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## Between mystical and entertainment: A study on Barongan show in Blora, Indonesia

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#### Abstract

The *Barongan* show has existed since 1825 and is particularly popular in Blora, Indonesia. This show is an adaptation of the Balinese *Barongan* and *Reog Ponorogo* to Blora culture. Because of its magical and mystical characteristics, *Barongan* Blora is associated with ritual practices. The traditional *Barongan* show began as a mystical show, but as it evolved, modern *Barongan* shows that are entertainment and spectacle have arisen without displacing the traditional *Barongan*. This paper looks at the magical and mystical rites in the *Barongan* Blora Show from the standpoint of function or the theatrical program. In Blora, traditional and modern *Barongan* show groups were interviewed and observed. As a mystical show, traditional *Barongan* stresses supernatural elements bound by particular regulations. It has enormous magical power and can put the *pembarong* into a trance. This phenomenon has a unique allure for the audience. This is different from modern *Barongan* shows, which are primarily for entertainment and are more adaptable in their execution. Modern *Barongan* shows are also more attractive to all groups since they are more enticing and are not restricted by rituals. Traditional and modern *Barongan* symbolize populist moral values that exist in Blora culture and are a trademark of the Blora region. Therefore the proclamation of *Barongan* as Blora regional art is more than just a discourse; *Barongan* becomes the spirit of life for the Blora people.

**Keywords:** Barongan, Blora, entertainment, mystical, show



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### Public Interest Statement

This paper looks at the magical and mystical rites in the Barongan Blora Show from the standpoint of function or the theatrical program. In Blora, traditional and modern Barongan show groups were interviewed and observed. As a mystical show, traditional Barongan stresses supernatural elements bound by particular regulations. It has enormous magical power and can put the *pembarong* into a trance. This phenomenon has a unique allure for the audience. This is different from modern Barongan shows, which are primarily for entertainment and are more adaptable in their execution. Modern Barongan shows are also more attractive to all groups since they are more enticing and are not restricted by rituals. Traditional and modern Barongan symbolize populist moral values that exist in Blora culture and are a trademark of the Blora region. Therefore the proclamation of Barongan as Blora regional art is more than just a discourse; Barongan becomes the spirit of life for the Blora people.

### Introduction

*Barongan* performing arts have grown significantly in Indonesia, particularly in Bali, Yogyakarta, North Sumatra, East Java, and Central Java. *Barongan* shows in Central Java are generally found in the Blora, Rembang, Pati, Grobogan, and Tegal regencies. Nonetheless, the Blora region hosts a greater number of *Barongan* shows overall. *Barongan* Blora has developed into a treasure of local culture that differs from *Barongan* shows from other locations, despite claims in some literature that it is a variant of *Reog Ponorogo* and *Barongan* Bali (Ibda, 2019). *Barongan* shows are regular folk shows in Blora, particularly among rural populations. Furthermore, the Regional Government of Blora Regency has designated the *Barongan* show as an intangible cultural heritage since 2017 (Blora Regency Government, 2017).

*Barongan* is associated with dance through the medium of a large mask in the shape of a giant tiger known as *Singa Barong*, as the forest's ruler is haunted and extremely ferocious (Dewi et al., 2018). The presence of *Barongan* Blora is due to the Blora people's belief in the spirits of mythological creatures, which they believe in having the capacity to guard and maintain safety (*totemism*) (Arisyanto et al., 2021). The Blora people's belief in tigers inspires the employment of the tiger mask and the movements of the *Barongan* dance that mimic a tiger or wild tiger. In the *Barongan* show, there are at least two *pembarong* dancers. One dancer is the head, while the other is the tail (Komariyah & Wiyoso, 2017).

As a traditional show, *Barongan* is rich in cultural and artistic characteristics, yet, this presentation is full of mystical impressions and is closely tied to the spirituality of the performers (Hendriko & Effendy, 2019). The presence of this metaphysical activity causes dancers to enter a trance state. Trance happens when the spirit enters the *Barongan* dancer's body through the handler and controls the dancer's body and awareness (Agung & Soetopo, 2019). The audience is anticipating the phenomena of the *Barongan* dancers becoming possessed because the *Barongan* show is regarded as interesting when a trance occurs (Pasaribu & Yetno, 2015).

Based on this, the author attempts to investigate the ritual and entertainment nature of the Blora *Barongan* Show by observing two traditional and modern *Barongan* ensembles. The author also interviews Mr. Sutrisno, the handler of the "Singo Buono" Traditional *Barongan* organization, who has been active in the world of *Barongan* for a long time. *Barongan* "Singo Buono" is a *Barongan* group that is still tied by tradition and is dedicated to carrying out ritual ceremonies. In addition, interviews were conducted with the Modern *Barongan* Dance and Cultural Arts Studio team "Ridwan CS" as the *Barongan* Modern group, the *Barongan* group "Risang Guntur Seto Blora," as the modern *Barongan*

show group and Mr. Sukoco and Mrs. Sulastri, the organisers of the *ruwatan murwakala* ceremony, who live in Bedingan Village, Todanan Sub District, Blora Regency, Indonesia.

