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## **The Stories of Death in Abangan: Religion, Myth, and Beyond**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the construction of death myths through eschatological concepts within the religious beliefs of the Abangan Javanese community, a subcultural group with a syncretic religious orientation rooted in Kejawen traditions. The primary issue addressed is the scarcity of scholarly attention to how localized eschatological narratives shape alternative interpretations of death, which are often overlooked by dominant religious paradigms. Employing a qualitative descriptive method with a case study approach, this research is grounded in theoretical frameworks of eschatology and religiosity to analyze how the abangan community constructs meaning around death. The findings reveal that death is not solely understood as a personal or moral endpoint but is perceived as the result of broader socio-religious dynamics, environmental conditions, and interactions with unseen entities. These interpretations reflect a unique epistemology that challenges normative theological discourses and affirms the validity of local spiritual worldviews. This study contributes to eschatological scholarship by highlighting the interpretive richness of indigenous belief systems and addressing the ongoing marginalization of religious knowledge within broader academic and theological discussions.

**Keywords:** stories of death, indigenous faith, Abangan, Javanese belief, myth.

## Introduction

In the Javanese Abangan community, death is not merely understood as a biological event, but as a cultural phenomenon with deep social and spiritual dimensions. It is interpreted as the culmination of life choices intricately linked to social harmony and cosmological values. This cultural interpretation is reflected in local myths and folk narratives that circulate within the community. According to Zaluchu,<sup>1</sup> mythological narratives about death in local societies serve as effective tools of social control, shaping collective behavior and value systems. These stories not only enrich the sociocultural understanding of death,<sup>2</sup> but also embody the community's distinctive eschatological perspectives. Solovar further argues that mythic narratives surrounding death represent a collective cognitive structure that reflects the local community's religious identity.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, this study examines explicitly death myths and stories within the abangan Javanese community to uncover the essence of local belief knowledge regarding the concept of death.

Various case studies across Java further illustrate how death is conceptualized not only as an individual fate but as a socially and cosmologically significant event. In Central Java, for instance, the *slametan* ritual performed on the 3rd, 7th, 40th, and 100th days after death represents a communal effort to secure the deceased's peaceful transition into the afterlife and to maintain spiritual equilibrium within the living community. In East Javanese Abangan villages, local myths recount stories of spirits (*roh gentayangan*) of those who died under social disgrace, believed to wander restlessly due to unresolved social obligations or violations of tradition (*adat*). These beliefs reinforce the notion that death is deeply intertwined with moral behavior and community ethics. In Yogyakarta, it is common for families to consult spiritual intermediaries or shamans to interpret signs that precede a death, suggesting a cosmological understanding in which the natural and supernatural realms are continuously interacting. These case examples demonstrate that the Javanese understanding of death—particularly among Abangan communities—is not uniform but shaped by localized experiences, rituals, and mythic traditions that reflect their unique eschatological orientation. Incorporating these cases provides a more grounded and culturally specific framework for analyzing how death myths function as part of indigenous religious knowledge systems.

From the perspective of the Abangan community, whose religious orientation tends to embrace syncretism and non-formal spiritual traditions, death is not solely perceived as the end of biological existence, but as a profoundly spiritual and cultural moment. Park describes death as a reflective juncture for families and communities to reaffirm connections with ancestors and to strengthen moral and spiritual values in everyday life.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sonny Eli Zaluchu, "Interpretation about Death Rite of the Nias Ethnic and Its Relation to Social Order," *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 91, no. 3 (2023): 1155, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228221149804>.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Pyszczynski, Sheldon Solomon, and Jeff Greenberg, "A terror management theory perspective on the appeal of historical myths," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 47 (2024): e189, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X2400061X>.

<sup>3</sup> V. N. Solovar, "Linguosemiotic features of death signs in Khanty folks tales and legends," *Languages and Folklore of Indigenous Peoples of Siberia* 1, no. 45 (2023): 40, <https://doi.org/10.25205/2312-6337-2023-1-39-48>.

<sup>4</sup> Hong-Jae Park, "Lessons from 'memorial piety': Capitalising on the connectedness between living and past generations and its implications for social work practice," *Journal of Social Work* 19, no. 4 (2018): 468–69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017318762597>.

This is supported by Nasir,<sup>5</sup> who contends that death myths and narratives form an integral part of the abangan community's traditional religious belief system regarding eschatology. These narratives often feature stories of spirits, causes of death, and supernatural signs believed to convey meaning within the community.<sup>6</sup> As such, narratives of death within the Abangan Javanese society constitute a form of collective belief rooted in Javanese spiritual cosmology, indicating that death is regarded as a complex and meaningful cultural fact.

In recent years, academic research on death within local communities has predominantly centered on three main themes. First, studies exploring death within religious frameworks.<sup>7</sup> Second, research examining the economic dimensions of death.<sup>8</sup> Third, investigations addressing the psychological aspects of death.<sup>9</sup> However, these approaches have yet to fully capture the nuanced construction of death's meaning within the context of Javanese communities, particularly within the abangan Javanese, whose belief system is shaped by tradition, myth, and local spirituality. As a result, there remains a significant gap in reflective, in-depth studies on death narratives and myths in this community narratives, which, in fact, embody important eschatological, social, and moral values requiring a holistic understanding.

The stories and myths surrounding death in the Abangan Javanese community should not be viewed merely as traditional narratives, but as manifestations of local religious constructions that shape communal conceptions of eschatology. According to Munandar,<sup>10</sup> these narratives not only function as myths but also influence collective attitudes and understandings about the afterlife. In the context of Abangan belief systems, often characterized by a synthesis of animism, Kejawen, and non-doctrinal

<sup>5</sup> Mohamad Abdun Nasir, "Revisiting the Javanese Muslim Slametan: Islam, Local Tradition, Honor and Symbolic Communication," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 57, no. 2 (2019): 329, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2019.572.329-358>.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel F. Panuntun et al., "The sleeping soul doctrine of metaphysical anthropology in the Javanese death tradition," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79, no. 2 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i2.8370>.

<sup>7</sup> Kamal Suleiman et al., "Suicide Response in American Muslim Communities: A Community Case Study," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 17, no. 1 (2023): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.3998/jmmh.1457>; Kristen Nicole Andersen et al., "Perceptions of child death in Jigawa State, Nigeria: a mixed-methods study on how sociocultural nuances shape paediatric mortality reporting," *Global Health Action* 15, no. 1 (2022): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/16549716.2022.2120251>; Elizabeth Ayebare et al., "The impact of cultural beliefs and practices on parents' experiences of bereavement following stillbirth: a qualitative study in Uganda and Kenya," *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth* 21, no. 443 (2021): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-021-03912-4>.

