

# **The Identities of Barong and Keris Dancer towards the Commodification of Sacred Dance in Batubulan**

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Barong and Keris Dance is a sacred dance that can attract tourists; therefore, it is shown as a cultural tourist attraction. However, this condition raises questions about the central identity of a dancer who contributes to sacred dance performances and tourist attractions. Therefore, this research examined a dancer's central identity and motivations. This research is qualitative research with a narrative approach. The data collected was from observation, interviews, and a literature study with three findings. Firstly, the dancer has two identities as *pengayah* and tourism actor, whereas *pengayah* is his central identity. Secondly, the existence of Barong dan Keris Dance encourages him to devote his dance skill to society and God. Lastly, in this condition, the existence of cultural commodification can support the preservation of a culture.

*Keywords: barong and keris, commodification, dancers, identity.*

## ***Identitas Seniman Tari Barong dan Keris terhadap Komodifikasi Tari Sakral di Batubulan***

Tari Barong dan Keris merupakan tarian sakral yang mampu menarik wisatawan; oleh karena itu, tarian ini ditampilkan sebagai daya tarik wisata budaya. Namun, kondisi ini menimbulkan pertanyaan mengenai identitas sentral seorang penari yang berperan baik di dalam pertunjukan tari sakral dan daya tarik wisata. Maka dari itu, penelitian ini mengkaji identitas dan motivasi sentral seorang penari. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan naratif. Data yang dikumpulkan berasal dari observasi, wawancara, dan studi pustaka dengan tiga temuan. Pertama, penari memiliki dua identitas sebagai pengayah dan pelaku wisata, sedangkan pengayah adalah identitas sentralnya. Kedua, keberadaan Tari Barong dan Keris mendorongnya untuk mengabdikan keterampilan menarinya kepada masyarakat dan kepada Tuhan. Terakhir, dalam kondisi ini, adanya komodifikasi budaya dapat mendukung pelestarian suatu budaya.

*Kata kunci: barong dan keris, komodifikasi, penari, identitas.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Bali is home to many forms of great and noble cultures, especially dance, which has been known since before the tourism industry developed massively. Balinese dance has become one of the icons of the exoticism of tourism in Bali to date throughout the world. It cannot be separated from the role of western artists, one of which is Walter Spies. He introduced the beauty of Balinese culture to the world, especially Barong dance. In 1928, Walters Spies preserved the visualization of the dance in a photograph with the title *Barong Keket*. The presentation of dance in cultural tourism has characteristics closely related to the customs and beliefs of the ancestral heritage of the Balinese people. It is because the existence of Barong and Keris Dances, which are part of Hindu religious symbols in Bali, has undergone a process of sacralization through the *yadnya* (holy sacrifice) ceremony (Wirawan, 2019, pp. 422–423). The performance of sacred dance performances, especially the Barong and Keris Dances in Bali, is a community effort to communicate with the divine Creator (Dana, 2010, p. 154). Following the development of the tourism industry tends to cause shifting; in this context, Barong and Keris Dances which was initially a sacred performance, also became a cultural tourist attraction. For example, in Batubulan, where the Barong and Keris Dances were originally sacred, now they are the mascots of tourist attractions in Batubulan.

The existence of sacred Barong and Keris Dances can be found in almost every village in Bali. It is because Balinese culture is identical to Barong and Keris Dances. In the Batubulan area, the performances are frequently conducted. In addition to being presented as a sacred dance, it is also served as part of tourist attractions. The development of sacred dance that turned into a tourist attraction is one of the impacts of tourism development. However, studying the dancer's identity is necessary considering the current conditions. It aims to investigate a dancer's identity by positioning Barong and Keris Dances as sacred dances or as tourist attractions. Therefore, this study examined the identity of one of the Barong and Keris dancers in Batubulan. In addition, the researcher also examined the motivation behind the emergence of the dancer's identity.