Previous research conducted by Marschall (1995) revealed that Barongan is the same as *jaran kepang* dance, namely as a typical Javanese trance dance used in rural community ritual events. Additionally, Jazuli & Alam (2020) in Blora stated that the influence of globalization, socio-cultural developments, and economic shifts led to changes in the function of Barongan from ritual to entertainment. At the same time, another research mentions that the process of the Javanese Barongan show that aims for entertainment has a different storyline with performances that aim for ritual ceremonies (Sundari et al., 2020).

Several studies have only focused on the function of the Barongan performance, while the novelty in this study seeks to bring out the mystical nature of the Barongan performance through the ritual possession of the dancers, which are now rarely found in the Blora area. This research also seeks to bring out changes in the nature of the ritual into entertainment in the Barongan performance.

This research is intriguing to investigate when there is a ritual that occurs at the *Barongan* Blora Show that appears magical and mysterious. However, it is currently more of an entertainment nature. As a result, the author is interested in the rituals and mysticism of *Barongan* Blora, which are divided into three stages of the show. On the other hand, observations and interviews with the entertainment version of the *Barongan* dancing group demonstrate that the existence of this version of *Barongan* is improving. In contrast, the ritual show version of *Barongan* remains unchanged.

### Method

This study uses a type of qualitative research. Creswell (2013) states that qualitative research is a process of scientific research that is intended to understand human problems in a social context by creating a comprehensive and complex picture presented, reporting detailed views of sources of information, and carried out in natural settings without any intervention from researchers. This research was conducted on February to March 2023. This research focuses on examining Barongan performances related to rituals and mysticism, as well as changes in traditional Barongan performances to modern ones in the Blora area. Data collection was carried out by observation, interview with some Barongan groups, and documentation methods.

Data collection technique using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information, and is a way of identifying and selecting cases that will use limited research resources effectively (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this research, there were 4 respondents, such as: 1) the handler of *ruwatan* ceremony from traditional Barongan group “Singo Buono”, Mr. Sutrisno; 2) two organisers of the *ruwatan murwakala* ceremony, Mr. Sukoco and Mrs. Sulastri; and 3) a representative group of modern Barongan dance Cultural Arts Studio “*Ridwan CS*”. The instruments were used observations sheet and questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to collect data from the handler of Barongan traditional, the organizer of the *ruwatan murwakala*, and representative group of modern Barongan dance.

The analysis used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes and to develop interpretations of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The analysis in this study consists of an analysis of the history of Barongan Blora, an analysis of the traditions and functions of Barongan Blora, an analysis of Barongan performances and religious rituals, and an analysis of Barongan as an entertainment show. The data gathered during the research are organized in order and classified based on different characteristics and types. Interviews with Barongan handlers from the Barongan group, Sutrisno were conducted to obtain information regarding the ritual requirements in Barongan performances and

the spells used to inject spirits into the body *pembarong* and the spell to stop the possessed *pembarong*. Meanwhile, interviews with Mr. Sukoco and Mrs. Sulastri were conducted to obtain information about the *ruwatan murwakala* ritual procession which will be carried out at the wedding procession. Meanwhile, interviews with representatives of the Barongan group “*Ridwan CS*” were conducted to find out the differences in functions and roles between traditional Barongan groups and modern Barongan groups which are increasingly developing today. Observations were made by observing the *ruwatan murwakala* ritual at weddings which began with a *slametan* and ended with a Barongan performance to drive away evil spirits. Analysis includes the history of Barongan Blora, Barongan as a function and tradition, Barongan shows and religious rituals, and Barongan as an entertainment show. The analysis was carried out based on the results of interviews and observation on two Barongan groups, one is traditional Barongan group “*Singo Buono*” and another is modern Barongan group “*Ridwan CS*”. As well as by observing traditional Barongan performances at the wedding ritual ‘*ruwatan*’ procession.

## Results

### 3.1 History of Barongan Blora

According to the Blora people’s oral history, *Barongan* Blora represents Gembong Amijoyo in the story “*Panji*,” which means the big tiger that reigns (Utina, 2019). Some traditional sources claim that the existence of a sacred tomb in the Mlangsen Village, Blora, which is thought to be the grave of Mbah Singo Lodro, is directly tied to the existence of *Barongan* Blora (Ibda, 2019). The locals think Mbah Singo Lodro’s large tiger frequently appears in the tomb. According to historical sources from Blora, during the *Naya Gimbali* conflict between 1825 and 1830, during the Diponegoro War era, *Barongan* shows were once present at every wedding ceremony or parade (Soedarsono, 2010).