<sup>8</sup> Henri Chambert-Loir and Anthony Reid (eds.), *The Potent Dead: Ancestors, Saints and Heroes in Contemporary Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003118176>; Moh. Dede et al., "Disaster, environment and local indigenous knowledge in Indonesia," *E3S Web of Conferences* 600, no. 02001 (2024): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202460002001>; Alina R. Oxendine, "City Seclusion and Social Exclusion: How and Why Economic Disparities Harm Social Capital," in *Urban Social Capital: Civil Society and City Life*, ed. Gregory W. Streich (London: Routledge, 2012), 9–30, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315548708-2>.

<sup>9</sup> Anna Agnes Ojok Arach et al., "Cultural beliefs and practices on perinatal death: a qualitative study among the Lango community in Northern Uganda," *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth* 23, no. 222 (2023): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-023-05550-4>; Hyunchul Kim, "Making Relations, Managing Grief: The Expression and Control of Emotions in Japanese Death Rituals," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 16, no. 1 (2015): 17–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2014.985605>; Xiaoyue Fan et al., "Religious Afterlife Beliefs Decrease Behavioral Avoidance of Symbols of Mortality," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 49, no. 7 (2023): 1113–29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672221096281>.

<sup>10</sup> Aris Munandar, "Death-related expressions in Javanese *angkating layon* speech and English eulogy," *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 8, no. 3 (2019): 515–16, <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v8i3.15250>.

spiritual values, death narratives are a vital component of the local religious knowledge system. Nevertheless, research on death within local communities, especially those that engage reflectively with death myths and narratives, remains limited and lacks comprehensive treatment. This study addresses that gap by examining the characteristics of death-related narratives circulating within the abangan Javanese community, particularly as represented in online media, as a reflection of local eschatological beliefs.

Death, within the Abangan Javanese community that upholds *kejawen* traditions and local spirituality, is understood through a complex framework of knowledge and meaning. It is not merely a biological fact, but a cultural reality with social and spiritual implications tied to personal life choices. Within this context, death is often narrated through stories drawn from myths and collective beliefs. This study is guided by three primary research questions: (1) How does the Abangan Javanese community construct death narratives through myths of social relations? (2) What is the role of astral entities in shaping the meaning of death? and (3) How are environment-related myths employed to explain the causes of death? Ultimately, this study aims to reflect on how the Abangan community constructs religious interpretations of death that encapsulate a local eschatological worldview, offering insights into a complex spiritual understanding rooted in everyday lived experience.

## Literature Review

### Death Myths

In Javanese society, particularly among the Abangan community, death is not merely understood as a biological end, but as a sacred event imbued with profound spiritual and symbolic meaning.<sup>11</sup> The Abangan group, known for its syncretic blend of Islam, local beliefs (*Kejawen*), and animism, has a variety of mythological narratives that accompany the process of death.<sup>12</sup> One popular belief is the existence of “natural signs” preceding someone’s death, such as specific bird calls, unusual dreams, or behavioral changes that are interpreted as omens. These myths serve not only as interpretations of phenomena that cannot be explained rationally but also as cultural mechanisms to spiritually prepare individuals and communities for the loss of a loved one.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, myths function as cultural instruments that preserve social cohesion through symbolic meanings passed down through generations.

On the other hand, death stories in the abangan tradition are often associated with the presence of spirits or souls that do not immediately depart the world. Beliefs about wandering souls, spirits (*lelembut*), or restless spirits (*roh penasaran*) are integral to the local cosmology, shaping the community's view of the afterlife.<sup>14</sup> Events such as sudden

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<sup>11</sup> Nasir, “Revisiting the Javanese Muslim Slametan.”

<sup>12</sup> Panuntun et al., “The sleeping soul doctrine of metaphysical anthropology in the Javanese death tradition,” 2.

<sup>13</sup> Francesca Martinelli, “Pegasus enterprise: An innovative form of cooperative for an alternative model of entrepreneurship,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Cooperative Economics and Management*, ed. Jerome Nikolai Warren, Lucio Biggiero, Jamin Hübner, and Kemi Ogunyemi (London: Routledge, 2024), 358–74, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003449850-28>.

<sup>14</sup> Whilda Syafitri, Robby Hidajat, and Tutut Pristiati, “Makna Sesaji pada Tradisi *Baritan* Desa Dermojayan Kabupaten Blitar,” *JoLLA: Journal of Language, Literature, and Arts* 2, no. 6 (2022): 857, <https://doi.org/10.17977/um064v2i62022p857-864>.

or unnatural deaths are often perceived as consequences of disturbances caused by spirits or violations of a particular customary norm.<sup>15</sup> Rituals like the *slametan* (a feast held for the deceased) on the seventh, fortieth, and hundredth days after death are not only acts of reverence but also serve as a process to "guide" the soul towards acceptance in the afterlife. In this context, death myths serve as a framework for understanding a spiritual realm that parallels the physical world, while also reinforcing ritual practices that shape the social and spiritual structure of the abangan Javanese community.<sup>16</sup>

## Javanese Belief

In Javanese society, particularly within the Kejawen tradition, a belief system is represented that integrates animism, Hindu-Buddhist influences, and Islam, especially in the syncretic form practiced by the abangan group.<sup>17</sup> In Kejawen thought, human life is understood as a cyclical and progressive spiritual journey, rather than a linear one. Life is viewed as an opportunity to align oneself with *kawruh sejati* (true knowledge) and to engage in inner spiritual practices that lead to the perfection of the soul.<sup>18</sup> The concept of life is not limited to the physical world, but also encompasses efforts to achieve harmony between humans, nature, and spiritual forces. The doctrine of *manunggaling kawula gusti* (the unity of the servant and the Lord) becomes an essential representation of the search for oneness between humanity and the Divine.<sup>19</sup> Life is viewed as a process of purification, where moral and spiritual actions directly influence the soul's journey after death, including the possibility of reincarnation or merging with the Source.

