation reinforces the energy of the performance.

Instrumentation also reflects the intersection between ritual function and socio-economic reality. The presence of musicians from working-class backgrounds underscores how performance operates simultaneously as cultural expression and livelihood, revealing the entanglement of artistic practice with everyday social conditions.

5.5 Choreographic Hybridity and Restored Behavior

The evolution of Sisingaan choreography demonstrates how traditional performance adapts through processes of assimilation and reinterpretation. The incorporation of movements from Pencak Silat, Ketuktilu, and Jaipongan reflects a form of choreographic hybridity in which diverse vocabularies merge into a distinctive performance style. Rather than replacing earlier forms, these movements exemplify Schechner's (2003) notion of restored behavior, where gestures are repeated yet continuously reshaped by context.

Such hybridity illustrates the agency of performers in negotiating cultural continuity. Dancers reinterpret inherited movement vocabularies to align with contemporary audience expectations, transforming ritual performance into a space of creative experimentation. The

resulting choreography embodies both historical memory and present-day innovation, demonstrating how embodiment becomes a site of cultural negotiation.

5.6 Sisingaan, Collective Memory, and Cultural Identity Formation

The strong association between circumcision rituals and Sisingaan highlights how performance functions as a mechanism for constructing collective memory. The linguistic inseparability between "circumcision" and "Sisingaan" within the Subang context indicates that performance has become a primary vehicle for articulating regional identity. Through repeated enactment, the ritual transforms individual life events into shared cultural narratives.

From a performance studies perspective, Sisingaan can be understood as a living repertoire through which cultural identity is continually reproduced. The parade becomes a public archive where historical experience, communal aspiration, and social values converge. Rather than remaining fixed, this identity evolves through ongoing negotiation, reflecting the dynamic relationship between tradition and modernity.

The findings of this study reinforce the argument that traditional performance should not be understood merely as cultural preservation, but rather as a dynamic process of social negotiation and identity construction. Within the context of Sisingaan, ritual performance operates as an embodied cultural practice through which communities collectively reinterpret meanings of maturity, social legitimacy, and communal belonging. This perspective aligns with Turner's (1982) theory of liminality, which emphasizes that ritual transitions create temporary social spaces where ordinary structures are suspended and new identities are symbolically enacted. In the Sisingaan procession, the elevation of anak sunat onto the lion effigy demonstrates how bodily positioning, collective attention, and ceremonial movement become mechanisms for producing social transformation.

Furthermore, the performative dimensions of Sisingaan illustrate how ritual embodiment contributes to the preservation of collective memory. Taylor (2003) argues that embodied repertoires transmit cultural knowledge beyond

written archives, allowing traditions to survive through repetitive bodily enactment. The repeated musical rhythms, choreographic gestures, and processional formations observed in Sisingaan function as forms of embodied memory that connect younger generations with inherited cultural values. In this sense, performance becomes both a cultural archive and a living process of transmission.

The findings also demonstrate that hybridity plays a crucial role in sustaining the relevance of traditional performance in contemporary society. The incorporation of Jaipongan movements, Pencak Silat gestures, and modern musical arrangements indicates that Sisingaan continuously adapts to changing aesthetic expectations. This process reflects Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity as a "third space" where cultural meanings are negotiated rather than fixed. Instead of diminishing authenticity, these adaptations reveal the creative agency of performers and communities in maintaining ritual significance while responding to contemporary audiences. Similar patterns of hybridization have been identified in Southeast Asian ritual performances, where local traditions incorporate modern elements to maintain social resonance (Brandon, 2003; Fischer-Lichte, 2008).

In addition, the symbolic dominance of the lion effigy reveals how visual symbols become culturally negotiated representations of power and aspiration. Historically associated with colonial symbolism, the lion has been reinterpreted within local Sundanese cultural logic as a representation of courage, dignity, and prosperity. This reinterpretation demonstrates that traditional communities do not passively inherit symbols, but actively reconstruct them according to contemporary social realities. Such symbolic transformation supports Butler's (1990) argument that identities and meanings are continuously produced through performative repetition rather than originating from fixed essences.

From an ethnomusicological perspective, the study also highlights the importance of music as an affective and relational component of ritual performance. Rhythmic accompaniment not only structures movement but also creates emotional intensity and collective participation. Keeling (2017) explains that musical performance in ritual contexts often mediates relationships between performers, audiences, and spiritual imagination.

In Sisingaan, the use of Kembang Gadung and Kangsreng Tepak Ewag demonstrates how musical repertoire shapes ritual atmosphere while simultaneously reinforcing communal identity.

Moreover, the transformation of Sisingaan reflects broader socio-cultural changes occurring within Indonesian society. Urbanization, tourism, and digital media exposure increasingly influence the presentation of traditional arts, encouraging performers to innovate visually and musically. Nevertheless, the persistence of ritual elements within Sisingaan indicates that local communities continue to value ceremonial meaning alongside entertainment value. This finding supports contemporary scholarship arguing that traditional performance survives through adaptation rather than rigid preservation (Schechner, 2003; Supiarza & Sarbeni, 2021).

Overall, this study contributes to broader discussions in performance studies by demonstrating that ritual traditions remain socially meaningful because they function as flexible spaces of negotiation between memory, identity, spirituality, and modernity. Sisingaan therefore represents not only a ceremonial performance but also a living cultural process through which communities continuously reconstruct collective identity within changing social contexts.

6. Conclusion

This study reconceptualizes Sisingaan not merely as a regional folk performance but as an embodied initiation practice through which social transformation is enacted and collectively negotiated. By situating Sisingaan within frameworks of performative liminality, postcolonial hybridity, and symbolic negotiation, the research demonstrates that circumcision rituals in Subang function as relational performance events that materialize identity through movement, sound, and communal participation.

The elevation of anak sunat as Raja Sadinten illustrates how ritual temporarily restructures social hierarchy, transforming personal transition into a public enactment of aspiration and recognition. The lion effigy emerges as a hybrid symbolic form shaped by layered historical encounters, revealing how communities appropriate and reinterpret external influences

within local cultural logic. Rather than signaling cultural dilution, hybridity becomes a generative force that sustains the adaptability of tradition.

Musical and choreographic practices further highlight the embodied nature of cultural transmission. Through repeated performance, repertoires such as Kembang Gadung operate as living archives that mediate relationships between memory, spirituality, and collective identity. These findings challenge preservation-centered approaches to folk performance by demonstrating that tradition persists not through static continuity but through iterative reinterpretation.

Conceptually, this study contributes to performance studies by positioning initiation rituals as dynamic sites where embodiment, agency, and cultural negotiation intersect. The

analysis expands discussions of Southeast Asian folk performance beyond heritage discourse, proposing a framework that foregrounds relationality and performative process. Future research may extend this perspective through comparative studies of initiation rituals, translocal performance networks, or shifting gender dynamics within ritual performance contexts, further illuminating how embodied practices mediate identity formation in contemporary societies. Ultimately, Sisingaan demonstrates how embodied initiation rituals continue to negotiate identity, memory, and cultural transformation within contemporary performance landscapes. By foregrounding initiation as relational performance, this study contributes to broader discussions of embodied ritual beyond Southeast Asian contexts, positioning Sisingaan within global performance studies discourse.

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