Functionally, the *Barongan* Show is critical to the survival of the Blora people. *Barongan* emerged due to village clean-up rites such as *lamporan*, *ruwatan murwakala*, *sedekah bumi*, circumcision processions, and weddings (Slamet, 1999). The people of Blora use the *Barongan* to drive away the plague by parading the *Barongan* around the village (Jazuli & Alam, 2020). The artistic aspect of *Barongan* ritual shows is secondary to the principal function of *tolak bala*. The *Barongan* show is designed to accompany weddings and ritual ceremonies, following its function (Guntaris et al., 2019; Indriyanto et al., 2022). However, there is a shift and addition of features in which the *Barongan* show is utilized as an entertainment medium and does not require time and place computation in its execution (Utina, 2020). If we look closely, the *Barongan* show contains more improvisational moves that reference tiger movements. The spontaneity of the *pembarong*’s movements is matched to the rhythm of the music that is playing.

The *Barongan* Blora show was created as a dance drama in 2000 (Nurdien & Wisnu, 2021). In dance drama, *Barongan* shows are classified as either presentation without trance or with trance (Mangundiharjo, 2019). The *Barongan* show without trance highlights the dramatic components of the act, whereas the *Barongan* show with trance stresses the magical element. *Barongan* began as a show with trance, as opposed to the concerts that are currently being developed, which do not have trance (Jazuli et al., 2020) seperti spontan, sederhana, kekeluargaan, kasar, menantang, dan berani karena memang benar. Sifat kerakyatan membuat masyarakat Blora memiliki kekuatan yang luar biasa dalam menjalani kehidupannya. Topeng singa dalam kesenian Barongan merupakan simbol kekuatan dan kekuatan. Simbol ini merupakan nilai yang sangat penting untuk digunakan dalam mendukung pendidikan karakter anak bangsa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bentuk dan corak seni Barongan (kearifan lokal). The story of the *Barongan* show is based on the Panji epic, which tells of Raden Panji Asmarabangun or Pujonggo Anom from the Kediri kingdom who wants to propose to

Dewi Sekartaji from the Jenggala kingdom (Ibda, 2019). The *Barongan* show began with a procession of bodyguards from Raden Panji and Singo Barong.

The *Barongan* Blora show consists of figures such as *Barongan*, *Gendruwon*, *Nayantaka*, *Untub*, *Pak Genthung*, *Bujangganong*, *Gainah*, *Mbok Bong*, and *Belot* (Mangundiharjo, 2019). These characters underwent an evolution; where at the beginning of their development, the figures in the *Barongan* show were played by men, but currently, the *Barongan* dancers are played by women, especially in the *Barongan* Samin Edan Group (Dewi et al., 2018). Several musical instruments, including *kendhang*, *kethuk*, *bonang*, *saron*, *demung*, and *kempul*, make the *Barongan* show more entertaining (Jazuli et al., 2020) seperti spontan, sederhana, kekeluargaan, kasar, menantang, dan berani karena memang benar. Sifat kerakyatan membuat masyarakat Blora memiliki kekuatan yang luar biasa dalam menjalani kehidupannya. Topeng singa dalam kesenian Barongan merupakan simbol kekuatan dan kekuatan. Simbol ini merupakan nilai yang sangat penting untuk digunakan dalam mendukung pendidikan karakter anak bangsa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bentuk dan corak seni Barongan (kearifan lokal. Many modern instruments, including drums, trumpets, big drums, and keyboards, were added to the *Barongan* show during its evolution. Many events in the exhibition are frequently coupled with Campursari paintings. Yet, gamelan with *slendro* tunings is the musical accompaniment distinguishing *Barongan* Blora (Murni et al., 2016).

### 3.2 Analysis of Tradition and Function of Barongan Blora

Rituals are long-established social and religious activities in every culture (Khoury, 2017). *Barongan* Blora shows are inextricably linked to rituals in many events. This show has a mystical value following the beliefs of the local community and entertaining the audience. The community regards the *Barongan* Show as a symbol of appreciation to God for providing natural fertility and goodwill for the village community to develop. As a result, the *Barongan* show is only done on specified occasions, such as the *sedekah bumi*, *bersih desa* traditions, and *tolak bala* (*lamporan*) to fulfill its ritual role. In addition to these ceremonies, the *Barongan* show is presented at the wedding *ruwatan* (*selamatan*) ceremony as a form of gratitude for the bride and groom and to rid the household of *bala* (misfortunes) that will be lived in (see figure 1).



