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Tadek dance as a decolonial theo-cosmology[1]

ABSTRACT

This article explores the decolonial possibilities of Tadek *as a dance of cosmic*[2] *interconnectedness and solidarity, by unveiling its underlying ontological, epistemological, and axiological principles.* Tadek *is a traditional dance of the* Itneg *people in the Philippine Cordillera region that embodies their indigenous world views on eco-spirituality and theo-cosmology. By offering and constructing a theo-epistemic otherwise through* Tadek*, this article hopes to surface a decolonial theo-cosmology that brings about planetary justice and creation solidarity. Like other traditional dances in indigenous areas,* Tadek *offers a creative epistemic horizon for a theo-decolonial future.*

1. INTRODUCTION: THE *ITNEGS' TADEK* AND THEIR WORLD VIEW OF SACRED INTERCONNECTEDNESS

In many indigenous communities in the Philippines and other parts of the globe, dancing is traditionally integrated into every historic event such as communal rituals and assemblies. This article explores the decolonial possibilities of *Tadek* as a

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2 In this article, cosmos also means creation, planet, or earth, which covers ecology and all life.

dance of cosmic interconnectedness and solidarity, by unveiling its underlying ontological, epistemological, and axiological principles. Doing so aims to contribute to rebuilding theological knowledge to combat hierarchical and divisive elements of the present modern-colonial society. By offering and constructing a space for a theo-epistemic otherwise through *Tadek*, this article hopes to surface a decolonial theo-cosmology that brings about planetary justice and creation solidarity. Like other traditional dances in indigenous areas, *Tadek* offers a creative epistemic horizon for a theo-decolonial future.

Tadek is a cultural dance of the *Itneg* people in the Cordillera region of the Philippines that embodies their indigenous world views on creation spirituality and theo-cosmology.[3] According to Valera (2016:568),

> The *Itnegs,*[4] also called as 'Tinguians', are a nation that inhabit the Malaya mountains along the Ilocos coast and the northwestern slopes of the Gran Cordillera Central in Northern Luzon, Philippines.

The ethnographic study of Cole and Gale (1922) reveals that the *Itneg* people have two dances. *Tadek* is one of these two dances and "part of nearly all gatherings of a social and religious nature" (Cole & Gale 1922:440).[5] It is performed during celebrations and communal rituals such as weddings, funerals, family/clan reunions, harvest festivals, and communal feasts. On these occasions, *Tadek* is a form of offering or giving thanks to the divine for the important milestones in every *Itneg* life. Hence, it is a sacred bridge between the human and spiritual worlds. It is accompanied by the beating of gongs, which signals that a communal ritual or an important gathering is taking place in the community. It serves as a social call for people to assemble, participate, and celebrate together. Often, it is also paired with the singing of lyrical chants that recollect genealogies, myths, love/life stories, or moral lessons. This interplay of movement and song in *Tadek* preserves the collective memories, values, and identity of the *Itneg* community across generations.

That *Tadek* operates within an indigenous world view of sacred interconnectedness is evident in the lifeworld of the *Itneg* people. Like their indigenous neighbours in the Cordillera region of the Philippines, their acts are inspired by their belief in the divine and supernatural. The significance of these religious beliefs and practices is closely tied to their individual and communal contexts (Bigornia 2025a:58). Religious experiences shape

3 Theo-cosmology is interchangeable with cosmo-theology.

4 The *Itnegs* can be classified into 11 ethnolinguistic groups, namely *Inlaud*, *Adasen, Maeng, Masadiit, Banao, Binongan, Mabaka, Gabang, Balatok, Belwang,* and *Muyadan*. See Valera & Valera (2016).

5 The other one is a ceremonial dance called *Da-eng,* which takes place at night to the accompaniment of a song (Cole & Gale 1922:439).

