

The Dancing Cross: Contextualizing Religious Symbol in Balinese Context

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Religious symbol is the generic word for all kinds of religious signs of the divine. It includes myths and religious narratives, theological ideas, particular notions such as karma or sin which are defined in one or more symbol systems, religious acts such as liturgies or private meditations that move through and overlay various symbol systems, as well as architectural and artistic symbols with religious content, books, songs, devotional objects, and the like. Generally, it can be referred to a religious object and can bear a religious meaning. This study aims to identify the meaning of a contextualized religious symbol in the Bali Church which is known as 'the dancing cross'. The theory applied in this study is semiotic theory which in this case is structural semiotics. The source of the data are texts that discuss about the cross symbol as well as the results of interviews with the creator of the dancing cross symbol, Nyoman Darsane. This study confirms that the dancing cross, which is widely used by Christians who are members of the Protestant Christian Church in Bali is considered as the product of regionalization or contextualization of the cross which is the crux of Christian life and worship. The shape of the dancing cross is transformed from the universal shape of the cross which is consisted of two bars leading to a T-shaped cross which base stem is longer than the other three arms but crooked at the bottom like a dancer who is in left *agem* position. The results of the analysis through the utilization of structural semiotics in terms of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations revealed some important points namely the contrastive meaning of the cross before and after the time of Jesus Christ as the sign of shame which covers a curse, a stumbling block and foolishness and the sign to be glorified which covers salvation victory and obedience. Other important points to be revealed are the contextual shape of the cross that can be aligned as a dancer who is in left *agem* position and the contextual meaning of the cross which leads to the sign of obedience of God's people or the disciples to carry or dance the cross in accordance with the example given by Jesus Christ.

Keywords : dancing cross, contextualization, symbol, Balinese

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INTRODUCTION

Symbols, religious or otherwise, play a wide part in the life of individuals as they are closely related to their cultural heritage and often give contribution to the making of a person's identity (Bacquet, 2017). Specifically, about religious symbols, (Neville, 2001) reveals that it is the generic word for all kinds of religious signs of the divine. Further, he states that it includes myths and religious narratives, theological ideas, particular notions such as karma or sin which are defined in one or more symbol systems, religious acts such as liturgies or private meditations that move through and overlay various symbol systems, as well as architectural and artistic symbols with religious content, books, songs, devotional objects, and the like. Generally, it can be referred to as a religious object and can bear a religious meaning.

The cross is one of the most important symbols for Christians. The cross which is widely used as a representative symbol of Christianity, is symbolically representing the success, atonement, and sacrifice and love regarding the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ for the salvation of mankind (Park, 2019). Some of the other famous symbols in Christianity as mentioned by (Wilson, and Taylor, 2015) are dove which is a symbol of not only peace but also the one who brings peace namely the Holy Spirit. Another one is water which is a symbol of baptism i.e cleansing from sin and resurrection to eternal and also symbolizing living water namely eternal life given by God. In Baptism people die to sin and rise to new life in Christ. Another famous symbol is rainbow, which is a visible sign and reminder that God will restore the relationship between God and humanity that was damaged at the fall. Regarding the cross, it is also known as a universal symbol for the Christian faith and a reminder of Christ's death and resurrection. It stands on mountain tops, hangs on the walls and is worn as a jewel in the form of a chain pendant. There are many types of crosses that have been used throughout history, many having regional or ethnic origins.

(Johns, 2019) conducted a study on the regionalization of the symbol of the cross in terms of its visual through ornamentation either on the surface of the cross or around it. According to him, the evolution of the cross and its ornamentation changes with region, group or sect of Christians and the meaning they gave to it. Further he also states that the ornamentation or the cross also represented various facets or Christian theology and philosophy as professed by these various sects. In this case, local

elements like vegetation, fruits, fauna and cultic symbol get incorporated, as seen in the cases of India, Armenia, etc. Thus the resultant combination of the cross symbol with its evolving and distinguishing ornamentation serves as a window into the coming of Christianity into those respective localities, how the two communities interacted, the level of their religious-intellectual interaction, etc. The purpose of his study is to make a cross-cultural comparison between a few of the ancient crosses like Nestorian Crosses, Armenian Khachkar, Persian Crosses in India, etc. He studies the ornamentation of the cross and puts into context the locality where these crosses are found while making an attempt to separate what was originally brought by the early missionaries either in tangible or intangible form.

The term regionalization has the same meaning as contextualization. (Bailey, 2007) simply defines contextualization as place (ideas or words, for example) in a suitable or particular context. It is an attempt to take off Western wrappings, which have typically become a part of worldwide Christianity, and put on 'clothing' which looks and feels much more natural and 'right' in certain communities. (Wilson, 2007) reveals the aim of contextualization which is not to make to Biblical message relevant, rather it is to make the message meaningful in terms that the people can understand, facilitating critical reflection on the message of Scripture in the particular cultural context, and helping the people internalize the message so that their worldview and behavior is transformed.