Figure 1. *Barongan* performance in the *Ruwatan* ceremony

The participation of the *Barongan* show in the ritual began with the people's belief that Blora's natural wealth remained a mystery to the lives of its people. Furthermore, the existence of *Barongan* is intimately tied to the economic conditions of the Blora people, who live in a rural culture. The terrain of the land in Blora is better suited for growing hard woody plants like teak but not for growing staple

daily crops like rice and legumes. Given its natural geography surrounded by limestone mountains, rice, and secondary crop growers have difficulty finding water reservoirs. This is one of the reasons behind their customary practice of performing religious rites for fertility, security, and entertainment. It is a sacred ceremony in which the people aspire to meet the demand for connection between the Above world and the Underworld. The relationship between humanity and their Creator is regarded as the Above world, while the Underworld is where humans socialize. The community considers the *Barongan* Show to be the personification of a fabled tiger with magical powers to protect the people from all types of harm. The Blora people also believe in ancestor spirits that protect life and *dhanyang*, or spirits that dwell in a specific location or territory, such as forests, mountains, and villages.

The village's clean tradition is still linked to the *sedekah bumi*, recognized by the exorcism ceremony. The exorcism is preceded by a *slametan* ritual in which offerings are made to the village *dhanyang*. They believe that the *dhanyang* is the village's guardian. Meanwhile, *slamet* means safe in this context. Therefore, this rite ensures that the people of the Hamlet are secure from bad spirits. The qualities of the offerings utilised in a *slametan* are derived from food offered by residents, which includes rice, side dishes, and various vegetables (see picture 2). These meals are then wrapped in teak leaves representing Blora's native vegetation. This demonstrates that the outcomes of nature can be reconnected with nature and become a sign of hope for nature, allowing people to live prosperously. As a symbol of natural knowledge, teak leaves are utilized as wrapping in Blora. This demonstrates residents' desire to live in harmony with nature. Another wish expressed during the clean village rite is for the village to be protected from evil spirits that disrupt the balance of its environment, such as floods, landslides, plant pests, and so on (see figure 2).



Figure 2. Traditional ceremonial offerings (*sesaji*)

Another tradition still associated with *sedekah bumi* is the tradition of *tolak bala*, which evolved in Blora as a sort of disaster rejection. By ritual offerings (*sesajen*), the sign of rejection is visualized. The community uses a variety of offerings, such as paired bananas, telon flowers—three colourful flowers: red roses, jasmine, and *ylang-ylang* or support, pasung and bugis—traditional street cuisine, two Javanese chicken eggs, and other fruits. There were a few folks eating rice and maize as well. Since these offerings are usually the food spirits enjoy, they are carefully placed and identical in pairs.

### 3.3 Analysis of *Barongan* Shows and Religious Rituals

The following characteristics distinguish *Barongan* performing arts used in rituals: 1) performed at a predetermined location, sometimes the location is considered sacred; 2) a choice of time; 3) the player

who plays must be the one who has been chosen; usually, people who are considered holy or who have cleansed themselves spiritually; 4) a set of offerings depending on needs; 5) prioritizing ritual goals over aesthetic appearances; and 6) the use of very distinctive clothing. According to the handler *Barongan's* narrative, certain taboos must be followed by the *pembarong* and team before the show begins, including 1) not washing hair and 2) not eating or smoking during the *Barongan* show.

*Barongan* is intended as a special dish for ancestor spirits for the Blora people. In ceremonies, *Barongan* Show Arts are not concerned with aesthetic aspects but rather serve as a means to do *tolak bala*. The objective of the *Barongan* at a ceremony is to obtain safety based on the *Barongan's* belief and magical powers (Blackledge & Creese, 2020; Grimes, 2012; Insoll, 2009). The *Barongan* is considered an exorcist of evil spirits since the tiger mask or tiger is claimed to have magical powers where the tiger's soul enters. *Barongan* ritual shows are divided into pre-show festivities, opening and main shows, and closing.

### 3.3.1 Pre-Show of Show

The pre-show of the *Barongan* begins with the preparation of the *pembarong*, handlers, and the show team. They carry out various taboos and adhere to existing traditions, as explained by Mr. Sutrisno below:

*“Before the show begins, I and others with a purpose normally consider the best date for the ruwatan ritual. After determining the best day, the pembarong, which consists of 9-10 people, is obliged to follow the rules, which include not washing their hair before the event and not eating or smoking during the ceremony. As the handler, I must memorize the incantations recited when pouring yellow rice, blowing incense and incense, and reviving the tranced pembarong. We must also wear all-black clothing in conformity with prevailing customs.”*

The *slametan* ritual takes place in the traditional ceremony. The ceremonial *slametan* is always provided in conjunction with the *slametan* rite. The presence of ceremonial offerings is designed to provide natural wealth to ancestral spirits as a kind of gratitude for assisting in the protection of villagers from natural disasters, and so on. In addition, rituals are done to request smoothness and protection from the Almighty and to pique the audience's interest in the *Barongan* show.