the totality of the *Itnegs'* experience – their world view, understanding of the divine, relationship with nature, and social or communal life. For the *Itneg* people, public and communal participation is tightly connected to their religious practices (Bigornia 2025a:58). Moreover, all ceremonies are imbued with spiritual and material value relating to the individual and the community's present and future affairs (Weygan 2009). This connotes a strong interconnection between the *Itneg's* material/physical reality and their spiritual life. In this regard, the *Itnegs* believe that the spirit world can exert its supernatural force in the physical realm. This means that the lived realities of the *Itnegs* are linked to an inextricable interaction of the biophysical plane with the spiritual realm. For traditional *Itnegs*, spirits are constantly around and can influence or direct the course of their lives (Cole & Gale 1922:295). They also believe that spirits possess magical powers that affect their immediate surroundings. For example, in Cole and Gale's (1922:297) research, the greatest spirit can send the lightning (known to be the guardian spirit's dog) to bite a tree or strike a field or house. Although invisible, these entities are not unreachable. These spirits, commonly called *anitos*, can communicate with people, by entering the body of a medium during ceremonies (Cole & Gale 1922:295, 301). Furthermore, the natural world becomes the spirits' habitat in the human realm, or the spirits themselves assume the form of natural objects and animals, creating an inseparable bond between nature and spirit. In the *Itneg* community, various natural objects are also thought to house specific spirits. Cole and Gale's work (1922:298) explains that several stones can be found at the entrance of every village. They are specifically positioned under a house or a tree. These stones, called *Pinaing*, are believed to house a guardian spirit to protect the town (Cole & Gale 1922:298). The same guardian spirit has been known to assume the appearance of a red rooster or a white dog (Cole & Gale 1922:298). Thus, a spirit guardian or supernatural entity can be found in nature. This imbues the natural world with sanctity such that it is imperative for *Itnegs* to respect nature and maintain a harmonious and balanced relationship with their environment. In the present context, belief in spirits has been supplanted by belief in the Holy Spirit, as most *Itnegs* have become Christians. I maintain, however, that the *Itnegs*' core theo-philosophy of cosmic interconnectedness, rooted in their indigenous spirituality and theo-cosmology, remains and re-emerges in their rituals and practices such as the *Tadek* dance. This traditional theo-cosmology exists in tension with the Christian cosmological perspective, especially in its colonial and Western form. However, I argue that the *Itnegs*' theo-cosmic belief in interconnectedness and creation solidarity is compatible with a reoriented Christian theology and cosmology. Bigornia (2024:105) reiterates,

> *Tadek* is both a symbolic and lived expression of the intermingling of worlds and cosmological wholeness that can also be found in theological frameworks.

In the next section, I elaborate on theological arguments that recognise the imperative of rethinking theo-cosmology, which aligns with the indigenous framework of the interconnectedness of creation and cosmological unity.

2. "FROM THEO-ANTHROPOLOGY TO THEO-COSMOLOGY": TOWARD AN EARTH-AFFIRMING THEOLOGY

Throughout the history of Christianity, humankind has often received theological favour by being placed at the centre, with the rest of creation being pushed to a peripheral role in the unfolding of God's kingdom. The doctrine of *imago Dei* was attributed exclusively to humanity and elevated human beings to the highest position in the cosmic order. The Book of Genesis reinforces this stance, by granting human beings dominion over all other creation. In what Rieger (2022:25) refers to as a 1967 classic article in science, White (1967:1205) points out:

> God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image.

This theological orientation, known as theo-anthropocentrism, is the justification of the human-nature hierarchical division and the mindless and detached exploitation of the earth by human beings. White (1967:1205) states:

> Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.

In the same article, White (1967:1205) further declares: "Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen." This metaphysical framework has created an ontological divide between human beings and nature, causing the marginalisation of non-human beings and other beings on earth.

In a related discussion, the central-periphery taxonomy of human beings (centre) and non-human beings (periphery) has occupied theological dialogues concerning God's soteriological plan. Theologians have predominantly focused on the history of human salvation. Along this line, Kim (2018a:519) argues:

> In the history of Christian thought, most theologians had a limited view of God's creative intention, with an almost exclusive attention to the redemption of humanity from sin and death.

Echoing this sentiment and incorporating the evolution of modern thought, Kim (2009:78) states:

> Heavily influenced by the tradition of salvation history and modern historical consciousness, theology became anthropocentric and history-centered. For the last five hundred years, the earth, nature, and the cosmos, 'got lost' in Christian theology with an exclusive focus on God and the human self.

In the Christian divine narrative of redemption, non-human beings and other life forms exist to fulfil a utilitarian role. From this perspective, Kim (2018b:549-550) articulates:

> In this redemption-centred theological paradigm, creation is regarded merely as a stage for God's saving history with the human beings and thus recedes to the background of theological discussions.

In this theo-cosmological world view, the sacred entanglement between creation has been fractured. It resulted in the alienation of the ecology from humanity and fissured the alignment of the entire cosmos. Such a theological tradition has had detrimental repercussions for the biosphere and skewed the relational aspect of human-nature dynamics in favour of the former. It has led to the disenchantment, despiritualisation, and instrumentalisation of nature, ultimately leading to the physical disfigurement and abuse of the entire planet.