The dancing cross is a product of regionalization or contextualization of the cross which is the crux of Christian life and worship. This symbol is widely used by Christians who are members of the Synod of the Protestant Christian Church in Bali. This symbol is known as the crooked cross or dancing cross which is clearly depicted on the symbol of the Balinese Church which stands upright on a boat (in Balinese 'jukung'), which is representing the church (Aritonang, 2012).

This study aims to explore the contextual meaning of the dancing cross symbol. Although most Christians in Bali are familiar with the contextual shape of this cross because it has been widely used as a symbol of the Protestant Christian Church in Bali, research has never been conducted to reveal the meaning of the dancing cross symbol. When compared to previous studies regarding the contextualization or regionalization of the cross symbol which focused more on discussing the evolution of the cross in visual terms, this study discusses it more comprehensively, namely not only

in terms of its visual shape but also in terms of meaning through the use of structural semiotic theory. This research will have broad implications because it will provide an understanding of not only the shape but specifically on the meaning of the dancing cross to the wider community, especially members of the Protestant Christian Church in Bali which was confirmed directly through interview with Noman Darsane as the creator of the symbol.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been carried out to connect symbols and meanings by the utilization of semiotic theory, especially for symbols found in films, short story, and also advertisement. ([Septiani et al., 2019](#)) research the relationship between the symbol and meaning in *Zootopia*, a film by Jared Bush and Phil Johnston. The objectives of this research is to show the types of symbol in *Zootopia* and its meaning by identifying the types of symbol and its meaning based on the speaker's utterance and the context of the utterance itself. The method used in this research is descriptive analysis with library research technique. The results of this research shows that there are 15 symbols in this movie. From 15 symbols mentioned, all the symbols in *Zootopia* are private symbol. The meaning of symbols is determined by its reference, which refers to the words and sentences, and also by supportive context which explains the reference. Symbols and meanings in this movie are closely related and become a unity that builds storylines and characters. The symbols in this movie are intentionally used to help in conveying the content and message of the movie.

Similar study was also conducted by ([Friskaliana, 2020](#)) in order to examine the used symbols, the meanings and also the roles of symbol in *The Queen of Spades* short story. In this study, they used the theory by Griffith; public symbol and private symbol. To reveal the meanings of symbol, they used the theory of 'symbolic reference' by Whitehead. In finding out the roles of symbol in building the story, the researcher analyzed through plot, character, setting, and theme in the story. The method of this study used descriptive qualitative method and the data of this study based on words, sentences, and narration which reflected symbols throughout the story. Furthermore, the result of the research showed cards of three, seven, aces categorized as public symbol and the queen of spades categorized as private symbol. The number three reflected to love triangle which happened between Hermann, Lizaveta, and Lizaveta's husband. Then, seven reflected Hermann who obsessed to know the secret of lucky card. At last,

aces reflected to karma that must be accepted by Hermann and the Countess. Meanwhile, the queen of spades as private symbol reflected to the Countess Anna Fedotovna and as a symbol of the key issue on the secret of lucky cards in the story. Then, the roles of symbols reflected through plot that showed to express the disquieting effect, character that showed to express the strength qualities, setting that showed to express the strength atmosphere, and theme that showed to express the wisdom lessons.

Another study discussing the correlation between symbols and meanings was carried out by ([Rizqiyah, 2017](#)) in her thesis on *The Symbolic Meaning of Ruby Red* in Kerstien Gier's Novel. This study aims at identifying the symbolic meaning of Ruby Red used as Gwyenth's nickname which has an extension of meaning according to the context in the novel. The utilized theory is Semiotic by Roland Barthes which has two levels of significance namely denotation and connotation. The results show that the symbolic meaning of Ruby Red has three extensions of connotative meaning which are mystery, hero, and tragedy. The symbolic meaning of mystery is figured out from the belief of Gwen and her family in horoscopes and satanic rituals. Ruby Red also has a symbolic meaning of hero because Gwen was traveling to the past in order to take the sample of blood from time traveler who lived in past and had to solve the problem of chronograph is stolen. The Ruby has also an extension meaning as tragedy because it has been included in chronicle that all time travelers have symptoms or diseases such as dizzy, nausea, and migraine.