Similar research was conducted by Sariada (2017), who discussed the commodification of Tektakan Calonarang. The research employed qualitative methods. Findings showed a commodification based on market ideology, development, religion,

conservation, and economic benefits. The commodification of local culture gets support from the community because it is considered to have a positive impact. The following research was conducted by Pratiwi (2017), who analyzed the commodification of Balinese art and culture for tourism promotion. This research was conducted using qualitative methods. The study results show that tourism promotion displays Balinese cultural tourism's value, physical quality, philosophy of life, and travel experiences. Previous research generally discussed commodifying sacred cultural products into non-sacred ones for tourism purposes. However, in current research, the researcher focused on the identity of the dancer, specifically the Barong and Keris Dances' development from sacred dance into a cultural tourist attraction. Moreover, there is still little attention given by the previous researcher in connection with the identity of the sacred dancer in a tourism context. Therefore, the researcher's topic could enrich the insight into commodification that occurred in Bali.

The three theories used in this research are habitus theory, commodification, and identity. The habitus theory is a mental structure of an individual that is influenced by various factors originating from his social environment. A social condition can form habitus. On the other hand, it is also possible that habitus forms a social condition (Ariyani et al., 2015, p. 50). Habitus and social conditions can influence each other to form an individual mental structure.

Cultural commodification is defined as the process of buying and selling culture, both in the form of objects and non-objects, by demanding financial benefits, and cultural presentations are packaged according to market needs (Irianto, 2016, p. 217). The occurrence of commodification is a form of response from the host of a destination to tourism development.

Based on identity theory, it is explained that an individual's identity can be formed based on race, ethnicity, habits to beliefs held by individuals or groups, which then shape the mental and behavior of the individual. However, dealing with the outside world's influence on different cultures often causes changes in the identity of the individual or group. Thus, identity results from social conditions (Mardotillah & Zein, 2017, p. 123). The development of culture is often the beginning of a change in individual or group identity.

The skilled and experienced dancers play an essential role in the existence of performing sacred

dance and carry out the performing arts themselves (Indrayuda, 2015, p. 138). From this statement, dancers have a vital role in Barong and Keris Dance performances as sacred dances and tourist attractions. However, in its development, the presentation of culture in the tourism industry often brings up pros and cons. For example, some parties consider tourism changes the form of local culture for the benefit of tourism itself and thus potentially threatens the authenticity of the cultural value itself (Dewi, 2016, p. 225). Thus, the study of the dancer's identity is in the spotlight due to the importance of their existence. Therefore, the dancer's identity, whether as a dancer of sacred dance or as a tourism actor, is a significant factor in determining the sustainability of cultural tourism attractions.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative method that discussed the experience of one Balinese dancer, more specifically Barong and Keris Dances. It emphasized the identity of the dancer. The identity of the dancer was studied based on the existence of the Barong and Keris Dances, formerly sacred dances. Now, they developed into a cultural tourist attraction in Batubulan.

In order to obtain information from sources, a narrative approach was used by applying in-depth interview techniques or in-depth interviews by asking various questions about the lives or experiences of the informants, with the interview process being carried out in-depth, repeatedly, and without using guidelines (Sujarweni, 2018, p. 32). The researcher chose the informant because he was a ten years-experienced dancer who works for religious and tourism purposes. In addition, observations were also made at the Barong and Keris Dance performances as well as literature studies on literature related to the research topic in order to complete the information needed in compiling this study.

In the data analysis stage, the interview process was compiled and selected to be easier to understand (Sujarweni, 2018, p. 34). Then, the data conclusion stage used theories in research (Sujarweni, 2018, p. 35). The data were analyzed using habitus theory, commodification, and identity. Habitus theory explained the influence of the social environment that shapes the mental and behavior of a dancer in Barong and Keris Dances. The commodification theory explained the development of Barong and Keris Dances as sacred dances that have developed into tourist attractions. Lastly, identity theory

explained the central identity of a Barong and Keris dancer.

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The informant for this research, named Wayan Gana, is one of the Barong and Keris dancers who often contributes to performances in sacred contexts and tourist attractions. He has been practicing dance for a long time for both purposes.