Within the framework of Javanese belief, death is not perceived as a final cessation of life but rather as a transitional phase toward a higher or lower existential state, determined by the quality of one's life conduct. The Kejawen tradition, as embraced by the abangan community, holds that the soul undergoes several metaphysical stages—referred to as *alam ruh* (the realm of souls)—before either attaining unity with *Sang Hyang Widhi* (the Supreme God) or returning to the cycle of reincarnation if the soul remains spiritually unrefined.<sup>20</sup> Death rituals such as *slametan* and *tahlilan* (commemorative prayers) reflect and enact these beliefs, serving not only to guide the soul in its journey but also to prevent it from becoming restless or malevolent.<sup>21</sup> These practices simultaneously function as expressions of ancestral reverence and as mechanisms for

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<sup>15</sup> Rahma Ari Widiastuti, "Animisme dan Dinamisme Masyarakat Jawa dalam Rubrik *Alaming Lelembut* Majalah Panjebar Semangat Edisi Januari-Juni 2022," *ARBITRER: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia* 5, no. 2 (2023): 905–16, <https://doi.org/10.30598/arbitrervol5no2hlm905-916>.

<sup>16</sup> Jochem van den Boogert, "The role of *slametan* in the discourse on Javanese Islam," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 45, no. 133 (2017): 352–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2017.1345166>.

<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Adiz Wasisto, "Reflecting on Kejawen: Javanese Esoteric Teachings in Indonesian National Development," *Udayana Journal of Law and Culture* 5, no. 2 (2021): 96, <https://ojs.unud.ac.id/index.php/ujlc/article/view/71365/40740>.

<sup>18</sup> Wasisto, "Reflecting on Kejawen," 113.

<sup>19</sup> Eko Suroso et al., "Mystical Implicature of Javanese Mantras: From Lingual to Transcendental?," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 13, no. 9 (2023): 2384, <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1309.26>.

<sup>20</sup> Ni Putu Ayudya Putri and Nitya Yuli Pratistha, "Menghayati Asta Aiswarya Sebagai Kemahakuasaan Sang Hyang Widhi," *Pramana: Jurnal Hasil Penelitian* 3, no. 2 (2023): 112.

<sup>21</sup> Sri Lestari et al., "Exploring Javanese Islam: The Acculturation of Religious Doctrine with Cultural Rituals," *Komunitas: Jurnal Pengembangan Masyarakat Islam* 14, no. 2 (2023): 188–205, <https://doi.org/10.20414/komunitas.v14i2.7556>.

preserving harmony between the physical and spiritual realms. Thus, the concept of death in Javanese belief is closely tied to moral life, cosmological awareness, and the ongoing sacred relationship between human beings and the universe.<sup>22</sup>

## The Abangan Community

The Abangan community within Javanese society represents a cultural group known for its syncretic religious orientation, blending Islamic elements with local traditions such as *Kejawen*, animism, dynamism, and influences from Hindu-Buddhist cosmologies.<sup>23</sup> For the abangan, religion is not merely a legalistic system or formal ritual practice but a way of life deeply embedded in cultural values, spiritual intuition, and social ethics.<sup>24</sup> This orientation is evident in their flexible approach to Islamic orthodoxy while emphasizing traditional rituals such as *slametan*, ancestral reverence, and harmonious coexistence with nature and the spirit world. In daily life, abangan individuals place high importance on cultural heritage, including *wayang* (shadow puppetry), folk narratives, and symbolic rituals that structure relationships between humans, ancestors, and metaphysical forces. Their understanding of death reflects a complex cosmological perspective, viewing it not as the end of life but as a transition to the spiritual realm. This transition demands culturally embedded responses to maintain spiritual balance between the earthly and supernatural realms.<sup>25</sup>

Although death rituals such as *slametan* are performed across various Muslim communities in Indonesia, including those outside Java, the meanings, structures, and cosmological foundations of the practice differ significantly in the abangan tradition. Within the Abangan context, *slametan* is not only a prayer for the deceased but also a spiritual mechanism to maintain harmony between the physical and metaphysical worlds.<sup>26</sup> Elements such as ritual timing based on the Javanese calendar, symbolic food offerings, and the interpretation of dreams or natural signs as messages from ancestral spirits distinguish abangan practices. In contrast to *tahlilan* rituals observed in santri (orthodox) communities—typically formal, text-based, and guided by Islamic jurisprudence—the abangan ritual framework incorporates local cosmological beliefs and ancestral symbolism.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the distinctiveness of Abangan lies in its synthesis of Islamic

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<sup>22</sup> Dwi Wahyuni et al., "The Religious Cosmology of Indigenous Communities for Maintaining Ecological Balance in the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 24, no. 1 (2025): 137–72, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol24.iss1.art5>.

<sup>23</sup> Sanny Nofrima, Sonny Sudiar, and Eko Priyo Purnomo, "How Javanese Culture Shaping Political Ideology (Case Study of the People in Yogyakarta)," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 9, no. 2 (2021): 435–36, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v9i2.500>; Nely Rahmawati Zaimah et al., "Abangan, Kejawen, dan Para Penjual Mimpi di Pesisir Jawa: Penelusuran Kisah Lain dari The Religion of Java Clifford Geertz," *Societas Dei: Jurnal Agama dan Masyarakat* 11, no. 2 (2024): 135–205, <https://doi.org/10.33550/sd.v11i2.472>.

<sup>24</sup> Ngatawi Al-Zastrouw, "Mengenal Sepintas Islam Nusantara," *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017): 1, <https://doi.org/10.21009/hayula.001.1.01>.

<sup>25</sup> Niels Mulder, "Abangan Javanese Religious Thought and Practice," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 139, no. 2/3 (1983): 260–67, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27863504>.

<sup>26</sup> Nasir, "Revisiting the Javanese Muslim Slametan."

<sup>27</sup> Masdar Hilmy, "TOWARDS A RELIGIOUSLY HYBRID IDENTITY? The Changing Face of Javanese Islam," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 12, no. 1 (2018): 66, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2018.12.1.45-68>; Supriyanto S., "Cuwongan in Javanese Islamic mysticism: A study of Islamic philosophy in Penginyongan society," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8234>.

ritual forms with indigenous cosmological frameworks, in which death is viewed not merely as a biological end, but as a sacred passage that requires communal and spiritual engagement to preserve cosmic balance.<sup>28</sup>

## Research Methods

This study aims to explain and reflect on the stories of death events that have developed and are believed by the local Javanese community, specifically within the abangan group, which upholds a religious tradition based on syncretic beliefs, spirituality, and non-dogmatic practices. The primary focus of this research is how these narratives function not only as myths but also as frameworks for constructing the living spiritual knowledge within the community. Izzuddin argues that local stories have a profound influence on shaping societal understanding of significant life events, including birth, marriage, and death.<sup>29</sup> This study is grounded in three key considerations: (1) the death narratives within the abangan Javanese community represent a central issue that has yet to be explored in depth, (2) these stories reflect a system of local spiritual knowledge that warrants further exploration, and (3) the complexity of the meanings embedded in these narratives requires a reflective and contextual approach. These three considerations form the basis for the study's focus.