*“Making offerings is designed to request protection from Allah so that those organizing the event are safe and protected. Several offerings are made during the Barongan show at the ruwatan ritual. Yellow rice, coconut leaves, dupa, and kemenyan are among the offerings utilized in addition to everyday food and fruit. Each item serves a certain purpose. Providing yellow rice and coconut leaves is effective for driving away reinforcements by sprinkling coconut leaves on the stage arena and sowing yellow rice along the path Barongan follows while parading around the village. Frankincense and incense are used to bring spirits into the pembarong's body, while staple foods and fruits wrapped in teak leaves are a favourite food of the spirits and a symbol of our village's natural wealth.”* (Sutrisno, personal communication, 28 February 2023)

After completing the *slametan* ritual and offerings, the handler and the observing community will parade the *Barongan* around the village to the *punden*, located at the end of the hamlet abutting the teak forest region. This *punden* can be a tomb, hallowed land, or other such things. In this situation, the *Barongan* serves as a showcase for the *punden's* wares. Before the *Barongan* show in the *ruwatan* event

begins, the handler must follow several rules: 1) The handler determines the show time, which is half past noon; 2) The handler selects a sacred *Barongan* show venue; 3) The handler prepares offerings in the form of yellow rice, coconut leaves, and incense (see figure 3) The handler recites the mantras before the *ruwatan* ceremony begins.



Figure 3. The handler recites the mantra before the event begins

Since the shaman can control the *Barongan* while performing, the technique of the ceremony is fully in the hands of the handler. The handler does not operate alone in its implementation but is aided by other people who have been appointed and have nearly the same supernatural powers as the handler. The significance of magical and religious rites dictates the location of the *Barongan* show. An ancestor's provision governs the *Barongan* performing venue. According to Mr. Sutrisno, one of the show handlers, the timing for the *Barongan* show at the *ruwatan* ceremony has also been planned so that unpleasant things do not occur.

*“I chose half past noon for the event because that is when the sengkolo appears. Therefore, the Barongan show is designed to evict evil spirits that may disrupt the community.” (Personal communication, Sutrisno, 28 February 2023)*

In certain cases, such as the *ruwatan* ceremony at a wedding, the *Barongan* show is intended to expel evil spirits that can disrupt the wedding ceremony and dispel all reinforcements that could harm the households of the bride and groom. This was revealed by Mr. Sukoco, who organized the *ruwatan* ceremony.

*“For the Blora people, the ruwatan ceremony means asking for protection and safety for the individual being treated for the ritual. Furthermore, this ceremony is performed to preserve traditions that have existed since the time of our forefathers. We feel that if a person is not treated for rituals, he can cause havoc in the surrounding community. As a result, it is critical that the newly married bride and groom, circumcised children, sick children, and newborns be treated in the hope that their lives will remain safe.” (Personal communication, Sukoco, 28 February 2023).*



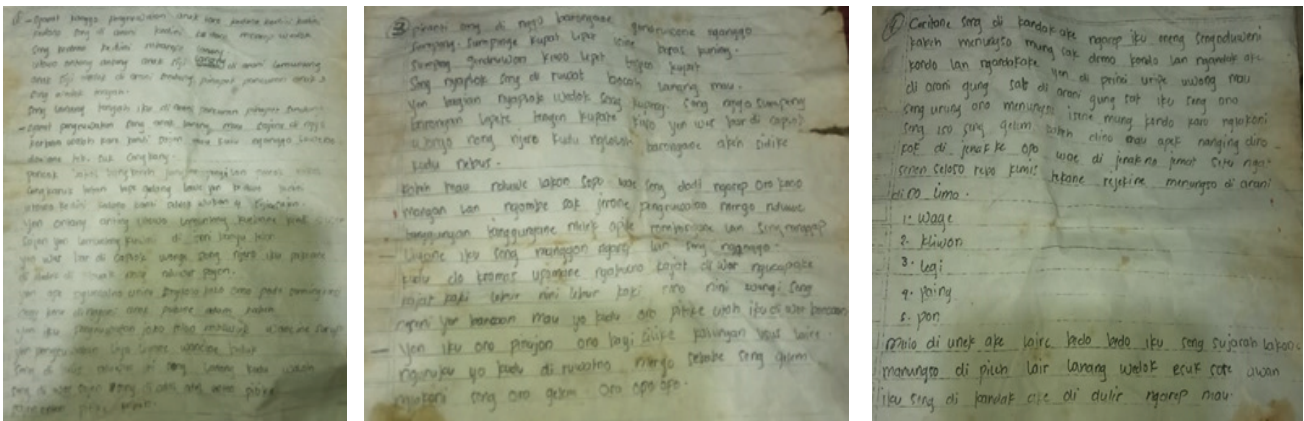


Figure 4. Mantras recited before the *ruwatan* ceremony begins

The handler recites spells passed down from generation to generation from the village’s ancestors before the show begins. The handler must learn these spells, and they cannot be spoken by anyone else (see Fig. 4).