In the interview, Wayan Gana stated,

“I have been learning to dance for about ten years. In the past, I first learned with a Barong Dance dancer named I Nyoman Raos in Singapadu. The reason was that I was interested in dance, and it happened that many of my friends also joined there. Moreover, there was a Barong *sungsungan* (sacred) at the temple, so there was a desire to do *ngayah* (a service voluntarily given to the community, for mostly religious purposes).”

Based on the motivation in learning Barong Dance, internal and external drives influence in forming beliefs to learn and pursue the art of Barong Dance. It is the influence of habitus from the social environment with certain conditions that shape or even support one's actions. In the implementation process in society, the dancer's contribution is part of a series of religious ceremonies in the *ngayah* (Utami, 2017, p. 362). *Ngayah*, etymologically, means sincerely doing work for God, the government, or people who are respected and glorified, according to Anandakusuma 1986 (Gitaswari, 2019, p. 200).

In addition to contributing to sacred performances, Wayan Gana often contributes to the Barong and Keris Dance for tourist attractions in Batubulan. Wayan Gana shared his views regarding the contribution to staging the Barong and Keris Dances attractions in Batubulan by saying,

“I make my contribution to the tourist attraction as an opportunity. Almost every day, I get the opportunity to perform and practice dancing Barong and Keris, plus there is a monetary reward. So, it is like doing what I love while being paid, a paid hobby. In addition, there is also no forcible change in the form of the Barong dance. So, I do not change or modify the dance as it still follows the standard of Barong and Keris Dances.”

As a dancer of Barong and Keris Dances, the informant believed that as a tourist attraction, in

addition to providing an economic impact in the form of monetary rewards, it is also an opportunity for dancers to train and strengthen their skills. In this case, tourism has the potential to foster the spirit of the younger generation in pursuing to learn these sacred dances. In addition, the informant maintains the original dance movement in performing Barong and Keris Dances for tourism purposes. It is an effort to maintain the authentic value and preservation of the culture itself. There are differences in staging the dances as tourist attractions, such as using non-sacred objects during performances. Related to this, Wayan Gana emphasized that

“Non-sacred Barong and Keris are used in staging tourist attractions.”

It is conducted to maintain the boundaries between sacred and non-sacred to maintain the sanctity and religious values of the original Barong and Keris.

The commodification of sacred dances certainly influences the dancer as cultural actors in sacred contexts and tourism actors in non-sacred contexts. It causes dancers not only to pursue art in a sacred context but also in the context of tourism interests (Seramasara, 2017, p. 184). This condition is called dualism. Dualism is a concept that describes the existence of two sides or roles that are different or even opposite in something (Putra & Irianto, 2017, p. 87). Wayan Gana is a dancer of Barong and Keris Dances; apart from pursuing sacred arts, he also studies art as a tourist attraction, which reflects the conditions described in the dualism theory.

Further, Wayan Gana stated,

“I think performing as *ngayah* and tourist attractions are important. However, if the *ngayah* and tourist attraction performances co-occur in a particular situation, I will prioritize *ngayah*.”

Based on this statement, the informant prioritizes the *ngayah* procession over tourist attractions. So it can be analyzed that the central identity of the informant is a dancer of Barong and Keris Dance as a *ngayah* for religious purposes. This central identity is influenced by the belief that the dancer firmly holds that Barong and Keris Dances are sacred dances. It is based on the element of belief in identity theory as a determining factor for an individual's identity.

However, he also stated that *ngayah* and tourist attractions are important. It means that although prioritizing it, the existence of tourist attractions is also beneficial. Tourist attractions are an opportunity for dancer to deepen their knowledge

and experience and provide economic benefits. The existence of these tourist attractions gives the three impacts and also has the potential to support and maximize the *ngayah* procession. So even if Wayan Gana chooses his identity as a dancer of cultural actor in a religious context, the existence of the Barong and Keris Dances tourist attractions will perpetuate and not negatively influence the sustainability of cultural tourism attractions.

The informant's statement that his central identity is closely related to the philosophy and existence of Barong and Keris Dances. Barong Dance is one of the sacred dances found practically in every village in Bali. Barong, also known as Barong Ket based on Hindu tattwa philosophy, states that Barong Ket is the embodiment of God in his manifestation as Banaspati Raja or a wild animal believed to have the power to destroy all distress (Wirawan, 2019, p. 418). Therefore, the Barong dance's meaning can symbolize virtue that provides protection and prosperity and highlights the performance's authoritative nature.