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, utilizing document analysis as its primary method. The research focuses on publicly available digital texts that capture how myths and stories surrounding death are circulated, interpreted, and believed by the Abangan Javanese community. The choice of this approach is based on the recognition that online media has become a significant source of cultural narratives especially in communities where oral tradition and spiritual interpretation continue to adapt within the digital age. Data were collected through an intensive review of online news articles published on accessible Indonesian media platforms. The data collection process took place from March 2 to March 19, 2025, using the search keyword “Stories and Myths of Death in the Local Abangan Javanese Community” on Google.. Three researchers were involved in a systematic skimming and screening process, focusing on article titles, content, and contextual relevance. This resulted in the identification of three central thematic categories: (1) myths of social relations, (2) myths of the environment, and (3) myths of astral beings. These themes served as analytical entry points to understand how death is perceived within the abangan belief system. Fernando<sup>30</sup> emphasizes that social and religious issues disseminated in online media can represent factual phenomena that reflect existing realities within the community.

The data analysis in this study follows a process outlined by Miles and Huberman, focusing on three stages.<sup>31</sup> First, data reduction is carried out by reorganizing the data

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<sup>28</sup> Akhmad Rizqon Khamami, “Nasionalis-cum-Nahdliyin: a new identity for nominal Javanese Muslims,” *Contemporary Islam* 16 (2022): 517, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-022-00505-6>.

<sup>29</sup> Ahmad Izzuddin et al., “Cultural myth of eclipse in a Central Javanese village: Between Islamic identity and local tradition,” *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 78, no. 4 (2022): 5, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7282>.

<sup>30</sup> Henky Fernando, Yuniar Galuh Larasati, and Novita Cahyani, “Being #wanitasalihah: Representations of salihah women on TikTok,” *IAS Journal of Localities* 1, no. 1 (2023): 5, <https://doi.org/10.62033/iasjol.v1i1.8>.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (Second Edition) (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1994).



into a more systematic form based on the classification of the data acquired, according to the characteristics and implications represented by the data. Second, data verification is performed by drawing preliminary conclusions from the systematically reduced data. Third, data description is presented to showcase the verified data thematically, using relevant excerpts from online news articles that align with the arguments developed in this study. Following these three stages, an inductive analysis is conducted to provide the basis for interpreting the collected data.<sup>32</sup> Data interpretation is achieved by restating and reflecting on the data in light of the ideas, patterns, and socio-cultural context represented in the narratives derived from the news article excerpts, which are crucial findings in this study. The processes and stages of analysis conducted allow this study to explain and reflect on the stories constructed through the concept of eschatology in the local religious beliefs of the abangan Javanese community.

## Results and Discussion

The myths surrounding death in the Abangan Javanese community are not mere folklore passed down through generations without meaning, but rather reflect the religious and social structure, environmental beliefs, and interactions with astral beings that are deeply ingrained in their worldview. In the religious tradition of the Abangan Javanese community, which blends animism, Kejawen beliefs, and local spirituality,<sup>33</sup> death myths are expressed through a variety of dominant narratives that describe familial relationships, natural signs, and the existence of invisible entities. These narratives are an integral part of the cosmological understanding of the Abangan community, shaping their views on life and death. The key findings and discussions of this study provide a comprehensive insight into how death myths are constructed through the concept of eschatology in the religious beliefs of the Abangan Javanese community.

### Death Stories Based on Social Relations Myths

Death stories within the Abangan Javanese community, rooted in the myths they believe in, reflect the complexity of the collective cognitive structure that constructs communal knowledge about the causes of death based on religious values. In the Abangan tradition, death is not merely understood as a biological fact, but as a social and spiritual transition influenced by dominant socio-cultural knowledge, such as kinship, social hierarchy, and inherited norms and values. Panuntun reveals that in this context, death is often positioned as a consequence of life, extending beyond biological endpoints.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Wigati and Lukito emphasizes that death in Javanese tradition is not only a natural phenomenon but also shaped by inherited social and spiritual factors.<sup>35</sup> A report from Zaman illustrates this context, which states:

In Tegal, there is a myth that the regent cannot serve two consecutive terms. If someone serves two terms as regent, it is said that only two possibilities exist: imprisonment or

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<sup>32</sup> Fernando, Larasati, and Cahyani, "Being #wanitasalihah."

<sup>33</sup> Lestari et al., "Exploring Javanese Islam."

<sup>34</sup> Panuntun et al., "The sleeping soul doctrine of metaphysical anthropology in the Javanese death tradition."

<sup>35</sup> Kania Dwi Wigati and Yulia Nurliani Lukito, "Javanese cosmology as the source of sustainability: Analyzing the harmony of spatial organization in Javanese *joglo* house and shadow puppet performance," *AIP Conference Proceeding* 2376, no. 040009 (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0064110>.



death.<sup>36</sup>

The myth regarding the prohibition on serving two terms as regent in Tegal reflects a social construct that links political power with supernatural consequences, acting as a mechanism for social control. In the abangan Javanese community, which maintains a belief system rich in cosmological elements and local spirituality, this myth serves to limit the accumulation of power and regulate social regeneration. Jackson affirms that death narratives are often linked to belief systems designed to preserve social balance.<sup>37</sup> Death myths in local Javanese society illustrate tensions in social and political structures,<sup>38</sup> where excessive power is seen as disturbing the cosmic and moral balance of the community. This is particularly evident in societies with traumatic experiences related to leadership, which generate narratives reinforcing the belief that absolute power may lead to social and supernatural consequences.

