



## The symbolical meaning of *Macanan* dance in *Barongan* Blora

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### Abstract

This study is aiming at finding out the symbolical meaning of *Macanan* dance in *Barongan* Blora. The method implied in the study was qualitative with ethnochoreology approach. Results indicated that *Macanan* dance is a typical dance imitating the movement of an animal which is a tiger, which is known also in Indonesia as '*macan*'. It also illustrates some movements which resemble the activity of a group of farmers. This study concluded that the movement of *Macanan* dance contained specific meanings; specifically representing and illustrating the life of Blora Regency's agricultural community in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** meaning; symbol; dance; *Macanan*; *Barongan*

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### INTRODUCTION

Barongan is a kind of performance which uses big mask and a sheet of cloth in stripes motives covering body. It purposes to make the performer to look like a tiger. The choice of Tiger mask to be worn in Barongan Dance by the Blora people is because of the belief hold by the people that tiger is the strongest animal which is able to protect all mankind (Slamet, 2003). Beliefs hold by the Blora people towards the tiger becomes the main consideration of the use of tiger mask and the choice of Barongan dance movements.

Functionally, Barongan has a significant role in the life of the society, which is as part of social activity which is well known as '*Bersih Desa*' ceremony. *Bersih* means clean and *Desa* means village. Here, *Bersih Desa* refers to a kind of ritual aims to clean the village from evil spirit and bad luck. Slamet (1999) once delivered that Ba-

rongan can be seen some ritual activities, like in Lamporan ceremony on which the Barongan is used as a means of an important symbol of safety for the society. The emergence of Barongan was started from ritual activity as part of *Bersih Desa* ceremony done by the Blora society, such as, Lamporan, Murwakala, Sedekah Bumi, circumcision and wedding ceremony ritual. The Blora society uses Barongan as a means to send bad luck away, especially disease epidemic, by walking the Barongan around the village (known as *Arak-arakan*).

Barongan that is being developed recently, is a kind of stage performance consisting of several smaller parts, like, *Macanan*, *Bujangganong*, *Jaka Lodra*, *Jaranan*/*Jathilan*, *Untub Nayantaka*, and *Nggainah*. The *Macanan* dance is a part that always exists in the initial part of the Barongan performance. In 2003, the *Macanan* dance is packed into 10 main movements as a form of stage performance. As a stage per-

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formance, the form of Barongan here will be a bit different with the type of Barongan dance used in 'Arak-arakan'. Slamet (2004) mentioned that there are 10 main movements in Macanan dance, *Dekeman*, *Gebyah*, *Senggot*, *Ngaklak*, *Kucingan*, *Geter*, *Thatakan*, *Glundungan*, *Mbekur*, and *Thapukan*. In general, movements shown in Macanan dance resembles the movements of a tiger and is adjusted with the habit and culture had by the society which mostly works as a farmer. The term *Macanan* itself taken from the Javanese word of 'tiger' which is known as *Macan*.

Since the first emergence of Barongan performance till now, the dance always shows the movement of 'tiger' in every of its show. The Macanan dance as stage performance here emphasizes more to the aesthetic perspective in every of its show. It is seen from the well-ordered movement pattern. In addition, the existence of Macanan dance can be seen more dominant in the Blora Barongan performance. This is shown by the duration of Macanan dance show which took place in both the initial and the end of performance as well as the length of duration which is longer than any other dances containing in the same performance.

Macanan dance as the object of study here raises several research questions. Spradley (1983) mentioned three basic aspects used to study culture: it is related to what is done by people, what is known by people, and what is used by people. The first aspect refers to the cultural behaviour or the act of doing arts. Here, it is the Barongan dance as the art. The second aspect refers to the knowledge of culture symbolizes in meaning, or the symbolical meanings of art. The third aspect refers to the result or product of a culture, which is the Macanan dance. Therefore, this study is aiming at studying deeper the Macanan dance. To be specific is the symbolical meanings contained in Macanan dance.

Related to further explanation about meanings contained in the Macanan dance, a theory was taken from Bandem (1996). Bandem earlier took the theory about the

same topic from Allegra Fuller Snyder, which stated that dance is the symbol of human life and is an expressive kinetic activity. The meanings are formed through the stimulation, transformation, and unity.

The theory delivered by Bandem explained before is considered relevant to be used to analyze the meanings contained in Macanan dance movement in Barongan Blora dance. The theory helps the researchers to analyze the macanan dance from the perspective of society and culture, considering that the Macanan dance from Blora Regency is a product resulted from culture. Meanings contained in the Macanan dance can be seen from the process of movement formation, which consists of: (1) stimulation, revealing terms and movements; (2) transformation, revealing change; (3) Unity, revealing formations and its meanings of Macanan dance.

## METHOD

This study employed qualitative method. The approach used in this study was ethnochoreology. Soedarsono stated that ethnochoreology, as like ethnomusicology needs to borrow theories, concepts, or system from other disciplines, therefore, the approach will be categorized as multidiscipline (Pramutomo, 2007; Cahyono, 2014). The data collection techniques of the study were in the form of observation, interview, and documentation study.