Due to the escalating threat of ecological devastation and climate change, an increasing number of scholars and theologians recognise the necessity of reconstructing more comprehensive and life-flourishing theological discourses and earth-affirming theo-cosmological paradigms. Recent developments in Christian theology signal a shift away from a human-centred theology. This heralds a renaissance of religious paradigms closely aligned with the indigenous world view of sacred interconnectedness and solidarity among all creation. For example, Johnson's (2000) work explicates finding creation in the Christian tradition. In Johnson's (2000:11) view, the current ecological state of the earth pushes theologians "to incorporate the natural world as part or even the center of their work". Her feminist eco-theological project also highlights the parallelism between the violation of the earth and women, stemming from patriarchal and misogynist tendencies. Accordingly, Johnson (2000:17) calls for a transition toward a holistic and relational world view grounded in interdependence and the flourishing of mutual community. Centering creation in his works, Kim (2018a:520) mentions the recent movements aimed at

retrieving cosmic hope in Christian theology. Kim advances an onto-theological movement away from theo-anthropology and toward theo-cosmology. Kim articulates a theological paradigm shift that critiques anthropocentrism while envisioning a hope-filled theological future for the entire cosmos.

Rieger (2022:26) points out that scholars and theologians in religious and theological studies have engaged White's critique, by attempting to recover alternative theological traditions that shift away from an anthropocentric focus. However, in Rieger's view, White's critique is only the tip of the iceberg. According to Rieger (2022:27), White "missed important developments of the bigger picture – particularly, the metamorphoses of capitalism". Rieger's arguments diverge from the anthropocentric explanation for the current era. For Rieger (2022:27), the term "capitalocene" rightly describes this age rather than the word "anthropocene". Rieger's (2022:27) call is to closely examine the entangled relationship between capital, power, and nature in our present context. In his thought, rather than humanity as a whole, the expansion of capital, with its unceasing production activities, causes ecological destruction. Thus, this capitalist venture is the culprit in the desacralisation of nature and the disconnection between and among creation. Yet, to maintain the status quo and its structures of power, capitalism forms unholy alliances of people, corporations, organisations, and institutions. According to Rieger (2022:6),

> [c]ontrary to common belief, individualism is an illusion that is simply not an option in a world that is as interconnected as ours.

Individualism is not a reality-based axiom. It is a misdirection, if not a cover-up, of the fact that the continuity of capitalism depends on collective and concerted acts of allied corporate interests. However, the effectiveness of the capitalist joint venture also relies on the strategic marketing of isolationist and individualistic orientation as more preferable values. This incites a solipsistic mode, one that is also utilitarian, that eventually allows the hierarchical, separationist, and capital-driven agenda to thrive at the cost of the planet and its people.

Rieger's arguments resonate tightly with decolonial thoughts, foregrounding my discussion on the taxonomical reconfiguration of the human-nature relation. In my view, however, the anthropocentric mindset that has been onto-theologically embedded and has gained momentum since the onset of modernity should not be dismissed; rather, it should be properly recognised as a significant locomotive for environmental destruction. I contend that capitalism and anthropocentrism are both regimes of coloniality, cooperatively co-constituting to maintain hegemonic Western power. The planetary devastation is not simply collateral damage but a necessary offering to retain this power. The ensuing discussion expounds the modernity-coloniality link,

the synergy of anthropocentrism and capitalism in modernity/coloniality, and the need to challenge the theological-sacrificial and anthropocentric-capitalist bedrocks of coloniality.

3. THE SYMBIOSIS OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND CAPITALISM IN MODERNITY/ COLONIALITY

The entrance of Western modernity and its philosophical development reinforced, if not exacerbated, the disconnection between human beings and nature. The metaphysical and theo-ontological justification for hierarchical taxonomy within creation gained an ally in the thought traditions that arose in the modern period. For decolonial scholars such as Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano, modernity's darker but obscured twin is coloniality. Coloniality is a hidden global structure that persisted long after colonialism ended. While modernity proclaims its project of salvation and progress, coloniality creates violent realities of exploitation, extraction, and control. Coloniality is

> an embedded logic that enforces control, domination and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, modernization and being good for everyone (Mignolo 2005:6).

In other words, coloniality and modernity are two edges of the same sword. Coloniality is far more sinister, because it justifies and simultaneously conceals the displacements and the subjective and epistemic erasures done in the name of modernity. In its controlled narrative, the human and non-human victims are hidden, if not justified. For the colonial modern Western project to materialise, hierarchisation must be normalised. While ideological and philosophical tools of modernity are the underpinnings of coloniality's hierarchical arrangements and structural designs, coloniality of power is the core philosophy that constituted the modern colonial system. This shows a co-dependent symbiotic relationship, which also reveals the intertwining and overlapping of the ideologies of modernity and coloniality such as anthropocentrism and capitalism.