A myth in the local Javanese community suggests that death occurring on a Saturday can spread to others. If someone dies on a Saturday, it is believed that another person will also die soon.<sup>39</sup>

The belief within the abangan Javanese community that death on a Saturday can "spread" to others reflects the collective understanding of death as a complex phenomenon. The death myths that emerge within the Abangan community are not just seen as events tied to the sacredness of time and the cycle of life. According to Minz,<sup>40</sup> these myths reflect the way society constructs a knowledge system that links time with life and death, where the sacredness of time is viewed as a temporal marker imbued with symbolic meaning and believed to have consequences for death events. Brodsky also argues that these long-held myths function as interpretive mechanisms to enhance social and spiritual awareness.<sup>41</sup> Thus, death myths within the Abangan community connect time and destiny, shaping the collective imagination about the afterlife, as articulated by Zaman:

The prohibition against siblings marrying simultaneously is a common belief in the local Javanese community. It is believed that if this prohibition is violated, one of the family members will die or experience misfortune.<sup>42</sup>

The prohibition against siblings marrying at the same time within the Abangan

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<sup>36</sup> Malik Ibnu Zaman, "5 Mitos Tentang Kematian di Tegal, Percaya Tidak?," *detikTravel*, September 19, 2024, <https://travel.detik.com/cerita-perjalanan/d-7548402/5-mitos-tentang-kematian-di-tegal-percaya-tidak>.

<sup>37</sup> Joshua Conrad Jackson et al., "Testing the causal relationship between religious belief and death anxiety," *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 8, no. 1 (2018): 57–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2153599X.2016.1238842>.

<sup>38</sup> Alain Corcos and Lawrence Krupka, "How Death Game to Mankind: Myths and Legends," in *The Final Transition*, ed. Richard Kalish (London: Routledge, 2019), 165, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315227085-15>.

<sup>39</sup> Zaman, "5 Mitos Tentang Kematian Di Tegal, Percaya Tidak?"

<sup>40</sup> Seema Mamta Minz, "The Role of Megalith Tradition in the Eschatological Beliefs of the Munda Tribe of Jharkhand: Past and Present," in *The Routledge Handbook of Tribe and Religions in India: Contemporary Readings on Spirituality, Belief and Identity*, ed. Maguni Charan Behera (London: Routledge, 2024), 215–222, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003510826-18>.

<sup>41</sup> Alexander I. Brodsky, "Myth Therapy. Notes on collective traumatology," *Philosophy and Conflict Studies* 37, no. 2 (2021): 208–10, <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu17.2021.202>.

<sup>42</sup> Zaman, "5 Mitos Tentang Kematian Di Tegal, Percaya Tidak?"

Javanese community is part of a traditional belief system that reflects the tension between social relations and the rhythm of life deemed harmonious within the local cosmology. In the abangan community, which relies more on spiritual heritage and oral traditions than on formal religious norms, this prohibition is believed to have both spiritual and social implications. Ivanov explains that myths like these serve to regulate family harmony by controlling the timing and social order within the institution of marriage.<sup>43</sup> Pyszczyński views this mechanism as a cultural way of maintaining symbolic and spiritual balance,<sup>44</sup> while Brodsky sees myths as a tool for social control that strengthens collective solidarity through adherence to customary norms.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, marriage myths act as cultural constructs that preserve social order in the abangan Javanese community across generations.

The diverse death myths within the Abangan Javanese community, which emphasize syncretic spiritual traditions rather than formal religious dogma, reflect how society frames social relations, power, and life through a symbolic system that has been inherited over time.<sup>46</sup> The prohibition on serving two terms, the belief that death can be contagious on certain days, and the taboo against siblings marrying simultaneously are concrete examples of this cultural articulation. Izzudin underscores that myths are not merely cultural narratives but also mechanisms of social control that maintain the spiritual and moral stability of the community.<sup>47</sup> In the case of the abangan community, myths serve as tools to mediate and adapt traditional values in the face of changing modern norms and social transformations. Rather than static superstitions, these stories are active agents in shaping behavior, interpreting events, and reinforcing a shared worldview. Thus, the death-related stories and beliefs found in the abangan tradition contribute to a rich system of local knowledge. This system weaves together symbols, values, and power relations that have been shaped by the community's historical experiences, spiritual worldview, and everyday efforts to maintain social harmony.

## Death Stories Based on Environmental Myths about Nature-Associated Omens

Death narratives rooted in environmental myths about nature-associated omens represent a distinct form of cultural storytelling that embodies the symbolic relationship between humans, nature, and death, particularly within the framework of abangan Javanese eco-spirituality. In the abangan belief system (characterized by its syncretism and its emphasis on maintaining harmony with both nature and ancestral spirits), myths are not merely regarded as supernatural tales but as vital conduits for transmitting ethical

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<sup>43</sup> Andrey G. Ivanov, Valeriy A. Nekhamkin, and Irina P. Polyakova, "Mythologizing Power of Everyday Life," *Voprosy Filosofii* 9 (2020): 87, <https://doi.org/10.21146/0042-8744-2020-9-87-98>.

<sup>44</sup> Pyszczyński, Solomon, and Greenberg, "A terror management theory perspective on the appeal of historical myths."

<sup>45</sup> Brodsky, "Myth Therapy."

<sup>46</sup> Nurulia Widiati Ihsana and Noveri Faikar Urfan, "Mitos Kepercayaan Dalam Budaya Jawa Pada Film Primbon," *WACANA: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Komunikasi* 23, no. 1 (2024): 201, <https://doi.org/10.32509/wacana.v23i1.3970>; Rahman Latif Alfian, Johan Iskandar, and Budiawati Supangkat Iskandar, "Burung-Burung Pembawa Tanda: Aneka Jenis dan Pemaknaan Mitos Burung pada Masyarakat Desa Ngablak, Kaupaten Pati, Jawa Tengah," *Pangadereng: Jurnal Hasil Penelitian Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora* 8, no. 1 (2022): 81–82, <https://doi.org/10.36869/pjhpish.v8i1.238>.