3.3.2 Opening Ceremony and Main Show

The show begins with the handler sprinkling yellow rice onto the stage area after reciting a prayer. Yellow rice is also planted along the road that the *Barongan* will pass over when it parades around the villagers’ residences. Following the completion of the yellow rice sowing, the following stage is to blow the incense and incense that the charmer has spoken the spell on the *pembarong*. This is designed to encourage spirits into the *pembarong*’s body. The *ruwatan* ceremony’s *Barongan* show begins with sounds from the gamelan or gong. The main course of the ceremony is *Barongan*. The appearance of the *Barongan* dancing like a tiger marks the offering rite to the ancestral spirits and The Almighty. Because the ceremony is surrounded by spiritual energy, when *Barongan* begins to perform, the environment will feel mysterious and beautiful. Changes in the behaviour of *Barongan* performers can be seen throughout the show. All of the *Barongan* dancers wander through the hand of the village in hand while dancing, emulating tiger movements, and performing difficult attractions (see figure 5).



Figure 5. Barongan show on the village street

The *Barongan* show tells the story of Panji’s fight between Gembong Amijoyo, Bujangganong, and Joko Lodro. The community-created movement was based on the dispute’s sequence of events, which began with the introduction of the figures Gembong Amijoyo and Joko Lodro, followed by the meeting and dispute between Gembong Amijoyo and Bujangganong, the return of the Bujangganong

bodyguards to the kingdom, and the conflict between Gembong Amijoyo and Joko Lodro, which ended in a devastating defeat. Because they reflect spontaneous arguments, *Barongan* dance motions tend to be enthusiastic and unbound by musical accompaniment.

The spontaneous motion codes show the interaction between the *pembarong* and the audience. It is not uncommon for *Barongan* dancers and spectators to fall into a trance. The trance phenomenon in dance and music is often seen as indispensable to help raise the performer's spirituality to a higher level and reduce the pain inflicted on the body when the dance action takes place. Possession can occur because of the influence of the strains of Javanese gamelan music used as an accompaniment to the *Barongan* show, which can affect the consciousness and psychology of those who hear it. According to Turner (2020) and Becker (1994), a constant rhythm of music might produce "possession" in a person. However, according to the dancers' story, the trance phenomenon happens when the show handlers actively put spirits into their bodies. The method of entering the spirits begins with the burning of frankincense and incense on the roof tiles and the recitation of spells, followed by the incense being blown to the *pembarong* by the handler (see figure 6). The followings are the prayers and charms used to bring spirits into the *pembarong*'s body.



Figure 6. The ritual of summoning demon spirits to enter the *pembarong*'s body

*Niatingsun ngetoke aji-aji si dhawuk ruung. Sira tangia sun gugah, bakal ana gawe* (said by people who have intent then stomped their feet on the ground 3 times) (Slamet, 1999).

Trance dancers, like other mystical dancers, are utilized to make touch with the spirits of their ancestors, who continue to play an essential role in the lives of their descendants as moral beacons and wish fulfillment. The trance phenomena in the *pembarong* do not occur by themselves. Controlling the spirit requires good cooperation between the handler and the player, who has prepared his body and soul to be controlled by the spirit of the spirit. The occurrence of this trance phenomenon, however, is the real draw of the *Barongan* show itself. To neutralise mystical influences in possessed people, *Barongan* shows are usually 'guarded' by handlers who are tasked with securing the course of the show, dispelling all bad influences from evil spirits, encouraging the practice of being possessed, and acting as an antidote to people who are in a trance. Some prerequisites and limits must be met before becoming a handler, and the individual who becomes a handler must be able to synchronize ideas and sentiments. Sutrisno stated the following.

*"There is no age limit for being a handler; the most important thing is the person's intention and willingness because becoming a handler is not easy. Various requirements must be met, as well as some taboos that must not be broken. Typically, these taboos take the shape of foods*

*that should not be consumed. If broken, the handler will suffer the consequences.” (Sutrisno, personal communication, 28 February 2023).*

This handler is also skilled at chanting incantations in a ceremony to summon and release spirits. The handler must dress in traditional Javanese attire, including a skullcap, slacks, and an all-black beskap. Meanwhile, the handlers who assist continue to wear all-black clothes but are not restricted in what they wear (see figure 7).



**Figure 7.** The handler wearing all-black clothes

When the trance players take their place in the center, they begin by peeling coconuts with their bare hands and playing with swords. If you look closely, the eyes of the tranced *pembarong* will turn crimson and glare as though they are enraged (see picture 8). The public believes in this phenomenon because of the involvement of spirits in the *Barongan* show, where the possessed dancers or spectators are under the influence of jinn and have immense supernatural energy to perform attractions.