In Mignolo's thought, Christianity is one of modernity's ideologies (religious form). Throughout history, Christianity has been largely anthropocentric, particularly through the doctrine of *imago Dei* and the interpretation of Genesis as a divine endorsement of human dominion. The theo-anthropocentrism of Western Christianity, more prominently during colonialism and expansion, gained more traction and reinforcement during the Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason. The emergence of dualism, grounded in Cartesian epistemology and liberal humanism, is crucial in establishing anthropocentrism

as a theological and philosophical norm. The dualist logic of Enlightenment rationality further fuelled the division of an already fragmented creation. The binary categories and dualist philosophy that dominated modern thinking presupposed a competitive classification. Hence, while the anthropocentric stance of Christian theology places human beings at the epicentre, the dualism of modernity ensures that only a portion of humanity can occupy this space. These philosophical and theo-ontological reasons informed coloniality. With coloniality, the hierarchical taxonomy within creation is such that human beings, particularly White European Christian men, were viewed as the measure of all things. Non-human creation, indigenous peoples, women, and non-Europeans were relegated to the margins of being. The same colonial cognition caused the replacement of enchanted cosmologies with mechanistic world views, reframing nature as inert, passive, and available for exploitation. This also meant the invalidation of indigenous knowledge and practices that affirm the interconnectedness of all life.

However, in my view, the rationalist and dualist consciousness that enabled hierarchisation in coloniality reveals the inadequacy of the anthropocentric narrative as an explanation for planetary destruction. The existence of hierarchy, where some individuals sit comfortably at the top while others are marginalised, underlines this argument. In this scenario, only a few coloniality-enabled directors, initiated by structures of power, choreograph the show. It is accurate to say that the current state of climate and ecology should not be attributed to all of humanity. After all, the world is not shaped by all of humanity. Rieger's argument that the term "anthropocene" may not aptly describe the current age resonates.

Yet, entrenched coloniality makes it so that in a polarised human-non-human relationship, the anthropocentric choice appeals to the subjugated and colonised minds. Those subjected to systemic erasures and collective gaslighting are then reprogrammed to accept hierarchical norms for the benefit of the colonial agenda. Particularly, coloniality lays a normative claim over the lives and labour of people and natural resources for the modern messianic project of the West. This messianic vision is development, which is wrapped and presented beautifully as the good life, covering the rotten inner layer of the gift. Naturally, coloniality also has to normalise the Western definition of development and its related activities and processes. Western development extensively revolves around economic growth, targeting capital expansion as well as land and property accumulation. This development appears scientific and objective and is promoted as the only logical course forward. It is often fulfilled via political and militaristic interventions. This is capitalism, the economic and political arm of coloniality of power (Quijano 2007). Once validated, it legitimises the ethical demand for sacrifice, which often comes

from the marginalised communities and the environment. Its appearance of objectivity and its ethical demand help cloak the sacrifice. While human life is hierarchised, this asymmetrical taxonomy is mimicked by how human beings relate to and treat the environment. The colonial promise of a good life for all, supposedly fulfilled through development activities, strategically camouflaged the uneven trade-off it demands and the larger yet death-leading investment it requires from the development subjects, the supposed beneficiaries of such activities. Development, in this context, is a honey trap. Behind the veil of salvation promises, the developmental aspirations of the West coincide with its interest in maintaining hegemony and power. Necessarily, ways of being and knowing that counteract this interest must be clamped down. Thus, the subjugation of land was mirrored by other forms of colonisation – what decolonial thinkers refer to as the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres 2007), the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2008), and the coloniality of knowledge (Walsh 2007).

The coloniality of power as capitalism, accompanied by the ontological and epistemic erasures of colonial subjects, skilfully co-opts anthropocentrism to obscure itself. The encounter of anthropocentrism and capitalism has ignited a formidable alliance that bolsters existing power relations. This illustrates the interlocking and cooperative mechanism of coloniality that activates to seamlessly realign ideologies and principles for its continuation. In my view, the strategic ideological presence of anthropocentrism facilitates the pragmatic concealment of capitalism as a regime of the coloniality of power. Anthropocentrism is deeply intertwined with economic, sociocultural, geopolitical, and even religious and theological logics of capitalism. Capitalism taps into anthropocentrism's prioritisation of human needs over ecological care to legitimise relentless resource extraction, commodification of land and life, and environmental degradation. In this logic, the earth becomes a stockpile of resources and raw materials designed to serve human advancement, especially those from Western powers. The ecosphere, diminished to mere property or a backdrop, is rendered expendable – reminiscent of the racialised and gendered labour that sustains its plunder. This instrumental and reductionist perspective on nature is not merely theoretical; it is operationalised in policies, markets, and technologies that reproduce asymmetric power dynamics/relations and global inequalities while professing to promote prosperity (development).