<sup>47</sup> Izzuddin et al., "Cultural Myth of Eclipse in a Central Javanese Village."

and spiritual knowledge. As Wibowo argues, such myths encapsulate the ways in which local communities perceive nature as a living, sacred presence.<sup>48</sup> Within this cosmology, death is often interpreted as a repercussion of violating ecological taboos or disrupting cosmic balance, revealing an environmental consciousness shaped by indigenous religious traditions. According to Fauziah, these myths act as collective mechanisms for regulating social behavior and sustaining ecological order across generations.<sup>49</sup>

There is a widespread belief among Javanese communities that the sight of a crow circling or flying over a house is a bad omen, believed to foreshadow illness or even death among the household members.<sup>50</sup>

This belief in the crow as a harbinger of death underscores the deeply symbolic framework through which the Abangan Javanese understand the natural world. In their cosmological outlook, animals such as crows are not viewed merely as biological organisms, but as spiritual messengers tasked with conveying warnings of impending disruption or transgression.<sup>51</sup> Purnomo refers to this system as a form of totemism the belief that specific animals maintain spiritual bonds with humans and that their appearance signals violations of ecological or spiritual norms.<sup>52</sup> Within this paradigm, death is construed as an outcome of disharmony between humans and the natural cosmos. These local myths, as Frolova and Lunyova note, serve as interpretive tools through which people engage with environmental signs, situating them within a broader cosmological narrative.<sup>53</sup> As Hermansyah reports that

On the first day, laborers only cut the branches and stems of a tree. But the next day, a resident recounted that several people had died, and more deaths followed in the coming days.<sup>54</sup>

This account of sequential deaths following the felling of a tree illustrates how the abangan community conceptualizes the link between ecological disturbance and spiritual consequences. Within their syncretic worldview, where elements of indigenous belief are combined with Javanese spiritual traditions, nature is regarded as the home of ancestral

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<sup>48</sup> A. Wibowo, Sugihardjo, and E. Lestari, "Synergy between myth and local wisdom in ecology balance of climate change in Java, Indonesia," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 724, no. 012110 (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/724/1/012110>.

<sup>49</sup> Novie Fauziah, "42 Mitos di Indonesia yang Masih Beredar di Masyarakat, Terkait Sial hingga Kematian," *okezone*, August 6, 2022, <https://travel.okezone.com/amp/2022/08/05/406/2642674/42-mitos-di-indonesia-yang-masih-beredar-di-masyarakat-terkait-sial-hingga-kematian>.

<sup>50</sup> Fauziah, "42 Mitos Di Indonesia Yang Masih Beredar Di Masyarakat, Terkait Sial Hingga Kematian."

<sup>51</sup> Supriyanto, "Cowongan in Javanese Islamic Mysticism," 1.

<sup>52</sup> SF. Luthfie Arguby Purnomo et al., "*Pepeling*: What makes the epigraphs at the gravesites of Javanese Muslim saints linguistically unique from the perspectives of deathscapes?," *Issues in Language Studies* 11, no. 2 (2022): 109–110, <https://doi.org/10.33736/ils.4786.2022>.

<sup>53</sup> Marina V. Frolova and Alexandra I. Lunyova, "The Vengeance of Kuntilanak: Indonesian Ghost in Modern Culture," *Etnografia* 1 no. 3 (2019): 173, [https://doi.org/10.31250/2618-8600-2019-1\(3\)-173-192](https://doi.org/10.31250/2618-8600-2019-1(3)-173-192).

<sup>54</sup> Dadang Hermansyah, "Konon, Tebang Pohon Bungur di Ciamis Ini Bisa Meninggal Mendadak," *detikNews*, February 18, 2020, <https://news.detik.com/berita-jawa-barat/d-4904860/konon-tebang-pohon-bungur-di-ciamis-ini-bisa-meninggal-mendadak>.

spirits and unseen forces.<sup>55</sup> Sartini emphasizes that, in this belief system, trees are not seen as inert objects but as vessels for latent spiritual power.<sup>56</sup> Hence, death is not perceived as a purely biological event, but rather as the outcome of violating ecological and moral boundaries. These interpretations, as Wigati and Lukito suggest, reflect a cosmological knowledge system that centers harmony between human life and the natural world.<sup>57</sup> As Yuda reports that:

A widely held myth is that owls are bearers of misfortune and death. The appearance of an owl near a house is often interpreted as a sign that tragedy or the death of a family member is imminent.<sup>58</sup>

The association of owls with death and misfortune within abangan communities reflects a deeply entrenched spiritual framework that governs how natural symbols are understood in relation to domestic life and key transitional moments such as birth, marriage, and death. In the abangan cosmology, which synthesizes animism, indigenous practices, and Javanese mysticism, owls are not simply nocturnal animals; they are perceived as intermediaries between the material and spiritual realms.<sup>59</sup> Myths of this nature, passed down orally across generations, act as cognitive frameworks through which the community makes sense of tragic or extraordinary occurrences. According to Holland,<sup>60</sup> these beliefs uphold the spiritual values of the collective and provide interpretive structure for understanding disruptions to ecological and social equilibrium.

The variety of death-related myths and symbolic beliefs found among the abangan Javanese, whether concerning the presence of crows, owls, or the consequences of cutting sacred trees, illustrates the depth of a local knowledge system grounded in spiritual ecology.<sup>61</sup> Human interaction with nature is not seen as neutral, but as part of a larger sacred order. Within this framework, myths serve not only as manifestations of belief but as cultural systems for interpreting and anticipating significant life events. As Mishra asserts, nature is imbued with symbolic significance and spiritual agency.<sup>62</sup> Death myths

<sup>55</sup> Agik Nur Efendi et al., "Mitos dan Pelestarian Alam: Eksplorasi Ekologi dalam Cerita Rakyat Sumber Taman Sari di Madura, Indonesia," *Ghâncaran: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia* Special Edition: Lalonget V (2024): 34, <https://doi.org/10.19105/ghancaran.vi.17178>; James Bennett, "Chapter 6 Sacred Allusions: Spiritual and Temporal Powers in Indonesian Arboreal Imagery," in *Numinous Fields: Perceiving the Sacred in Nature, Landscape, and Art*, ed. Samer Akkach and John Powell (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 163–200, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004687387\\_008](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004687387_008).

<sup>56</sup> Sartini S., "MYSTICISM IN JAVANESE SHAMANS: Morality toward God.," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 15, no. 1 (2021): 129. <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2021.15.1.129-148>.

<sup>57</sup> Wigati and Lukito, "Javanese Cosmology as the Source of Sustainability."

<sup>58</sup> Alfi Yuda, "7 Mitos Memelihara Burung Hantu, Pembawa Sial Bahkan Kematian," *BOLA.COM*, July 30, 2024, <https://www.bola.com/ragam/read/5657174/7-mitos-memelihara-burung-hantu-pembawa-sial-bahkan-kematian>.

<sup>59</sup> Yuliadi M. R., "Burung Gagak sebuah Tanda: Makna *Ground* dalam Cerpen *Uak dan Burung Gagak*," *Sirok Bastra* 5, no. 2 (2017): 181–89.