Other literature discusses the use of semiotic theory in analyzing magazine advertisements, particularly related to the stereotype of gender roles. This study was conducted by ([Jha, 2017](#)). In this study, researchers find out how gender roles are portrayed as stereotypes in magazine advertisements. They analyzed 12 advertisements which were taken from Magazine (*Femina* and *Cosmopolitan*) from January 2016 to December 2016. The methodology which has been used in this study is Descriptive qualitative analysis with pictorial analysis based on Goffman's theory of gender analysis where the researchers analyzed and described and interprets the sign of portraying gender in Magazine advertisements. In conclusion they found that the portrayals of femininity depicted more often as a sex object than portrayals of masculinity in magazine advertisements. Gender display in this study in a form of stereotype, sex object and hegemonic nature as well as portrayals of femininity depicted more often in men's control or it can better to say that

women shows that herself to be receiving support from the men, i.e. men seemingly for supportive and protective nature.

Another study that specifically discusses the symbol of the cross is more directed to the discussion of the visual form of the cross, especially related to variations in the shape of the cross in each region and culture. For example, (Park, 2019) conducted a study on the characteristics of cross design with a purpose of suggesting the future direction of cross symbol design by making use of Apriori algorithm. She states that if there is the refined and defined data of the cross with diverse meanings and forms, it would be possible not only to understand the types and characteristics of the cross, but also to understand the changes in patterns of the time. Therefore, through her study she designed a data model that could systematize and save the types of cross symbol expressed in the symbolic form, and also analyzed the attributes of association rule of the cross with the use of Apriori algorithm. She believes that her study would be helpful for the production of more meaningful and symbolic cross symbols by conducting the analysis in accordance with the characteristics of cross design and also suggesting the future direction of cross symbol design.

In line with the study conducted by (Park, 2019), another study in the same year related to changes in the visual shape of the cross was also conducted by (Johns, 2019). He states that the cross symbol has gone through a long period of hundreds years of evolution from its origin in a pre-Christian phase to its Christianization. The cross, which was the symbol of shame and punishment for criminals became a Christian symbol and is representing the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The cross, either on its surface or around it began evolving with elongation, curves, equalization, and ornamentation. The cross in its evolution on ornamentation changes with region, group or sect of Christians and the meaning they gave to it. The ornamentation also represented various facets of Christian theology and philosophy as professed by these various sects. Furthermore, one observes that with the regionalization of the symbol of the cross - local elements like vegetation, fruits, fauna and cultic symbols get incorporated, as seen in the cases of India, Armenia, etc. Thus the resultant combination of the cross symbol with its evolving and distinguishing ornamentation serve as a window into the coming of Christianity into those respective localities, how the two communities interacted, the level of their religio-intellectual interaction, etc. He concludes that The next stage that is localization of the symbol depends on the originating variety of the

symbol, the route that it took in stages and the existing culture of the places that it halted or finally stops.

The review of literature above shows that semiotic theory has been used extensively in expressing the form, meaning, function and role of symbols, especially in literary works. Whereas in studies that specifically address the cross symbol, researchers have not utilized semiotic theory because the research conducted focuses more on changes in the shape or design of the cross symbol that adapts to local culture and does not specifically relate to the meaning associated with these changes.

METHODS AND THEORY

Methods

The approach used in this study is a qualitative approach by utilizing interpretative semiotic methods. In terms of interpretative semiotics method, the study used is a text analysis study where the data source consists of various texts that discuss the symbol of the cross, especially those found in the text of the Holy Scriptures, in this case the Bible. In addition, another source of data that will be analyzed using text analysis is the transcription of an interview with a Balinese Christian artist named Nyoman Darsane who created a dancing cross that has been adopted as a symbol that is widely used in the Protestant Christian Church in Bali.

The data was examined using three components of analysis, i.e. data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. The three components are: (1) Data reduction is the first stage in the analysis, data in the form of text is collected, then the data that has been collected is selected, simplified, and abstracted; (2) The presentation of the data is the second stage in the analysis, that is a series of information and a complete description that allows the conclusion of the research to be drawn; and (3) The conclusion is the third stage, which is an activity carried out when the data collected is sufficient.

Theory

As a science that studies signs, semiotics also views signs as cultural symptoms. Semiotics sees culture as a "system of meaning". This is explicitly stated by (Danesi, 2021) that "meaning is contained in these forms (known technically as signs). The coherence of these forms into an over-arching system of meaning produces what we call culture". Even Eco says that the meaning of a sign is the result of a convention, a principle in cultural life. In this regard, culture as a system of meaning is closely related to

the contextualization process which is defined as a model for emphasizing scripture or biblical meaning into contemporary cultural contexts. Based on this understanding, it is very appropriate if the semiotic approach is used to analyze contextualization which is defined by (Hesselgrave, D. J. and Rommen, 1989) as a direct result of discovering the meaning of the biblical text, consciously submitting to its authority, and applying or appropriating that meaning to a given situation. Regarding contextualization and culture, (Wan, 2003) clearly states that contextualization is derived from the dynamic relationship between gospel and culture, between what is called as cultural relevancy and theological coherence. Based on this, he claims that contextualization as the efforts of formulating, presenting and practicing the Christian faith in such a way that is relevant to the cultural context, of the target group in terms of conceptualization, expression and application; yet maintaining theological coherence, biblical integrity and theoretical consistency".

