

Functions of Lang Nginang Ritual Dance in Mengayau Traditional Rite in Belitang

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ABSTRACT

The Lang Nginang dance is a traditional ritual dance of the Dayak Mualang tribe in the Belitang District, Sekadau Regency. This study aims to depict the main functions of the Lang Nginang dance as a part of the Mengayau traditional rite. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach based on Roland Barthes' semiotics as the theoretical foundation. Barthes' semiotics is used to identify the sign system from denotative to connotative meaning. The findings show that the Lang Nginang dance serves as a means of communication with the spirits of the ancestors, a means of affecting natural forces, especially those related to the safety of the *pengayau*, as well as a means to legitimate tradition in the mengayau ceremony. The dance has distinctive features. For example, it can only be performed by a strong dancer dressed in Kapuak tree barks, and the setting must be in a place selected in sacred time, namely the central pillar in a Panjai House with offerings as a part of the mengayau traditional ceremony.

Keywords— *Ritual dance function, Lang Nginang, Mengayau tradition*

1. INTRODUCTION

Sekadau is one of the districts in the province of West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The largest population of the Dayak sub-tribe in Sekadau Regency is the Dayak Mualang. The tribe has been spread in three sub-districts namely Belitang Hilir, Belitang Tengah, and Belitang Hulu. Belitang is one of the sub-districts located in Sekadau Regency.

The Dayak Mualang tribe is a part of the Ibanic group that originated from the Tampun Juah area. Based on the legend, there are three groups migrating from the land of Tampuh Juah, the first group is the Dayak Iban, the second is the Dayak Mualang and Jangkang tribe, and the third group is the Dayak Hibun, Bi Somu, Bi Nengeh, Daro', Pompakng, Peruwan, Taba Kodatn, Mali, and many others [1]. Dayak Mualang tribe living in rural areas still adhere to a system of customs and traditions related to ritual activities and traditional ceremonies.

Traditional ritual is one of the traditions carried out by its communities by linking the rituals and magical powers. The purpose of holding the rite can be to create a sense of harmony, peace, prosperity, security, and happiness in the life of the Dayak community. Traditional ceremonies that are still associated with certain rituals are the embodiment of symbolic objects. According to Dayak Mualang, one of the rituals using sacred procedural is Ngayau (hunting human heads). Mengayau is a tradition of every Dayak

tribe. There are four goals why the custom has been done, namely to protect agriculture, gain extra lives, take revenge, and endure the existence of a building [2]. *Pengayau*, the actors of *ngayau*, who have succeeded in bringing themselves human heads are taken as the brave.

The rituals in mengayau are believed to have mystical powers that can be in the form of supernatural knowledge. They are performed prior to the departure and after getting the head of the *ngayau*. During the head-welcoming rite, all rituals of the Dayak Mualang tribe are carried out, including preparing food and drinks as offerings for the spirits of their ancestors and themselves, reciting prayers (*badarak*), and presenting such dances as the Lang Nginang dance.

The dance is usually performed along with the ritual. According to Dayak Mualang people, Lang Nginang dance was originated from the *Sebayan* world. It serves as a means of ritual dance that has to be performed in the mengayau tradition. It holds the functions of a means for establishing one's character and expressing non-verbal ideas.

Currently, a traditional dance that serves as a means of ritual is very difficult to do again from all the traditional customs and procedures. This may be due to the function of dance, which is sacred and magical. In addition, dance, in general, has been an important aspect of any society, in which from birth to death, dance functions as a navigator

of the way of human life and signs of directions towards a better, peaceful, and determined human existence [3]. The sacramental dance can be realized as a symbol or a certain form of expression, which is usually used as a communication tool or a request to the spirits of their ancestors.

Furthermore, in the function of ritual dance, a meaning can explain the relationship between Dayak Mualang, nature, and God. Performing ritual arts requires several details. They include (1) a selected and sacred performance site, considered sacred, (2) sanctified day, (3) selected performers, (4) special offerings, (5) distinctive clothing and (6) the ritual purpose [4]. The existence of ethnic dances in the midst of society is thus a part of the cultural unity of the community which must also be seen, and whose meaning is read through its roles and functions [5].