The data analysis was conducted by employing interpretative analysis which is a direct data verification process in the data collection. The data gathered during the research are organized in order and classified based on different characteristics and types. The related data in this study are categorized based on the types of movement and symbolical meaning contained in the dance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Macanan dance movements in Barongan Blora performance received several treatments before it became into a

whole and perfect set of movement. The process was initiated by the emergence of idea which was influenced by intuition, then was developed into imagination. From the imagination, it was continued into dance movement creation which was then resulted into ideas (Smith, 1976). It can be said that the Imagination or intuition of a dance creator will only be used or activated during the process of dance creation only. Imagination is influenced by the ability or talent to form a realization of an idea that is used to do creation. The *Barongan* dancers as well as the choreographer have a freedom of imagination towards the dance they perform. This intuition is supported by the knowledge of the *barong* dancer related to the kinds of movements as the main materials in the process of movement formation. Ideas were taken from experiences in the form of stimulus in a series of movement that are transformed to a unity of movement till it may form meanings.

From the previous research of Mulyono (2003) about *Barongan* as a tourism package that described about the manifestation of cat in arts, theory from Desmond Morris was applied. The theory discussed the theatrical mimicry which immitates the real movement of the real living object. The same as the study conducted by Mulyono, *Macanan* dance in *Barongan* Blora also contains movement adapted from the surrounding neighborhood, both animal and human's movements. Therefore, the imitation movement can be classified into two: (1) immitative, an imitation movement originally adapted from the imitation of animal and nature's movement, (2) mimitive, an imitation movement, adapted from human movements and gestures (Soedarsono, 1976).

#### The Formation of Movement and Simbolical Meaning in *Macanan* Dance

The *dekemen* movement is a kind of movement which requires the dancers to move forward entering the stage (known

as *beksan*) while hands are placed in front of face, moving downward, as like worshipping. The head is nodding looking at the floor, while the mask is facing forward up high. The feet are opened widely and the body is crouching. The *dekeman* movement illustrates the attitude of a tiger while waking up from sleep. A tiger will only look pointlessly to the surrounding, while highly cautious, waiting for a prey. A tiger has a very sharp natural instinct in deciding which prey will it eats. *Dekeman*, further, has meaning that as a human being, one should be focus in order to be success to achieve goals.



Figure 1. The *dekeman* movement using a tiger mask (Elinta, 2017)

#### The *Gebyah* Movement

The *Gebyah* movement is done by moving the tiger mask upward and downward, the hand is holding the mask, the body stands upright, while the leg is on *jengkeng* position; or legs are opened widely, the body of the *barongan* dancers moves by following the movement of the mask. The term *gebyah* itself is taken from the behaviour of Blora society in farming. *Gebyah* is the society habit, done every season while they are putting the rice plant to dry under the sunshine. While drying the rice plant outside, the farmers always stomp the rice plant's bunch for the rice plant to blossom or expanding. The meaning presented here is the tradition that is still preserved by the society to maintain interaction for the tolerance and communication to be upheld well. It has the meaning that no matter one has reached success or not, one should not forget his origin.





**Figure 2.** The *gebyah* movement wearing mask (Elinta, 2017)

### The Senggot Movement

Senggot movement is done by moving the mask to the right and left sides while hands are holding the mask. The leg can stay stand straight or *jengkeng*, bending the leg up to 90 degrees. Like *gebyah*, *senggot* is also a tradition for Blora society. Senggot is the activity of cutting grass by using *arit*, a Javanese traditional bladder. The farmer itself usually do *senggot* in the rice field, or just around the the rice plant. The grass taken by the farmer is not allowed to be thrown carelssly, but to be given to the livestock. Besides working in the ricefield, the farmers also rises livestokc,such as: goat, buffalo, and cow? The grass here bring both advantage and disadvantage for the farmers. The advantage received by the farmers in harvesting period was doubled. The fee result of the harvest then can be used to filfill everyday needs.



**Figure 3.** The Senggot movement wearing mask (Elinta, 2017)

Meaning contained in the *senggot* movement is about how to value something positive and negaitve , good or bad,

advantegous, and disadvantegous is based on the human itself. However, as human beingm we have to be selective towards it.

### The Ngaklak Movement

The *Ngaklak* movement is a mymesis of the movement of a tiger. On the other hand, *Ngaklak* is the immitation of the tiger movemnt while eating, specifically after the process of stilative and distortive. In *ngaklak* movement, the mouth of the face are opened with the hands holding the mask and moving it upward and downward following the music accompaniment. It can be done both in fast and slow motions.



**Figure 4.** The *Ngaklak* movement by wearing mask (Elinta, 2017)

### The Kucingan Movement

*Kucingan* represents the movement of a tiger while targetting the prey. While targetting its prey, a tiger uses his eye six times better rather than a human. A tiger will always pay attention to its prey and kill it in the precise and correct time. The *kucingan* movements show the head of the *barongan* to get beaten by the *barongan* dancer, while moving and looking at surrounding, haunting a prey.