(Piliang, 2010) states that the semiotic method basically operates at two levels of analysis, namely the analysis of individual signs, for example the type of sign, the mechanism or structure of the sign, and the meaning of the sign individually. Second, is the analysis of signs as a group or combination, namely a collection of signs that make up what is called a text. Text in its simplest sense is "a combination of signs. The most obvious type of text is a sentence written in a novel or a fashion worn by someone. Each of these texts has its own special paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes. Words in novels or clothing elements in fashion can be considered as a collection of signs that together form verbal text and fashion text. In contrast to text analysis, individual sign analysis focuses on the analysis of sign typology, sign structure, and sign meaning. Among the well-known typologies of signs is the grouping of signs into three types by Charles Sander Pierce, namely indexes, icons, and symbols. Analysis of signs in groups or a combination of them is called text analysis. Text semiotics does not stop only analyzing signs (types, structures, meanings of signs) individually but includes the selection of signs that are combined into larger groups or patterns (text) in which attitudes, ideologies, or myths are represented certain background for the combination of these signs.

Specifically, the types of systemic relationship of signs, based on Saussure's views are consisted of the relationship between signified and signifier, signs with all other elements in one system/code, and sign relationship with the elements surrounding it

(Chandler, 2007). Those type of systemic relations can be described as syntagmatic relationship, which is concerning with position and paradigmatic relations which is involving substitution or associate relations. Temporally, syntagmatic relationships refer to intertextual relationships with markers that are present in the text, while paradigmatic relationships refer to intertextual relationships with markers that are absent from the text. Such an approach is known to be very good to be used as an approach to textual analysis that focuses on structural analysis. Some analytical tools in the paradigmatic dimension include replacement tests (the commutation test), opposition, *markedness*, deconstruction, and alignment. The syntagmatic analysis of the text, both verbal and nonverbal, involves an analysis of the structure and relations between its parts. Structuralism semiotics attempt to identify basic constituent segments in the text, namely the *syntagma*. The study of syntagmatic relationships reveals text conventions. The use of certain syntagmatic structures in the text has an influence on meaning. Some syntagmatic analysis tools include spatial relations, sequential relations and structural reduction.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This point of result and discussion reveals three important things namely the four basic types of the cross and how it relates with the shape of the Balinese contextualized cross, i.e. the dancing cross, the semiotic views on the meaning of the cross which is grouped into the meaning of the cross before and after the time of Jesus Christ, and the most central point on the contextual shape and meaning of the dancing cross.

From the basic to the contextualized types of the cross

(“Cross,” 2022) mentions that the cross can be groups into four basic types of iconographic representations namely the *crux quadrata* or simply known as Greek cross with four equal arms, the second one is the Latin cross or the *crux immissa* which base stem is longer than the other three arms, the third one is the *crux commissa* which is in the form of Greek letter tau, which is also known as St. Anthony's cross, and the fourth one is the *crux decussate*, from the Roman *decussis* or symbol of the numeral 10, also known as St. Andrew's cross for the supposed manner of the martyrdom of St. Andrew the Apostle. Tradition favors the *crux immissa* as that on which Christ died, but some believe that it was a *crux commissa*. The many variations and ornamentations of processional, altar, and heraldic crosses, of carved and painted crosses

in churches, graveyards, and elsewhere, are developments of these four types. The following (Figure 1) is the image of those four basic types of the cross.

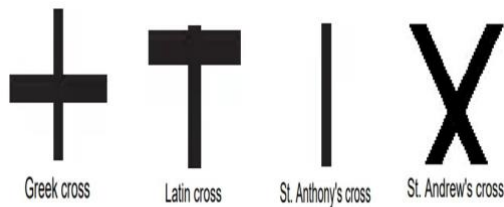


Figure 1. The Four Basic Types of Cross

(Source: Encyclopedia *Britanica*)

However, from the Greek New Testament, the word that English Bibles or other versions translate as 'cross' is a piece of wood that is a stake or a pole and sometimes it is just called a tree (KJV: Gal. 3:13):

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

What is known today as the cross universally is made up of two beams of wood – one vertical and one horizontal. (Yehoshua, 2016) mentions that this shape of tradition 'T' cross had its origin in ancient Chaldea (Babylon) and was used as the god Tammuz symbol (being in the shape of the mystic Tau, the initial of his name) in that country and in adjacent lands, including Egypt. It is by the middle of the 3rd century AD the churches had either departed from, or had travestied certain doctrines of the Christian faith. In order to increase the prestige or the apostate ecclesiastical system, pagans were received into the churches apart from regeneration by faith, and were permitted largely to retain their pagan signs and symbols. Hence the Tau or T, in its most frequent form, with the cross-piece lowered, was adopted to stand for the 'cross' of Christ." The following is the universal shape of cross consisting of two bars leading to a T-shaped cross or adopting the Latin cross or the crux immissa which base stem is longer than the other three arms.