**Figure 8.** Barongan trance process during the show

The handler must first understand each player’s weaknesses and strengths to halt a trance dancer. This is important because if there are players who are tough to awaken, the handler will instantly fulfill what the players want or awaken the players by exploiting their flaws. Depending on the spirits that have possessed the player, each player has various preferences and weaknesses. As a result, each player’s awareness process is unique. If the handler is unaware of this, it is feared that it will disrupt

the show and even endanger the dancer's health. The tool the handler uses to awaken the dancer when he is in a trance is adjusted to the preferences of each dancer. These tools include keris, special oil, and handkerchiefs. The handkerchief used has been given oil and spells. The handler also provides incense and special perfume to awaken the rebels. If the *pembarong* is difficult to awaken and cannot be revived using a handkerchief, then the handler must use another medium, burnt incense. When awakening a *pembarong* in a trance, the handler must carry out several stages, among which the handler will choose which one to rest in the first stage. Second, splash water filled with flowers or yellow rice that has been given a spell. Third, if the energy from the spirits of the spirits is greater, the performer will have a higher frequency of trances so that the dances performed will be more attractive. Fourth, if the players start to get tired, they will take the prepared offerings and ask for something like a drink or food, then continue dancing again. Fifth, if the player has had enough of dancing, the dancer will approach the handler to ask to be revived (see picture 9).



Figure 9. The process of awakening the *pembarong* who were in a trance

The handler will perform the following ritual to awaken individuals who are possessed. *Niatingsun semedi nutupi babahan hawa sanga, saperlu nyuwun serayaning kang akarya jagad mugimugi kasirnakna danyang kang manggon jiwaragane (sebut nama yang trance) kang manggon ing kiblata papatlima pancer Allah huma aamiin* (Slamet, 1999).

Infused religious rituals are frequently designed to attract and establish contact with supernatural beings, so establishing a domain of divine connection is distinct from ordinary social interaction. These manifestations are intended to influence supernatural beings' actions towards specific individuals and societal groupings for these supernatural creatures to take over the consciousness of their host. Shows, as reflected in ceremonial rites, are largely acts of persuasion, and the resulting dance motions and even trance phenomena can affect the psychology of those who witness them.

### 3.3.3 Show Closing

A series of ritual ceremonies ended the show. Apart from a show by *Prabu Kalana Semandana's* soldiers fighting *Barongan*, a Javanese mythological animal depicting horror and ferocity, the event was also finished with a prayer for safety so that the person being cleaned will be free of evil. The defeat of *Barongan* versus the *Jathhil* warriors indicates that goodwill replaces the bad. The *Barongan* show has come to an end with his defeat. The full sequence in the *Barongan* show lasts about 2-3 hours. The community's faith in the supernatural power of the *Barongan* show and the prayers said can be a

deterrent to reinforcements. A prayer offered is a form of request and an attitude of surrender to God Almighty so that people treated with *ruwatan* rituals are always given safety.

### 3.4 Analysis *Barongan* as an Entertainment Show

The *Barongan* show is currently a little looser in that it does not include ritual aspects in its presentation. This is due to the growing community demand for dancing aesthetics. *Barongan* shows for amusement and spectacle are not constrained by the same laws as *Barongan* shows for rituals, allowing for greater flexibility in their implementation (see Figure 10). This modification illustrates that the *Barongan* Blora show adapts to the times, as well as a method of cultural preservation to ensure that the show does not become extinct. This is because today's younger generation prefers shows that do not involve magical and mystical elements so that they can enjoy the beauty that radiates in every dance move without any intervention from other parties performing the ritual.



Figure 10. Traditional *Barongan* show

Both internal and external factors induce changes in the function of the *Barongan* show. Internal elements include the development of dancer skills and the creativity of the artists of the *Barongan* dance group in processing movements and composing shows to meet the needs of the times. Incorporating various moves, outfit changes, and creativity in the design of each character's mask properties is a crucial development of the modern *Barongan* show. In modern *Barongan*, there are additional musical instruments in the shape of keyboards and sound systems, which allow the sound of the show to be heard up to the area behind the audience. Furthermore, modifications may be noticed in the shape of the *Barongan* show, which combines dance aspects (movement, space, and time) with numerous other supporting elements like accompaniment, floor patterns, clothes, make-up, venue, and lighting (see figure 11).



Figure 11. Modern *Barongan* show

The rise of modern *Barongan* does not preclude the existence of street *Barongan* and entertainment versions of *Barongan* that are rich in ritual meaning. Street *Barongan* and entertainment *Barongan* continue to exist now. The spotlight on the stage lighting on the modern *Barongan* also helps to draw the crowd's attention. The *Barongan* presentation is divided into three sections: the opening, the main part, and the conclusion. Each section is divided into sub-sections (scenes). Another way for the community to support the existence of the *Barongan* Show is to introduce it to young people at a young age so that they can learn and even inherit current traditions. *Barongan* shows are typically seen as an entertainment function at village events and cultural festivals, where their appearance is more appealing, elegant, played by male and female dancers, and entertaining. It is as expressed by the management of the *Barongan* Dance and Cultural Arts Studio "Ridwan CS", Mr. Ridwan, as follows:

*"Contemporary Barongan shows differ from traditional Barongan shows in their presentation, governed by specific standards. The Barongan show in my studio is primarily for entertainment; we also frequently perform at festivals and government entertainment events. We also have a room for children who want to study the Barongan dance thoroughly; occasionally, they even play as pembarong. Thus, this modern Barongan show is more child-friendly and well-liked by people of all ages."* (Ridwan, personal communication, 28 February 2023).