Moreover, the symbiosis of anthropocentrism and capitalism becomes a mobilising force of the coloniality of power, compelling the colonised to act within its epistemological framework. Employing the anthropocentric narrative permits the naturalisation of human dominance and conceals the sacrificial logic at the heart of capitalist modernity: the systematic destruction of ecosystems and the sacrifice of frontline communities – often indigenous,

poor, and racialised – who are rendered collateral in the quest for the so-called "good life". This is not an accidental byproduct but a strategic design where anthropocentrism and capitalism, along with their synergy, obscure their very own constructedness and universalise their values. The outcome is the material and cognitive reproduction of coloniality. This systemic restructuring, which includes geopolitical, economic, and theo-cosmological reconfiguration, had a destructive domino effect. It led to the disenchantment of the world, desacralisation of the earth, and disconnection of humanity from the sacred cosmic relationality that many indigenous cultures and marginalised theological traditions had long affirmed.

I contend that decolonising ecological imagination and theo-epistemologies requires a deliberate confrontation and defiance against the theological-sacrificial and anthropocentric-capitalist bedrocks of coloniality. This task necessitates reclaiming and recentring theo-cosmologies and (theological) knowledge systems that seek inclusive planetary well-being and mutual flourishing. Relational ontologies from indigenous communities, which have been historically and systematically silenced by coloniality, offer reparative and resistant frameworks to anthropocentric and capitalist philosophies. This is accomplished not by inverting the human-nature hierarchy, but by dissolving it entirely in favour of creation solidarity, cosmic interdependence, and kinship with the more-than-human world. In this context, the project of decolonial theology, decolonial feminist theo-philosophy, and ecological justice cannot be divorced from the task of disrupting anthropocentric assumptions and capitalist orientation, while unveiling their roles in legitimising both environmental devastation and social sacrifice. There is a resurgence of indigenous, African, Asian, Latin American, feminist, and decolonial theologians whose works aim to resurrect and rearticulate a theology informed by pluriversality, interrelationality, sacred cosmology, and epistemic plurality. These efforts do not merely critique coloniality; they retrieve alternative modes of knowing and being that centre the earth (creation), the communal, the embodied, and the sacred. This is where indigenous practices and the dances of indigenous peoples such as the *Itnegs*' *Tadek* become vital decolonial-theological-epistemic resources. *Tadek*, as a granary of embodied theo-philosophy and communal cosmovision, conflicts with colonial anthropocentric-capitalist-oriented theologies and invites a theo-cosmological reorientation that is inherently decolonial, emancipative, and ecological.

The next section explores how *Tadek*, as a dance of theo-cosmology, rooted in the everyday spiritual, ecological, and relational practices of the *Itneg* people, provides a decolonial pathway to mend the broken thread that binds all of creation, and toward cosmic solidarity. Fernandez (2024:176) beautifully captures the ideas I aim to unravel in *Tadek*:

> Standing at the edge of a climate precipice, before this socio-political and ecological unravelling becomes a nightmare, a radical turnaround or *metanoia* must happen, which involves a new way of *seeing, dwelling*, and *acting* if we are to move in the direction of our socio-political and ecological healing. To put it differently, this involves having the much needed three competencies: *knowing, being*, and *acting* or attitude, knowledge, and skills. These competencies address the matter of *who we are, what we know, and what we do.*

In my view, these three competencies are enacted in *Tadek*. By unpacking its ontological, epistemological, and axiological principles, *Tadek* dancing becomes a potent ground for critiquing and resisting coloniality and reappearing alternative and transformative theo-epistemologies and theo-cosmological praxis.

4. THEO-COSMOLOGICAL DANCING AND DECOLONISING: ONTOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL, AND AXIOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES IN *TADEK*

Grounded in the *Itneg* world view, *Tadek* is an affirmation of a conception of existence (ontology), knowledge (epistemology), and values (axiology) that support a holistic, united, and interconnected vision of life. *Tadek* serves as a living embodiment of these principles and presents a transformative model of cosmic solidarity and planetary wholeness that diverges from Western ideologies generated and undergirded by coloniality. Focusing on the ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions of *Tadek* discloses the decolonial and emancipatory potentials of the dance, including its more comprehensive theo-cosmological approach. They are decolonial counterpoints to the sacrificial-demanding, life-exhausting, anthropocentric, and capitalist theo-cosmology of coloniality. These dimensions are interlaced and didactically connected so that they co-constitute each other.

4.1 Embodied ontologies: *Tadek* as a dance of relational existence

The core of Western thought on the nature of being *vis-à-vis* the natural world is characterised by dualism and separation. In particular, human beings are believed to exist autonomously, separate from the biophysical environment, and the ontological priority is assigned to the former. A definition of nature from the Oxford dictionary

> makes a sharp distinction between humans and non-human nature, the leitmotif of the Western perception of the natural world, where humans and human artifacts are split and disconnected from nature (Jarwar *et al.* 2024:2).