Figure 2. The Universal Shape of Cross

(Source: (Wilson, and Taylor, 2015))

Referring to the results of research that has been carried out by many scientists, (Park, 2019) for instance, with her study on the cross model by utilizing *a priori* algorithm, states that this universally cross shape has evolved from time to time and will continue to evolve in terms of design. The evolution of the cross on its shape and ornamentation changes in accordance with the region, group or sect of Christians and how they gave meaning on it. The evolution of the cross shapes and ornamentations are also determined by various facets of Christian theology and philosophy which are professed by these various sects which is according to (Johns, 2019) is a window into the coming of Christianity into their respective localities. He also referred to this process as regionalization which according to (Bailey, 2007) simply defines as contextualization which is process of placing ideas or words in a suitable or particular context or putting on clothing in order to look and feel much more natural and 'right' in certain community.



Figure 3. The Dancing Cross

(Picture by Nengah Rata of a Wooden Souvenir from *Blimbingsari* Festival)

Figure 3 is picture of one products of contextualization which is known as the dancing cross. This is a form of regionalization of the cross, not only in terms of the shape but also the philosophy of the universal Christian symbol into Balinese context.

The semiotic views on the meaning of the cross (before and after the time of Jesus Christ)

Referring to (Johns, 2019), the shape and meaning of the cross contained in its philosophy cannot be separated from one another. The cross has become the symbol of the Christian faith and even Christianity has become a religion of the cross is a manifestation of the correlation between the shape and the meaning or the philosophy of the cross itself. The correlation between the two is found in various biblical texts, which are spread throughout the entire book from the Old Testament to the New Testament. (Walker, 2014) in the Bible Concordance reveals 54 verses that mention or discuss the cross throughout the Bible. The following are some parts of the Biblical texts that mention the cross which is divided into two groups based on the grouping method carried out by (Kanu, 2018), namely the cross before the time of Jesus Christ and the cross after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The grouping of Biblical texts is based on codes, which is not only function as communication convention but also a procedural system of interrelated conventions that operate in a particular domain, in this case the meaning of the cross before the presence of Jesus Christ and the meaning of the cross after the presence of Jesus Christ. This grouping is also carried out in a framework to simplify phenomena and facilitate the analysis process.

In accordance with the semiotics view point as mentions by (Piliang, 2010), those biblical texts related with the cross in Table 1 can be considered as the combination of signs which have their own special paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes. This understanding is based on Saussure’s view that the systemic relations of signs are consisted of the relationship between signified and signifier, signs with all other elements in one system/code, and sign relationship with the elements surrounding it (Chandler, 2007). Those type of systemic relations can be described as syntagmatic relationship, which is concerning with position and paradigmatic relations which is involving substitution or associate relations. Basically these two types of relationships are ways of selecting and combining signs based on certain rules or codes so that they can produce a meaningful expression.

Table 1. The Biblical Texts Related with Cross

(Source: Online Bible New International Version)

The Cross Before the Time of Jesus Christ	The Cross After the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ
<p><u>22</u>If someone guilty of a capital offense is put to death and their body is exposed on a pole, <u>23</u>you must not leave the body hanging on the pole overnight. Be sure to bury it that same day, because anyone who is hung on a pole is under God’s curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. (Deuteronomy 21:22-23)</p>	<p><u>23</u>but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <u>24</u>but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <u>25</u>For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. (1 Cor. 1:23-25)</p>
<p><u>13</u> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.” (Gal 3:13)</p>	<p><u>14</u>May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which [a] the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal. 6:14)</p>
<p><u>23</u>but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:23)</p>	<p><u>24</u>“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24)</p>
<p><u>21</u>From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. <u>22</u>Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” (Matt. 16:21-22)</p>	<p>¹³When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:13-15)</p>
<p><u>7</u>rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <u>8</u>And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:7-8)</p>	<p><u>24</u>Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <u>25</u>For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. <u>26</u>What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? (Matt. 16:24-25)</p>

In this sense, those biblical texts related with the cross before and after the time of Jesus Christ can be described by using syntagmatic relations, namely the combination of signs in one text that forms a meaningful expression. This can be done by seeing that the texts on the understanding of the cross, both from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy) and from various books in the New Testament (Matthew, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Hebrew, and 1 Peter), are an integral part of a text namely the Bible. Furthermore, of several types of relationships in the combination pattern (spatial and narrative relations) the one that can be applied is the spatial relationship, which in this case is the center/periphery relationship. Regarding this, the center is the cross as the core information, which is connected with other elements (periphery elements) in the form of words or expressions in each code, i.e the understanding of the cross before and after the time of Jesus Christ. The following is the image of the spatial relations in each code.