The movement is naturally free and depends on the creativity of the dancers. It can be danced individually, in pairs, or even in a group. The movement of *kucingan* can be done both in high and low levels. Moreover, since it is a kind of spontaneous movement, the music accompaniment pattern should adjust with the movement of the music players, mainly the *kendhang*.



**Figure 5.** The *Kucingan* movement by wearing mask (Elinta, 2017)

### The Geter Movement

*Geter* is the movement of the dancers vibrating the mask. This movement is done with the movement volume narrow and fast dynamics. The character emerging from the movement is strict and stiff. The *geter* movement also functionalized as the connecting movement between one main movement to another main movement.

The *geter* movement is an imitation of a person who is cutting woods by using *sewer* machine. Small number of native Blora society work as wood cuter in the woods which is known as *mblandong*. The activity is still frequently able to be seen till now since Blora is well-known for its forest wealth.



**Figure 6.** Geter movement by wearing mask (Elinta, 2017)

### The Thathakan Movement

*Thathakan* is moving the mouth of the mask open and close while biting. The movement is done by hitting both hands into the mask's mouth in turns. The movement of *thathakan* emerges from the activity when people are hitting woods. The wood craftsman is one of a profession had by the society in Blora to make the use of

the available natural resources. The word *thathakan* was originally taken from the movement that produces the sound *thak-thak* on the hit wood.



**Figure 7.** *Thathakan* movement by wearing mask (Elinta, 2017)

### The Glundungan Movement

*Glundungan*, is movement immitating the tiger while it is rolling its body after experiencing the phase of stilative and distortive process. *Glundungan* is movement on which the 'tiger' is rolling is body to the right and left side.



**Figure 8.** *Glundungan* movement by wearing mask (Elinta, 2017)

### The Mbekur Movement

The *mbekur* movement shows the position of the tiger scratching its feet by doing wavy movement. It is done alternately from the right foot to the left foot with the biting technique. *Mbekur* is a kind of immitative movement from the real tiger behaviour while biting its own foot after getting hurt or injured. A tiger, leaking its own leg while getting injured, so by showing this movement, it is hoped that one should have good impact both to himself and to other people within society by digging potential had by human being.



**Figure 9.** *Glundungan* movement by wearing mask (Elinta, 2017)

### The Thapukan Movement

*Thapukan* is the movement of catching done in the position of sitting as well as standing with the biting the Barongan technique. The movement is started by looking upward and then crossing both hands as if the tiger is about to catch an object.

The *thapukan* movement is an imitation of the tiger's activity while catching its prey. *Macan* is known to have vivid sensitivity and ability to catch its prey that will be impossible for the prey to run and get their freedom after getting caught. Meaning attached within the movement is to use all of our energy to achieve the best for us.



**Figure 10.** *Thapukan* movement by wearing mask (Elinta, 2017)

### The Movement Organization in Macanan Dance

Soedarsono (1999) and Cahyono (2014) once stated that movement consists of locomotion, pure movement, gesture, as well as baton signal. Therefore, the movement in *Macanan* dance is considered to have the four kinds of movement as stated above.

### The Locomotion

Locomotion can also be categorized as transition movement. This movement is used to every transition, both in the dance (floor) pattern and the movement. These movements are danced by the dancers as the transition between two main stage patterns. Besides, it also uses to connect one movement to the other movements. The movements belong to this category are *kucingan* and *glundungan*.

### The Pure Movement

The pure movement in the *Macanan* dance of Barongan Blora does not have any specific meaning. This movement is used to show the character of the tiger mask that is danced. Usually, the movements are taken from the movements of a real tiger after they experience the phase of stilative and distortive. The pure movements in this dance are *gebyah*, *senggot*, and *thathakan*.

### The Gesture

Gesture in the *Macanan* dance of Barongan Blora has specific purpose. The meanings are related to the behavioral pattern of Blora citizen as traditional society. All the meaning behind the dance is the reflection of the behaviour of the society living in the region where the dance were created. On the other hand, the dance contains value of society that is reflected through movements. Gesture in this dance are seen in the movements of *dekeman*, *ngaklak*, *mbekur*, and *thapukan*.

### The Baton Signal

The baton signal is the most dominant movement in *Macanan* dance of Barongan Blora. This movement is related to the ability of the *Barongan* dancers as well as the appropriate movement technique so that the expression can be seen based on the character of the mask that is performed. Here, the movement belongs to the baton signal is *geter*.



## CONCLUSION

The philosophical meaning is formed by the behavioral pattern of the society and the tiger as a symbol that is sacred by the society, that is believed to be able to protect the society from disaster and bad luck. In addition, the *Macanan* dance movement in *Barongan* Blora illustrates the activity done by the society whose occupancy mostly are farmer; besides also showing the imitation of a tiger movement. The movement illustrating the activity of certain society is used to beautify and strengthen character, while the symbolical meanings are formed from the imitation of the movement of a tiger.

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