Female dancers' participation in modern *Barongan* is a distinct draw because male dancers have traditionally dominated *Barongan* shows. Still, over time, female dancers have been incorporated as a form of cultural preservation for all young people in Blora. Yet, there are distinctions between male and female *Barongan* dancers in the show arena. The male dancers will take on the part of the *pembarong* and perform tiger motions, while the female dancers will take on the role of *kuda lumping* dancers (see figure 12).



Figure 12. Male adolescent were imitating the Barongan dance

Meanwhile, external factors contributing to the show's existence may be found in the socioeconomic community directly tied to the *Barongan* show. Given that the Blora are a rural community that relies on agricultural products, their lives are nevertheless shaped by numerous supernatural beliefs, particularly the notion that there is a power that can affect their crops and livestock. Many still feel that ritual actions might help them attain their aims. *Barongan* is thought to have magical properties (*magi proteksi*) against bad spirits (*tolak bala*). The *Barongan* show in the *tolak bala* is carried out by community members involved in cooperation. The locals share the costs included with the *Barongan* show. *Barongan* is frequently seen at Blora circumcision and wedding celebrations, particularly in rural villages. *Barongan* is thought to impact celebrations or marriages since responding to *Barongan* protects

circumcised children or brides from evil spirits (see figure 13).



Figure 14. Barongan show on marriage ceremony

Relationships with other parties, such as community leaders, politicians, government and private institutions, and businesses, are another external aspect. This other party will help the *Barongan* show by responding to (contracting for) their needs and desires (individuals, groups, institutions). Therefore, every *Barongan* group tries to establish relationships with anyone and any party seen as capable of responding to *Barongan* (see Figure 14).



Figure 14. Barongan show on village event

### Conclusion

The existence of the *Barongan* show is not only employed as a sort of ceremony, but it has also combined with local culture and times, making this presentation more appealing and enjoyable. The *Barongan* show, as a sort of ritual, attempts to reflect the socio-culture of the Blora people, who are still deep in tradition, and to link tradition with religious beliefs for the ritual to give safety to those who arrange this event. In addition to street *Barongan* which is rich in spiritual qualities, modern *Barongan* flourishes and develops in response to the community's entertainment needs. Furthermore, modern *Barongan* is more adaptable regarding performers and execution time, making it a good medium for children and teenagers to learn about *Barongan* shows as part of Blora culture. Both *Barongan* ritual and entertainment shows have demonstrated the presence of Blora culture that has not been damaged by time.

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### Disclaimer Statement

This work is not part of a thesis submitted to a university for award in any degree.

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### Authorship and Level of Contribution

The authors are drawn from the Universitas Negeri Semarang specifically from the Departments of Drama, Dance, and Music, Department of Elementary School Education, and Visual Arts Department. The authors equally contributed in the research, writing and preparation of the work for publishing.

### Glossary of Terms

- Singa Barong : Tiger-headed figures and dancers with peacock decorations and are the most dominant in the Reog Ponorogo performance.
- Totemism : A belief that grows in a community that believes in the existence of a divine nature in an object or living creature. In this case, the Blora people have faith in the spirit of the animal tiger / tiger which is able to protect the community.
- *Dhanyang* : In Javanese culture, *dhanyang* are spirits that protect a place. *Dhanyang* is



believed to live in a place called *punden*. The *dhanyangs* are believed to accept the pleas of those who turn to them for help.

- *Slametan* : *Slametan* is a ritual tradition that still exists today and is practiced by most Javanese people, with the aim of asking for salvation from the Almighty.
- *Sesajen* : Offerings are offerings in the form of food, flowers, and so on, which are offered to ghosts (spirits) in religious ceremonies or other customs. Performed symbolically with the aim of communicating with supernatural forces.
- *Sengkolo* : A negative energy that surrounds humans and makes humans in bad luck.
- *Bala* : *Bala* is interpreted as calamity, misfortune, or trials that will be faced by the person concerned.
- *Ruwatan* : In Javanese, *ruwatan* means a purification ceremony which is held with the aim that a person can be released from danger and get rid of the bad things around him.
- *Sedekah bumi* : *Sedekah Bumi* is a traditional ceremony that is held every month of Muharram in the Islamic calendar or Suro in the Javanese calendar. This event was held as a form of people's gratitude to God for giving the earth as a foothold and all the natural wealth that exists.
- *Lamporan* : *Lamporan* is carried out when an animal dies suddenly, so this ceremony is intended to expel evil spirits, avoid evil, and ask for safety from God Almighty.

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