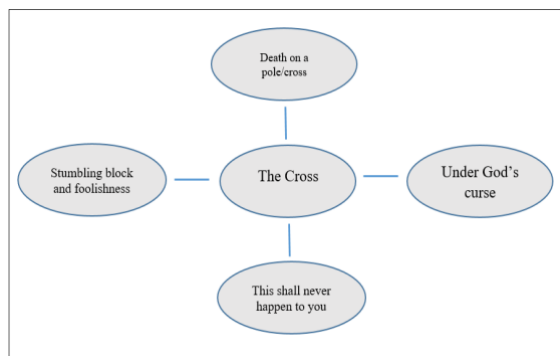


Figure 4. The Spatial Relations of Texts in Code on the Cross Before the Time of Jesus Christ

The above image on the spatial relations of the texts clearly shows the negative meaning of the cross as it was known as the symbol of shame. The cross was a stake on which the corpse of a criminal was bound for public display. Thus, Scripture says through the book of Deuteronomy: If someone has been put to death for a crime and his body has been hung on the post, it is not to remain there overnight. It must be buried the same day, because a dead body hanging on a post brings God's curse on the land. You shall not defile your land which the Lord God gives you as an inheritance (21:22-23). This also explains why, Apostle Paul referring to the Old Testament writes: "Anyone who is hanged on the cross is under God's curse" (Gal 3:13). When Jesus told his disciples, "I must go to Jerusalem and suffer much from the elders and the chief priests and the teachers of the law. I will be put to death, but three days later I will be raised to life (Mt 16:21)", Peter took Jesus by the side and began to reprimand him, "God forbid it Lord that must never happen to you" (Mt 16:22). Peter did this because the cross was a symbol of

shame. The understanding of the cross before the death of Jesus was negative- the cross was a curse, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:23).

In contrast to the understanding of the cross before the time of Jesus Christ, the cross after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has become a sign to be glorified. It has become a sign of salvation, victory, and also obedience. This can be seen through the utilization of spatial relationship i.e. the center/periphery relationship on the combination of signs with code the cross after the time of Jesus Christ. The core information is the cross, which is connected with other texts of the same code as described in the following image.

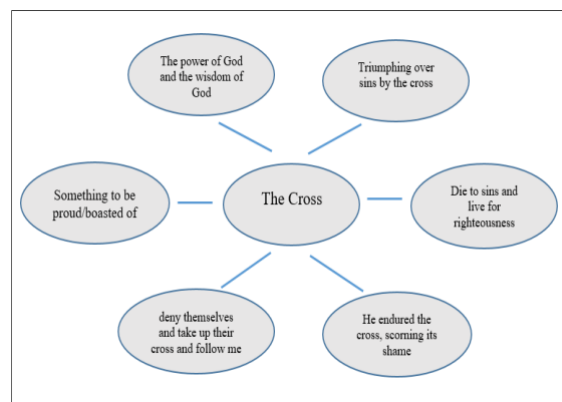


Figure 5. The Spatial Relations of Texts in Code on the Cross After the Time of Jesus Christ

The mystery of the cross lies in the fact that Jesus used what the world considered scandalous and shameful to bring salvation to the whole world. Contradictory, the cross which is used to be a sign of curse, a stumbling block, and even foolishness, turned into a sign of salvation after the time of Jesus Christ. The twisting of this fact is clearly seen in 1 Corinthians 1:23-25, where the word cross (Christ crucified) is correlated in a center/periphery relationship with the words power and wisdom. Thus, the cross, which is God's wisdom, is also a sign of victory. Even, it is not only a victory but a triumph which has the meaning of a great victory or achievement. In this case, the cross has a center/periphery relationship with texts triumphing over sins. This relation is revealed in the letter of the Apostle Paul to the congregation in the city of Colosse: "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them,

triumphing over them by the cross” (2:13-15). The cross as a sign of victory is also shown by the center/periphery relationship between the cross and the text something to be proud/boasted of. The great victory over sin through the crucifixion of the world along with its pleasures should be something to be proud of because through it humans can live in righteousness (Gal. 6:14) (1 Peter 2:24).