Concerning this, the present study aims to reveal the functions of Lang Ngingang ritual dance in the *Mengayau* Ritual Ceremony. References that can be used in this study are (1) Alloy Sujarni, et al. with the title of the book *Mosaic Dayak, Diversity of Sub-Ethnic Groups and Dayak Language in West Kalimantan*. This book can help in explaining the nature of the Dayak Mualang tribe. (2) Roland Barthes, with the title *Semiotics* in which Roland Barthes' theory is the main basis for expressing the sign system found in the Lang Ngingang dance.

2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. It aims to describe the functions of the Lang Ngingang dance in the traditional ceremony of mengayau. The research setting was the District of Belitang Hilir, Menawai Tekam and Belitang Hulu villages in Sekadau Regency. Resource persons involved in this study were Edmundus Linggie, Yosep Semiun, and John Roberto Panurian.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The steps of data analysis techniques include data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusions [6]. Data validity was ensured through the source and technique triangulation. This study employed the application of the semiotic system of myth from Roland Barthes to reveal the dance functions based on the primary and secondary systems of the Lang Ngingang dance.

Barthes is a postmodern thinker and semiotic expert and literary critic. Basically, postmodern views give rise to views, among others include 1) socio-cultural theory which cannot be separated from the context of the community, 2) the idea that local context influences values and 3) references to cultural uniqueness [7].

Barthes also rejects the traditional view that art is not solitary the property of a single author. His semiotics is

used to express the myths prevailing in the cultural phenomena as part of the society set in the past. Human phenomena are perceived as something unique based on human consciousness, which causes an emphasis on the postmodern paradigm in art. The myth referred to by Barthes is not about a long story in Greek mythology and is not a section about goddesses considered to have existed and are recognized by the public [8].

Myth can be defined as a sign system manifested as human communication with fellow humans to help explain the message and knowledge obtained through writing, stories, body language (dance), oral language, and so on. Myth can be generated by historical events, natural phenomena, and something that is ritual. Barthes sees the myth from a semiological system, one of which is regulated in relation to the other system, which is a linguistic system, language (or forms of representation assimilated to it) called object language that holds on a myth to help the system itself: the myth itself is called metalanguage [9]. Barthes then makes a system of myths that can be described in the following scheme [10].

Table 1 The Myth Scheme

Primary System	Signifier	Signified
	<i>Sign (Meaning)</i>	
Secondary System	Signifier <i>(Form)</i>	Signified <i>(concept)</i>
	<i>sign (signification)</i>	

Roland Barthes further develops the understanding of the primary and secondary systems. The primary system can be explained as a linguistic system (language) or denotation system, while the secondary system is a mythical system (myth) or connotation system.

The primary system is the basic sign received first, while the secondary one is the development or change of signs associated with expression (metalanguage). Thus, the awareness process must be generated by the community in understanding changes of signs. Billlet [11] states that the conscious processes to engage with activities and interactions that secure knowledge cannot be separated from changes in knowledge, and these processes are both formed by, and in turn shape identity. Therefore, a change obtained from a piece of knowledge can help understand the sign contained in Dayak Mualang's Lang Ngingang dance as one of the Dayak traditional dances.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dayak Mualang is a sub-tribe that has the *Mengayau* tradition. Whoever managed to get an enemy's head is

interpreted as a manly and brave man. The tradition is carried out with all forms of traditional ceremonial processions. In the Dayak Ibanic group, Ngayau is seen as a positive thing for it symbolizes courage and symbols to Dayak manliness and social dignity.