Figure 1. Barong Dance  
(Source: Instagram.com/man\_dollo, 2021)

Barong dance in Bali is identical to the existence of the Keris dance. The Keris dance embodies Banaspati Raja's troops as Barongs fighting all dangers (Wirawan, 2019, p. 426). The keris is one of the weapons symbolized as a tool for the king's greatness (Rudyanto, 2015, p. 157). The performance of the Keris Dance shows a scene of a dancer stabbing a keris into his body. The Keris Dance staging highlights a soldier's spirit in fighting dangers. Keris dance is generally danced in an unconscious or trance state. So that the Keris dancers generally do not get hurt when they thrust the *keris* into their body.



Figure 2. Keris Dance

(Source: amenkphotography.blingspot.com, 2012)

The Balinese dance can be grouped into *wali* or sacred dances, which are only performed for religious ceremonies, *bebali* or semi-sacred dances performed as an accompaniment to religious ceremonies, and *balih-balihan* dance or entertainment, which is performed as entertainment (Raka et al., 2020, p. 96). Barong and Keris Dances in Bali are generally in the context of sacred dances whose performances are intended for religious ceremonies for Hindus, especially in Bali.

Apart from *ngayah* as the informant's central identity, the existence of tourism in Bali also raises another identity, that is, as a tourism actor. It can be explained based on the theory of commodification, where the existence of tourism directly or indirectly influences and attracts dancers as cultural actors to contribute to presenting local cultural performances as tourist attractions.

In dance, there are various values and profound meanings in its movements. Moreover, dance emphasizes "feel" in terms of movement composition, expression, and how the audience can enjoy a dance performance (Langer 1997 in Boru Mangoensong & Yanuartuti, 2020, p. 78). The exoticism and beauty of the values and meanings never fail to amaze tourists who watch traditional Balinese dance performances. Furthermore, the local community as the host responds to the opportunities in the tourism industry, presenting dance as one of the tourist attractions.

Barong and Keris Dance are frequently performed in Batubulan Village, Sukawati, Gianyar Regency, Bali. This dance is performed on a particular stage where the Barong and Keris used imitated properties similar to the sacred Barong and Keris. Thus, the performance would not tarnish the sacredness of the Barong and Keris in Bali as a religious attribute. At the same time, the tourist can still watch and experience the authenticity of the Barong and Keris Dances. Thus, it indicates that Barong and Keris Dances have undergone a commodification process

marked by the development of the function, initially only as sacred dances and tourist attractions.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, there are two identities of a Barong and Keris dancer: *pengayah* (religious context) and tourism actor (non-religious context). Social conditions influence the existence of dualism in the identity of a dancer, whether the existence of Barong and Keris Dances as sacred dances or the commodification of culture related to the growth of the tourism industry. Of the two identities, the informant stated that his identity as a dancer in a religious context was his central identity. It is motivated by the Barong and Keris Dances philosophy, which belongs to the sacred dance. Thus, his identity as *pengayah* is a way for a dancer to contribute to his socio-cultural and religious environment. However, he continues his role as a tourism actor in non-religious contexts.

Cultural commodification is related to the growth of the tourism industry. It not only has an economic impact but also supports the preservation of local culture by providing opportunities for young dancers to hone their artistic skills. Thus, it indirectly plays a role in strengthening culture as the central identity of a dancer himself.

The existence of cultural tourism in Bali, besides providing economic benefits, also has the potential to preserve the culture. Therefore, in presenting the cultural tourist attractions of Barong and Keris Dances, it is essential always to maintain the authenticity for the sake of sustainability and the authentic value of the culture. However, this research only focuses on the role of commodified culture in the tourism industry. Therefore, for further research, examining how tourism plays an active role in positively impacting culture is suggested.

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## INFORMANT

Gana, Wayan (29 years), Barong and Keris Dancer, interview on 04 September 2020 at his home, Singapadu, Gianyar, Bali