Besides having the signs of salvation and victory, the cross after the time of Jesus Christ also has the sign of obedience. This can be seen through the center/periphery relationship of the cross as the source of information with the text “He endured the cross, scorning its shame” which is taken from Hebrews 12:2. In this case, the sign of obedience is shown through Christ's obedience in carrying the cross even unto death to complete His mission of redemption for mankind. Through this, Jesus is also presented to us as an example not of endurance only, but also of faith. The cross as the sign of obedience is also shown through the center/periphery relationship between the cross and the text deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me which is taken from Matthew 16:24-25. This shows that obedience in carrying the cross is not only done by Jesus Christ but also by His followers.

Through His words in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus mentioned 3 main things which belong to the character of a true disciple. The first is self-denial which means that a person in following Jesus must voluntarily renounce everything that might hinder his discipleship, as well as denying himself even in things lawful that he may approach the likeness of his Master. The second one is taking up his cross which means that a true disciple is not only ready to bear what is brought upon him including suffering, shame, and death, but he also be eager to endure it, meet it with a solemn joy, be glad that he is counted worthy of it. The last point is follow me which means a Christ's follower must be energetic and active not passive only and resigned, but with all zeal tracking his Master's footsteps, which lead on the way of sorrows. Here too is comfort; he is not called to a task as yet untried; Christ has gone before, and in his strength he may be strong.

The contextual shape and meaning of the dancing cross

According to (Aritonang, 2012), the dancing cross (the crooked cross) as shown in figure 3 is a contextualized cross symbol which is used widely in Bali specifically among members of the Protestant Christian Church in Bali. This symbol was designed by a famous Balinese Christian artist named Nyoman Darsane. He is not only a dancer but also a

musician, painter, and puppet player. Referring to (Bailey, 2007) who defines contextualization as an act to place (ideas or words, etc) in a suitable or particular context, the dancing cross can be said as the product of a process of regionalization or what is widely known as contextualization. In this case Nyoman Darsane seeks to place not only the shape but also the meaning and philosophy of the cross symbol into Balinese context with concept of Balinese dancing. According to Dibia (2013) as mentioned in (Dewi, L, Sariyasa, Suweken, 2022) Balinese dances are personification of the complexity of values in Hindu-Bali culture which are manifested human body movements. Balinese dances which is also called *igel* have several elements such as *pepeson*, *pengawak*, *pengecet*, and *pekaad*.



Figure 6. Interview with Nyoman Darsane, the Creator of the Dancing Cross Design

(Source: Personal Documentation)

(Dewi, L, Sariyasa, Suweken, 2022) state that Balinese dances consist of a range of elegant movements. Movements in dances are what we do in life. Accordingly, the movements in Balinese dances are inspired by the movements that we do in our everyday life. Those movements are given unique names such as *melingser* (spinning), *agem* (basic stationary/standing position), and many more names. (Dewi, L, Sariyasa, Suweken, 2022) further reveals that the basic movements in Balinese dances are used to create new variations of movements. Hence, dancers need to know basic movements and variations of movements in Balinese dances. The basic movements and variations of movements should be really based on the dance's basic position which is called *adeg-adeg*. The *adeg-adeg* of Balinese dances has four important elements such as leg position, body position, hand position, and head position. Based on these elements, there are four types of basic movements in Balinese dances such as *agem*, *tandang*, *tangkis*, dan *tangkep*. Based on those principal rules dances should not move randomly but follow the prevailed rules.

In terms of shape, the dancing cross is transformed from the universal shape of the cross which is consisted of two bars leading to a T-shaped cross which base stem is longer than the other three arms but crooked at the bottom like a dancer who is in a *agem* position. As mentioned by ([Dewi, L, Sariyasa,](#)

[Suweken, 2022](#)), *agem* is one of four types of primary movements of Balinese dance including *tandang*, *tangkis*, and *tangkep*. The following are pictures that aligns the *agem* position in Balinese dance and the dancing cross design.



Figure 7. The Alignment of the Agem (Left Agem) Position in Balinese Dance and the Dancing Cross Design

The *agem* is the stationary position in Balinese dance. The most commonly used *agem*s in Balinese dances are right *agem* and left *agem* and the series of movements are based around these *agem* positions. For right *agem*, the body weight sits on the right, being held by the right leg. The arm position when doing the female style of the right *agem* in which is at the eye level and the left arm is parallel to the chest. Whereas left *agem* follows the same rules as right *agem* but the body weight is on the left ([Dewi, L, Sariyasa, Suweken, 2022](#)). Based on the rules, in terms of shape it can be said that the dancing cross can be aligned with the left *agem* in which the body weight is on the left. In this circumstances, Nyoman Darsane, as proposed by ([Bailey, 2007](#)) tries to take off Western wrappings of the cross and put on Balinese ‘clothing’ which looks and feels much more natural and acceptable in Bali community.