<sup>60</sup> Diane E. Holland et al., "Death and Grieving for Family Caregivers of Loved Ones With Life-Limiting Illnesses in the Era of COVID-19," *Professional Case Management* 26, no. 2 (2021): 53–54, <https://doi.org/10.1097/NCM.0000000000000485>.

<sup>61</sup> Dwi Amartani Suryaningputri et al., "Mitos - Mitos Kehidupan Sebagai Ciri Khas pada Masyarakat Jawa Khususnya Berada di Desa Manisrejo, Kecamatan Taman, Kota Madiun," *Jurnal Review Pendidikan dan Pengajaran (JRPP)* 5, no. 2 (2022): 223–25, <https://doi.org/10.31004/jrpp.v5i2.10157>.

<sup>62</sup> Sudesh Mishra, "Zoë-Assemblage: Immanent Life in the Age of the Anthropocene," in *The Routledge Handbook for Global South Studies on Subjectivities*, ed. Sebastian Thies, Susanne Goumegou, and Georgina Cebey (London: Routledge, 2024), 311–21, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003255871-26>.

are thus imbued with moral and ecological meaning, functioning as shared instruments for preserving the balance between humanity, nature, and the spiritual cosmos.

### Death Stories Based on Astral Myths

Death narratives involving astral beings are not merely integral components of cultural storytelling but also reflect how communities interpret death, transcendence, and the spiritual realm. In Abangan Javanese cosmology, belief in ancestral spirits, supernatural entities, and syncretic spiritual practices forms the foundation for understanding metaphysical aspects of existence. As Bubandt argues, oral traditions that feature spirits, vengeful ghosts, and otherworldly beings serve as symbolic representations of collective fear, moral boundaries, and the divide between the sacred and the profane.<sup>63</sup> These myths operate not only as tools of social control but also as systems of local knowledge that position human existence within the communal cultural order.<sup>64</sup> Yusuf further asserts that such narratives encapsulate the evolving cosmology of the abangan Javanese, where the meaning of death is continuously reshaped by changing social and spiritual conditions.

One such story is about the spirit of a woman. She is described as a cursed figure whose partners die mysteriously each time she marries, as she is said to consume the souls of her husbands.<sup>65</sup>

The story of the female spirit who brings death to her spouses illustrates the syncretic nature of Abangan belief, which blends animism, dynamism, and elements of Javanese Islam. This mythological construct of an astral being reveals symbolic tensions surrounding life, death, and gender relations.<sup>66</sup> The soul-eating woman is not merely portrayed as a supernatural figure but also as a metaphor for societal anxieties about women who defy domestic and patriarchal norms.<sup>67</sup> Within Abangan communities, this myth functions as a mechanism for regulating female behavior deemed transgressive.<sup>68</sup> Interprets this as a reflection of collective fears surrounding shifts in domestic power dynamics. Therefore, the myth of death associated with this figure is not just a supernatural tale; it is a deeply symbolic narrative that embodies the socio-religious

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<sup>63</sup> Nils Bubandt, "Spirits as technology: tech-gnosis and the ambivalent politics of the invisible in Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 13 (2019): 103, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-017-0391-9>.

<sup>64</sup> Pamela J. Prickett and Stefan Timmermans, "'If no one grieves, no one will remember': Cultural palimpsests and the creation of social ties through rituals," *The British Journal of Sociology* 73, no. 2 (2022): 252–254, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12934>; Arlindo Netto, "Narrando a própria Morte: Os Relatos De Experiências De Quase-Morte Como Narrativas De Sentido," *Sociedade e Cultura* 23 (2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.5216/sec.v23i.54620>.

<sup>65</sup> Rizal Yusuf JP, "Pasangan Sering Mendadak Meninggal? Hati-Hati, 5 Ciri Ini Bisa Jadi Anda Sosok Wanita Bahu Laweyan Menurut Primbon Jawa," *JawaPos.com*, August 18, 2024, <http://jawapos.com/lifestyle/014990247/pasangan-sering-mendadak-meninggal-hati-hati-5-ciri-ini-bisa-jadi-anda-sosok-wanita-bahu-laweyan-menurut-primbon-jawa>.

<sup>66</sup> Noni Puspa Adriana and Zahrotus Sa'idah, "Analisis Nilai-Nilai Budaya Jawa Dalam Film Badarawuhi (2024)," *Bayan Lin Naas* 8, no. 1 (2024): 69–82, <https://www.ejournal.unia.ac.id/index.php/bayan-linnaas/article/view/2011/1190>.

<sup>67</sup> Elisabeth Katie Soleman and Alfiansyah Zulkarnain, "Perancangan Film Animasi Pendek Dua Dimensi 'Ibu?' untuk melestarikan mitos Wewe Gombel," *Cipta* 2, no. 2 (2023): 240, <https://doi.org/10.30998/cipta.v2i2.2660>.

<sup>68</sup> Henky Fernando et al., "The Deconstruction of Women's Values in #MeToo on Instagram," *Italian Sociological Review* 15, no. 1 (2025): 32, <https://doi.org/10.13136/isr.v15i1.821>.

dynamics of gender and authority.

According to stories circulated in Gunung Kidul, a phenomenon known as pulung gantung (a reddish light descending from the sky and striking a rooftop) is believed to foretell a resident's imminent suicide.<sup>69</sup>

Death narratives in areas such as Gunung Kidul, predominantly inhabited by abangan communities, illustrate a cosmological interpretation of unnatural deaths, such as suicide. In the syncretic religious worldview of these communities, blending animism, Kejawen mysticism, and nominal Islam, such deaths are often explained through mystical narratives that offer culturally resonant explanations for tragic and illogical events.<sup>70</sup> Ardi also suggests that these beliefs function as collective symbols that link social crises to supernatural forces, providing a localized religious mechanism for coping with taboo phenomena.<sup>71</sup> These narratives, Larasati emphasizes, frame death not as a purely biological occurrence, but as the result of interaction between social, spiritual, and symbolic dimensions within the abangan religious structure.<sup>72</sup>

It is believed that a woman with the physical trait known as bahu laweyan brings misfortune. If she marries, her husband is said to suffer calamities or even die.<sup>73</sup>

The belief that a woman with bahu laweyan (a particular shoulder characteristic) is a harbinger of misfortune exemplifies the symbolic constructs within the Abangan Javanese belief system, which merges mysticism, Kejawen tradition, and syncretic spirituality. In this context, the female body becomes a site of cultural interpretation, loaded with mystical significance and social stigma. Larasati argues that this myth reflects how women are often portrayed as threats to household stability, especially within patriarchal frameworks.<sup>74</sup> Fernando adds that such myths operate as tools of social control, restricting women's autonomy and expressing collective anxieties about the unpredictability of life.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, these death-related myths are not merely tales of the supernatural, but powerful reflections of gendered power structures and socio-religious values.