This notion of human-nature dichotomy can be traced from Western ontology, specifically that of Cartesian dualism – proclaiming the separation of mind and body. Descartes' conceptualisation of the thinking self, the *ego cogito*, was the starting point of the Western understanding of human existence. Descartes' assertion began with razing everything to the ground and doubting all bodily sensible information. In the end, Descartes affirmed the existence of the *cogito*, the indubitable doubting self. According to Tulloch (2015:35),

> In Cartesian logic 'nature' is seen as passive, as an object that is separate from man, just as the body is separate from the mind.

This reinforces the anthropocentric stance of human superiority over other life forms, which results in the human-led damnation of nature and ecosystems, as Fanon (2001) noted in *The wretched of the earth*.

The *Itneg* world view found in *Tadek* contrasts with the dualist perception of being, as it expresses an ontology of interconnectedness, where all existence is bound within an interlocking grid of relations. In this view, indigenous ontology takes on features of a system found in nature, but one that is deployed philosophically. A rhizome system (Deleuze & Guattari 1987),[6] in a way, parallels indigenous ontology as a co-constitutive, co-creative, and co-dependent relation. Such an ontological orientation perceives all beings as representatives of nodes within a rhizomatic living system that relies on mutual connections for survival and common flourishing. To a large extent, *Tadek* expresses a rhizomatic sense of being in the world where all participants, human beings or non-human beings, are part of an interdependent, non-hierarchical, and non-linear network of relations. *Tadek* is one way in which the *Itneg* people articulate an otherwise mode of being founded on their belief in the symbiosis and unity of all creation. Specifically, when participants enter the circular formation of *Tadek*, they announce the cyclical, nonlinear nature of life/broader cosmos. When they perform circular movements and connected choreography, they acknowledge the mutual ongoing exchange of energy and life force. However, moving, performing, and living together is impossible without the land, the physical space of the dance.

6 Rhizome is a concept used by French Theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as a botanical metaphor and philosophical paradigm. It is a thinking framework of knowledge or culture as non-hierarchical, networked, and open-ended. It has six key principles, namely: connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography, and decalcomania. See Deleuze & Guattari (1987)

The land where the performance is held and the soil that rises in every stump and step bear witness to the connection and oneness in the dance – how everyone is embraced, welcomed, locked in steps, and moves in harmony with one another. This way, *Tadek* actualises the integration of all life – human beings, spirits, animals, and the land – where all are co-participants in the larger sacred order. This reflects an onto-theological and cosmo-spiritual understanding that human existence is intimately imbricated in a wider cosmic web, contrary to the isolationist and solipsistic portrayal of human life. The *Itneg* view of existence as interrelatedness and unity stands in contraposition to the dichotomous Western ontology – the human versus the non-human/nature argument. Through *Tadek*, the *Itnegs* theo-ontologically create an otherwise cosmic imaginary – a more comprehensive and transformative theo-cosmology of relational co-existence and cosmic solidarity.

4.2 Embodied epistemologies: *Tadek* as a locus of indigenous knowledge-making

On a related point, the epistemological principles expressed in *Tadek* are co-constitutive of indigenous ontology. In the *Itneg* learning experience, the way in which knowledge is produced, understood, and transmitted is not through abstract or detached engagement. Rather, it is embodied, lived, experienced, and grounded in the relational practice of knowing. In other words, it is exhibited in everyday experiences and relationships of all beings. For the *Itnegs*, knowledge is acquired and co-created through participation in the tempos of life, engagement with the land, interactions with neighbours, kin, visitors, and communion with non-human entities, including those from the spiritual world. *Tadek* takes on an active and creative process of remembering, re-making, and transmitting indigenous knowledge – an act that insists and persists upon world-(re)making/transforming. As a communal and ritualistic dance, *Tadek* serves as a socio-spiritual and theo-epistemic stage where participants learn about the intermeshing of all life, not through theoretical discourse but through embodied experience. The dance becomes a form of knowing, where the movements, alignments, sounds, music, location, participants, and spectators express the relational principles central to the *Itneg* world view. In *Tadek*, knowledge emerges from the entangled, interweaved, and liminal relationships between human beings, nature, and the divine. This way, *Tadek* becomes a dance of knowing – an epistemological tool that teaches participants about their place in the world and their responsibilities to the land, the supernatural world, and the community. It is a kinaesthetic epistemology reflective of the collective, relational, and interlinked nature of knowledge, where individual well-being is always tied to the flourishing of the community and the natural world. This indicates a knowledge-making process that reflects a more comprehensive theo-cosmological view.