In association with the shape, the contextual meaning of the dancing cross can be traced by utilizing Saussure’s view on the systemic relationship of signs specifically of paradigmatic relations. As mentions by ([Chandler, 2007](#)) this type of relation involves substitution or associate relations which refers to intertextual relationship with markers that are absent from the text. In this case, several markers that are present in the text can

be retrieved from the results of the analysis through syntagmatic relations, especially the type of spatial relations (center/periphery relations) both in the code before and after the time of Jesus Christ. Analysis through spatial relations as shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5 above has produced various markers including negative impressions for crosses such as shame, curse, stumbling block for text codes before the time of Jesus Christ and positive markers including salvation, victory and obedience for the text code after the time of Jesus Christ.

Through this type of paradigmatic relation, markers that are present in texts as found in the Scripture can be related with markers that are absent from the text, which are generated through the philosophical meaning of the dancing cross as proposed by Nyoman Darsane. Based on the interview on November 2021 and January, 2023, he states that the dancing cross is an image to invite people to remember Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, not in terms of the death but in terms of starting a new life, namely a life that directs humanity to be reunited with God (the Creator). Specifically, Nyoman Darsane also stated that the dancing cross is an invitation to mankind to dance the suffering of Jesus Christ. This implies that human beings must be ready to accept all situations experienced in their lives with full gratitude and submission to the

Creator. Thus, the suffering will not destroy human life, but instead to make him a new human being, who is increasingly similar to the Creator.

Figure 8 is a figure of paradigmatic relation which involves the substitution or associate relations between markers which are present in the text and markers that are absent from the text. It shows that of the three markers that appear in the text namely salvation, victory, and obedience, it can be seen that the sign of obedience which covers some signifiers as 'deny themselves', 'take up their cross', and 'follow me' has a substitution relationship with marker that absent from the text such as 'dance the suffering of Jesus Christ'. This process is known as the replacement test on the paradigmatic relationship which is carried out by selecting certain markers in the text and then juxtaposed with the alternative markers being tested

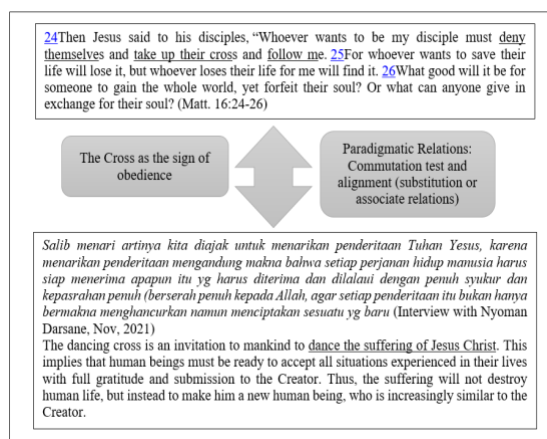


Figure 8. The Paradigmatic Relation Which Involves the Substitution or Associate Relations Between Markers which are Present and Absent in the Texts

Based on the results of the commutation test as shown in Figure 8 above, it can be concluded that contextually, the meaning of the dancing cross leads to the obedience of God's people or what is known as disciples to carry the cross in accordance with the example given by Jesus Christ. As (Dewi, L., Sariyasa, Suweken, 2022) states that the movements in Balinese dance are an overview of what human do in their daily life. Those movements which are basically consisted of *agem*, *tandang*, *tangkis*, and *tangkep* can also be interpreted as self-denial, being ready to bear what is brought upon him including suffering, shame, and even death but still to be eager to endure it and meet it with a solemn joy to follow the Master's footsteps.

CONCLUSION

The dancing cross is a symbol which is widely used by Christians who are members of the Protestant

Christian Church in Bali. It is considered as the product of regionalization or contextualization of the cross which is the crux of Christian life and worship. The shape of the dancing cross is transformed from the universal shape of the cross which is consisted of two bars leading to a T-shaped cross which base stem is longer than the other three arms but crooked at the bottom like a dancer who is in left *agem* position. In this circumstances, Nyoman Darsane as the creator of the dancing cross symbol tries to take off Western wrappings of the cross and put on Balinese 'clothing' which looks and feels much more natural and acceptable in Bali community.

Through syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations which are in accordance to semiotic views it can also be revealed the contrastive meaning of the cross before and after the time of Jesus Christ as the sign of shame which covers a curse, a stumbling block and foolishness and the sign to be glorified which covers salvation victory and obedience. In accordance to this result of analysis, the contextual meaning of the cross can be retrieved as the sign of obedience which is one out of the three meanings of the cross after the time of Jesus Christ. This sign of obedience is the result of the paradigmatic relations through the substitution or associate relations between markers which are present and absent from the texts. The sign of obedience refers to the obedience of God's people or the disciple of Jesus Chris to follow Him in carrying the cross but still to be eager to endure it and meet it with a solemn joy such as a Balinese dancer who moves elegantly.

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