The belief in bahu laweyan as a sign of misfortune is a symbolic construct rooted in the syncretic spirituality of abangan Javanese society. Within this tradition, the female body is frequently interpreted as a mystical and cultural symbol, often stigmatized

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<sup>69</sup> Febi Nurul Safitri, "Pulung Gantung, Mitos Bunuh Diri Di Gunungkidul," *Kompas.com*, March 31, 2022, <https://www.kompas.com/stori/read/2022/03/31/150000479/pulung-gantung-mitos-bunuh-diri-di-gunungkidul>.

<sup>70</sup> Anugerah Zakya Rafsanjani, "Tinjauan Ekoteologi Relasi Manusia dan Alam dalam Tradisi Sesuci Diri di Candi Jolotundo Mojokerto," *ISLAMIKA INSIDE: Jurnal Keislaman dan Humaniora* 4, no. 1 (2018): 96–120, <https://islamikainside.uinkhas.ac.id/index.php/islamikainside/article/view/58>.

<sup>71</sup> Mulia Ardi, "Kematian Filosofis Menurut Antropologi Metafisika Anton Bakker," *Kontemplasi: Jurnal Ilmu Ilmu Ushuluddin* 7, no. 1 (2019): 175, <https://doi.org/10.21274/kontem.2019.7.1.175-189>.

<sup>72</sup> Yuniar Galuh Larasati, "Trauma Psikologis Berakibat Kematian Pada Masa COVID-19" (undergraduate's thesis, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2021), <https://etd.repository.ugm.ac.id/penelitian/detail/195729>.

<sup>73</sup> "Mitos Bahu Laweyan, Perempuan yang Membawa Kematian," *Kumparan.Com*, February 17, 2023, <https://kumparan.com/berita-hari-ini/mitos-bahu-laweyan-perempuan-yang-membawa-kematian-1zqb0ukI3qC>.

<sup>74</sup> Yuniar Galuh Larasati, Henky Fernando, and Leanne Morin, "Rational Choice in Abortion: A Case Study of Urban Children," *International Journal of Business, Education, Humanities, and Social Sciences* 6, no. 2 (2024): 120–124, <https://journal.uty.ac.id/index.php/IJBHES/article/view/433>.

<sup>75</sup> Fernando et al., "The Deconstruction of Women's Values in #MeToo on Instagram."



through associations with misfortune, especially within domestic spaces. As Schirmacher explains, women with such physical traits are frequently subjected to cultural suspicion, reinforcing patriarchal dominance.<sup>76</sup> Nurasih underscores that these myths serve as mechanisms of social regulation, intended to control women's roles and respond to existential uncertainty.<sup>77</sup> Thus, myths concerning women and death are not only expressions of supernatural belief but also reveal the intersections of gender, power, and social order in abangan religious life.

The wide range of death-related myths involving astral beings, cursed women, pulung gantung, and bodily omens such as bahu laweyan reveals that the Abangan Javanese spiritual framework is not limited to supernatural imagination but is deeply embedded in social and cultural symbolism. These myths, arising from a fusion of animism, Kejawen, and syncretic Islam, function as collective narratives used to rationalize events that resist logical explanation. Holmberg notes that such stories serve to uphold social norms, stabilize moral order, and reproduce hierarchies, particularly in relation to gender.<sup>78</sup> Setio further argues that these myths often act as tools for stigmatizing behaviors that deviate from communal expectations.<sup>79</sup> In this way, death narratives in abangan communities function as socio-religious instruments that mediate tensions between life, mortality, and cultural values.

## Conclusion

Findings from this study reveal that within local Javanese communities, particularly those predominantly shaped by abangan traditions and syncretic belief systems, death is not understood merely as a biological event, but as a socio-religious phenomenon imbued with symbolic meaning and social consequences. In these communities, the experience of death is interpreted through three primary constructions. First, death is understood through myths of social relations, often linked to violations of familial or communal norms. Second, it is associated with the presence of astral beings, reflecting the abangan worldview that recognizes the influence of unseen supernatural forces. Third, death is narrated through environmental myths about nature-associated omens, such as the pulung gantung phenomenon or haunted sites, which serve as cultural metaphors for the disruption of cosmic and moral order. Together, these three dimensions illustrate that, in the abangan Javanese knowledge system, death is perceived as the outcome of the complex interplay between cultural values, local spirituality, and individual moral choices that are believed to shape one's ultimate fate.

These findings mark a significant departure from previous studies on death in local communities, which have largely been confined to three dominant thematic lenses:

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<sup>76</sup> Christine Schirmacher, "The Sharia-Based Understanding of Religious Freedom and Women's Rights in Conflict with the Secular Constitutional State," *Societas Dei: Jurnal Agama dan Masyarakat* 2, no. 2 (2015): 366, <https://doi.org/10.33550/sd.v2i2.22>.

<sup>77</sup> Wiji Nurasih, Ainiyatul Latifah, and Adil Hassan Ibrahim Mohamed, "Spirituality transformation from metaphysical to metaverse," *IAS Journal of Localities* 1, no. 2 (2023): 114, <https://doi.org/10.62033/iasjol.v1i2.17>.

<sup>78</sup> Tora Holmberg, Annika Jonsson, and Fredrik Palm (eds.), *Death Matters: Cultural Sociology of Mortal Life* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11485-5>.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Setio, "The Persistence of Ancestor Veneration: A Dialogical Relationship between Christianity and Indigenous Religions in Indonesia," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 29, no. 2 (2019): 220, <https://doi.org/10.2143/SID.29.2.3287307>.

religious doctrine, economic impact, and psychological interpretation. In contrast, this study highlights how abangan Javanese communities integrate local beliefs, Kejawen mysticism, and syncretic Islam, resulting in a more nuanced cultural understanding of death as a phenomenon with deep social and symbolic implications. While this study is limited methodologically, relying primarily on online media reports identified through keyword searches such as “stories and myths of death in abangan Javanese communities”, this constraint also presents an opportunity. It opens the door for future research that is more comprehensive and comparative, aimed at exploring the diverse social constructions of death within Javanese communities, particularly in the context of abangan spirituality.

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