Semiun (in the interview with Yosep Semiun, in Menawai Tekam, on June 6, 2019) explained the purposes of the ngayau. They include (1) to improve the supernatural powers where the Dayak Mualang tribe believes that offering human heads can enhance their strength, and can protect themselves, their families, and their tribal areas. (2) Second is to take revenge, and this is done as the basis of the whoever owes one's life should pay it with life (blood debt) (3) The head is used to propose a girl because it can symbolize courage and can protect all women. (4) As a symbol of power. Someone who has succeeded in *Mengayau* is believed to be a brave and strong person. Thus, people who succeed in *Mengayau* will be respected by their people by using certain Tattoo or Bird Feather marks.



Figure 1 Hman Skull in Dayak Ketungau (Source: Documentation by Hesty Pangestu, 2019)

The headhunting activity has ended since the birth of the Tumbang Anoi act and the spread of religion into the inland. This has caused a change in the habits of the Dayaknese in the mengayau tradition. However, such a change had a good impact on Dayak sub-tribes in various regions. For example, in improving family relations and harmony between each tribe. As the times goes, relations among the Dayak sub-tribes have been reinforced by the Dayak Gawai event.

For that reason, development in arts has also been attached to the lives of the people. One of the arts that greatly influences the development of the times is rooted in regional traditional dance. The development of the dance now and then can help shape new signs from the modification of old ones. In the Dayak Mualang tribe is the Lang Nginang dance as the example.

3.1. Lang Nginang Dance

The term Lang Nginang according to the Dayak Mualang society comes from two words, namely *Lang* or eagle and *Nginang* which means lurking. Lang Nginang dance, they add, was brought from the Sebayau world. The word

Sebayau is defined as a congregation place for spirits. The traditional dance was always performed in the traditional ceremony of *mengayau*. The following are the characteristics of the Lang Nginang sacramental dance.

1. Selected and Sacred Performance Site

Lang Nginang is a ritual dance of the Dayak Mualang tribe that is performed on the *Ruai*'s central pole in *Ruai Panjai* houses. *Panjai*'s houses have high pillars underneath the house so that they are stilt houses which comprise parts, namely *Bilik*, *Telok*, and *Ruai*.

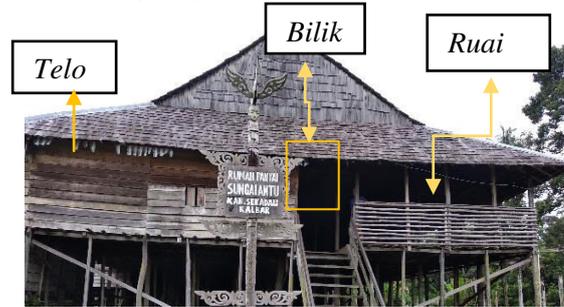


Figure 2 Panjai Sungai Antu (Source: Documentation by Hesty Pangestu, 2019)

2. Sacred Day Selected

The dance can only be performed in the *mengayau* tradition that is carried out on a large scale by every Dayak tribe, especially in welcoming head of the *ngayau* that still bleeds.



Figure 3 Dayak Mualang people bringing in the fresh head (Source:

<https://mualangmiga.wordpress.com/2010/06/17/mualang-tempo-dulu/> [12])

3. Distinguished Performers

The Lang Nginang dance can only be performed by one male dancer. He should have the skill, agility, and talent in performing dance movements. The following is one of the paintings that illustrate the perspective of how the Lang Nginang dance was done in the first mengayau rite. The Lang Nginang dance can be danced on the center pole of the Panjai house's central pole or the courtyard.



Figure 4. The Perspective of Lang Nginang (Source: Documentation by John Roberto Panurian, [13])

4. Offerings

The prepared offerings can be divided into two parts, first for the *mengayau* ritual events such as pork, chicken, roasted *lemang* (bamboo rice), a chicken egg, *tuak* (palm wine), yellow rice (raw), and cooked rice. While for the Lang Nginang dance offerings, are grilled *pulut* (glutinous rice in banana leaves), chicken, yellow rice (raw), a nail or machete, a bowl, and a chicken egg.