As a form of embodied knowledge, *Tadek* also serves as a dynamic reservoir of generational wisdom. However, the knowledge passed down is not monolithic, as if their world were static. It is a site for (re)collecting, (re)valorising, (re)validating, and (re)signifying indigenous knowledge on account of the existing and emergent contexts of the present generation. Similar to the everyday acts as locations of epistemological exchange, Bigornia (2025b:330) argues that

> [b]y daily relating and engaging with each other in those so-called ordinary domestic spaces – their kitchen (home) and farm – they weave and develop their own stories and form new patterns of thinking, knowing, and doing.

Then, Bigornia (2025b:330) asserts: "These new narratives and new patterns of thinking and living would then add to their repository of Indigenous knowledge."

This dynamic relational epistemology is a contradistinction to the Western format of knowledge creation in its preference for objective and positivist methods – those characterised as rational. Its valuation of scientific knowledge results in a drawn-up, rigid boundary between the knower and the known. Like its ontological determinations, Western epistemological designs have their roots in Cartesian rationality. In Quijano's (2007:172) thought, the Western framework of rational epistemology conceives knowledge "as a product of a subject-object relation", where the thinking subject

> constitutes itself in itself and for itself, in its discourse and its capacity of reflection. The Cartesian 'cogito, ergo sum' means exactly that.

What is problematic in this line of discourse is that "it made it possible to omit every reference to any other 'subject' outside the European context" (Quijano 2007:173). In this logic, Quijano (2007:174) argues:

> Only European culture is rational, it can contain 'subjects' – the rest are not rational, they cannot be or harbor 'subjects'. As a consequence, the other cultures are different in the sense that they are unequal, in fact inferior, by nature. They only can be 'objects' of knowledge or/and of domination practices.

This enabled the obscuring of colonial violence and epistemicide done to the colonised people and their indigenous ways of knowing. This Cartesian epistemic tradition elevated Western knowledge as the only valid and legitimate form. Moreover, the subject-object orientation of this rational knowledge is seamlessly tied to the objectification of certain groups of people and anyone or anything deemed to possess no rationality. Such is the justification of the

violation committed against the colonised – they have to be reduced to an object; they are tagged as animalistic or beastly and devoid of humanity; they are thingified to make way for colonial exploitation. This is the Western epistemological deployment of anything defined as a thing. Hence, the creation of the damned (Fanon 2001) is not only about human beings but also non-human beings – natural resources, ecosystems, and the rest of creation.

4.3 Dancing against divisive values: *Tadek* as a movement toward cosmic solidarity

Alongside the perpetuation of Western ontology and the production of rational epistemology comes the (re)production of modern colonial values. Coloniality's redefinition of flourishing in development discourse, for instance, implies the dominance of bottom-line-oriented, extractive, industrial, and neoliberal values. In contrast, the axiological dimension of *Tadek* reflects the *Itnegs*' holistic and interdependent understanding of the world. The values expressed through the dance also represent their aspirations for development, which is understood and captured in their concept of *pansayaatan/kinmayatan* (well-being). These may include, but are not limited to, the values of reciprocity, balance, and solidarity, which serve as social bannisters or guideposts for engagement of human beings with one another, the natural world, and the spiritual realm. These values are not exhaustive. In one way or another, they are intersecting lines or spaces of conception for related values, principles, and beliefs that support a transformative and holistic *Itneg* theo-cosmovision of interconnectedness and solidarity.

These interrelated values can be observed in many of the *Itnegs*' cultural practices and are central to their conception of a good life. In *Tadek*, the body becomes a medium for an otherwise world-creating and concretising what is good and valuable for the *Itneg* community. While the dancers' bodies are sites for actual translation of these values, they can nevertheless be articulated in the *Itnegs*' communal codes, everyday practices, and lived experiences.

One key axiom in the *Itneg* lifeworld is reciprocity. In *Tadek*, this principle is reflected in the dancers' continuous exchange of actions representing their energy and intention. While doing *Tadek*, partners coordinate and reciprocate their movements by watching each other. This mirrors the broader cosmic principle that the continuity of life is sustained by reciprocal interdependent relationships between human beings and the land, the living and the spirits, and all forms of life. This is exemplified in everyday life, for instance, in the autochthonous cooperative practices of the *Itneg* people, known as *Alluyon* or *Ganap*. These are mutual aid activities during planting seasons, harvest time, weddings, funerals, or communal assemblies. The mutuality of acts in these practices is not transactional but relational. This is contrary to the

modern colonial values and practices that are separationist, hierarchical, and utilitarian. In every *Tadek* dance, performers and spectators are reminded that nurturing these reciprocal relations means a continuous and harmonious flow of life. The motions and steps that mimic natural elements such as water flow or a bird's flight are the embodied recognition of the sacred entanglement of human life with cosmic beats. *Tadek* becomes an expression of cosmic reciprocity where the body acts as an intermediary or a dialogical avenue for human and ecological sounds. The beats, sound, movement, and space (land) of *Tadek* call everyone to co-preserve life and co-participate in bio-affirming acts. Reciprocal values leading to life-contributing acts also connote a kind of balancing.