5. Classic Clothing

The clothing used in the dance is made of *Kapuak* (*Artocarpus elasticus*) tree bark and Dayak woven cloth. *Kapuak* bark mentioned is one of the outer bark of the tree, which is often used for various needs of the Dayak community. The male dancer usually uses traditional wear called *sirat*.

6. Ritual Purposes

The purposes of presenting the Lang Nginang dance are as follows. (1) It serves as a means of building one's character. Concerning this, the dance has an important role in shaping the character of the younger generations of the Dayak Mualang tribe. The formation of this character can be taken from the philosophy of the eagles. The bird is very famous for its gallantry and strength. This philosophy of the dance teaches these male young generations of the clan to become manly and brave men. (2) Lang Nginang dance serves as a means to express non-verbal ideas. The primitive arts usually still believed in matters related to the occult sciences. This was also driven by the factor of strain in the ancients for expressing ideas in written languages. The non-verbal ideas expressed in the dance resembles the *Bebunoh* dance that means to kill a person or enemy, which is described as a bird targeting the prey.

3.2. Lang Nginang Dance Functions

The dance bears the functions and roles, which can be identified as follows: (a) worship to the spirits of ancestors, as well as communication with gods or the Almighty, (b) a means to influence the forces of nature, and (c) a means for legitimacy [14]. Based on this statement, the functions of the ritual dance is first, as a means of communication to the ancestral spirits. This is because the dance, as believed by the tribe, was brought from the *Sebayan* world. Therefore, in terms of presentation, it should use sacramental procedures. Secondly, it serves as a means to influence the forces of nature, especially those related to safety. For example, in the tradition of *mengayau*, Lang Nginang is performed as a supporting dance for *Pengayau's* fighting spirit so that he is given victory and salvation. Third, it acts as a means of legitimacy. The Lang Nginang dance can only be performed during the era of the traditional *mengayau* tradition, which was exhibited like an eagle stalking a prey.

By analogy, the application of Roland Barthes's semiotics can be used to study the Lang Nginang traditional dance based on the phenomena prevailing in its civilization. Based on the dance itself, the dance has primary and secondary systems explained as follows.

1. The Primary System (Denotative meaning)

The dance performed in the *mengayau* tradition can be interpreted as a form of joy for the Dayak Mualang tribe for successfully bringing the enemy's head (*ngayau*). This statement can be called as the denotative meaning. In the linguistic system, the dance performed in the traditional ceremony of *Mengayau* (signifier) means the story of the Lang Nginang epic (signified). Signifiers and signified are united to form a sign, and the sign is the Lang Nginang dance.

2. The Secondary System (Connotative meaning)

The connotative meaning can be the meaning associated with the contents. That is, there is a development or changes in the marking system, namely the Lang Nginang dance not as media of joy but as (1) a place or community media to communicate with each other. This belief arises from the story of the Dayak Mualang kinfolk explaining the origins of the dance from the *Sebayan* world. Then, the dance also acts as (2) a dance that is given a sense of encouragement, and (3) a place for the community to ask for victory to God. In a mythical system based on a series of sign systems that give rise to changes in marking, the form is manifested through the Lang Nginang dance and a concept based on the teachings of the characteristics of eagles, a message from the *Sebayan* world. The unity of form and concept forms the signification of the Lang Nginang ritual as manifested in dance.

4. CONCLUSION

The Lang Nginang dance functions as a means of communication to ancestral spirits, influencing the forces of nature and legitimacy. The dance's primary system holds the idea of the joy of the Dayak Mualang tribe, and its secondary system suggests a medium of the community to communicate, the dance that gives a sense of belligerent spirit, and a place to ask for victory. The Lang Nginang dance has the characteristics of a ritual dance that can only be performed by male dancers tied to the central pole of the *Panjai* House and dressed in Kapuak bark during the ceremonies of the mengayau tradition and is perfected with the offerings. The purpose of this dance performance is to build the strong character of the tribal youngsters and to express verbal philosophies.

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