Balance, another core value, is a theo-cosmological and ethical principle in the *Itneg* world view. *Tadek* symbolises the equilibrium between all life forces, seen or unseen. In many *Tadek* cultural dance performances, the themes and overall choreography reinforce the belief that imbalance in all kinds of relationships and practice – whether in the environment, social relationships, or spiritual life – leads to chaos and suffering. However, *Tadek* is not simply symbolic of balance but rather one that is performative. *Tadek* actively and creatively performs and produces balance through choreography, rhythm, formation, and others. As it often involves ecological gestures and movements, *Tadek* reflects both an exterior and an interior balance with nature. This way, *Tadek* also pays homage to the land, river, and nature that sustain life. While it is dancing, *Tadek* is also a mode of deep listening and communicating with, not dominating, the environment. This implies that *Tadek* has a restorative dimension, a power for relational reconciliation, in which the natural world is embraced as a partner in the ongoing process of life. This is concretised through the *Itnegs*' communal ordinance and exercise of *Lapat*. *Lapat* is their indigenous environmental management system that designates a specific time of the year when no one is allowed to cut trees or fish. The purpose is for environmental regeneration or restoration. *Tadek*, as a dance of balance and renewal, is prophylactic against the extractive Machiavellian practices present in Western development models, where natural resources are treated as objects for endless consumption and commercialisation.

A dance of reciprocity and balance naturally flows from a sense of deep togetherness, an embodied solidarity – an antithesis to the schism introduced by coloniality. *Tadek* is both a source and a locus of solidarity. It is an enactment of unity, as it is never done alone but through collective participation. In its very essence, *Tadek* is an act of solidarity, initiated when participants gather and start moving and dancing together. The participants are not exclusive to the dancers, but include all those who gather in that space. The dance becomes a convergence point of everyone – the performers, the music makers (gong players), and the audience. In its symbolic or physical

form, whether through movements, sounds/music, or the location where it transpires, *Tadek* enables the communion of human beings and nature. This makes the dance a co-celebration of all creation and reveals a sacred cosmic entangling. This instance opens up a theological and spiritual interstice where divinity is revealed. *Tadek* becomes a divine meeting place, where the living and flourishing of all creation is possible. It actualises a decolonial vision of relational plurality. Thus, it is a dance of theo-cosmic interconnectedness and a lived cosmo-theological choreography of solidarity.

5. CONCLUSION

The ontological, epistemological, and axiological principles embodied in *Tadek* converge to support a creation-informed, life-promoting cosmo-theology and eco-spirituality that gesture toward a theology of cosmic interconnectedness and solidarity. These principles enable *Tadek* to forge decolonial pathways and otherwise (theo-)epistemologies for reconstructing, resurfacing, and reactivating a theology of cosmic hope and a transformative vision of creation and cosmic unity. For the *Itneg* people, *Tadek* is a theo-epistemic space for unlearning the fragmentation and compartmentalisation of life imposed by Western coloniality. It offers a spiritual and theo-decolonial holistic therapy that embraces all beings – human beings, animals, plants, spirits, and the earth – as part of an integrated cosmos, a sacred web of existence. This vision of cosmic wholeness is an antidote to the relational dissonance advanced by the prevailing values of capitalism and the narrative of human exceptionalism. It is a movement of healing and a kinaesthetic *metanoia* that calls for reimagining what it means to flourish in harmony with the world.

With *Tadek* and other traditional dances, as a decolonising avenue to resurface and recentre the life-flourishing theo-cosmology of *Itneg* and other indigenous peoples, the task of churches, faith-based organisations, and communities is to proactively and creatively redesign their programmes and policies to incorporate these dances. More importantly, the challenge is to transform the practice of theology, ecclesiology, or missiology through the paradigmatic lens of indigenous dances. As such, this article contributes to the current discourse on decolonial theology and ecojustice, by positioning and reinterpreting indigenous dance, like the *Itnegs*' *Tadek*, as a potent decolonial theo-cosmology that intervenes and disrupts the colonial anthropocentric-capitalist designs. This article specifically addresses a scholarly gap on indigenous dances as embodied performative practical sources of theo-cosmologies that integrate ontology, epistemology, and axiology. It expands the methodological horizons of decolonial theology with the end of providing a concrete, embodied, and pragmatic yet philosophically robust pathway toward cosmic solidarity and planetary flourishing.

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