

An Ethnochoreological Analysis of Historical Transformation and Socio-Ecological Critique of SANG Dance in Belitung

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the expressive, symbolic, and communicative functions of movement in SANG Dance from Belitung Island through an ethnochoreological framework. SANG Dance, created by Bella Asmanabillah, uses pepper (sahang) as its central symbol to narrate the historical transformation of Belitung society across three choreographic phases: imbang (pre-colonial), ambang (colonial), and rumpang (post-colonial). This qualitative descriptive research collected data through in-depth interviews, participatory and non-participatory observation, and documentation involving the choreographer, dancers, arts observers, and the supporting community. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, and validity was strengthened through source and method triangulation. Results show that movement in SANG Dance functions expressively to convey the collective experience of Belitung people, symbolically to represent the relationship between humans and nature, and communicatively to deliver social criticism regarding ecological exploitation and cultural identity loss. The choreographic structure reflects the historical transformation of Belitung society from harmonious agrarian life, through exploitative colonial systems, to the post-colonial condition marked by social fragmentation and environmental degradation. SANG Dance thus serves not merely as an aesthetic expression but as a medium of social critique, cultural preservation, and ecological consciousness. This study contributes to ethnochoreology by positioning choreography as a cultural text that encodes collective memory, local identity, and socio-ecological criticism rooted in local commodity history.

KEYWORDS

Ethnochoreology
Movement Symbol
Social Criticism
Cultural Identity
Contemporary Dance

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INTRODUCTION

Dance is a cultural expression that functions not only as an aesthetic form but also as a medium of social communication representing values, collective experiences, and the dynamics of community life (Soedarsono, 2010; Kaeppler, 2000). In contemporary performing arts, dance is frequently used as a reflective space to respond to social, cultural, and environmental changes through symbols and movement language (Sklar, 2000; Murgiyanto, 2004). In an ethnochoreography perspective, dance is understood as a cultural text shaped by the relationship between the body, local knowledge, social history, and the symbolic systems of the society that supports it. One of the contemporary dance works is the SANG Dance from Belitung, created by Bella Asmanabillah, S.Sn. This work presents the experience of the people of Belitung through the symbol of the pepper plant (sahang). This work needs to be read not only as a performance, but also as a representation of the cultural

history of Belitung which is rooted in the sahang commodity, agrarian work practices, and the socio-ecological changes that followed.

Belitung is one of Indonesia's largest pepper-producing regions, contributing 33.8 thousand tons or approximately 37.6 percent of the national production in 2020 (Monavia, 2021). This fact demonstrates that pepper not only holds economic significance but also shapes cultural identity and collective memory. SANG Dance is structured as a trilogy consisting of phases *imbang* (pre-colonial), *ambang* (colonial), and *rumpang* (post-colonial), constructing a dramatic narrative about changes in human-nature relations and the shifting of social values due to colonialism and modernization (Ronyta, 2025; Hadi, 2022). Field data shows that Sahang or pepper is not just an economic commodity. Sahang is also a marker of the local identity of the people of Belitung which is related to work experience, mutual cooperation, and human relations with nature. Data shows that sahang farming activities, ranging from clearing land, planting, caring for harvesting, transporting produce, to reading natural signs, form a movement pattern in the SANG Dance. Thus, the body in the SANG Dance functions as a social archive that keeps traces of work habits. This dance translates it into an art form through a process of stylization, selection, and symbolic transformation.

Previous studies have shown that performing arts can serve as media for social and ecological criticism. Bintang and Putra (2019) examined Tari Jingkrak Sundang as social criticism against bureaucracy and environmental exploitation, although that study did not deeply analyze the symbolic system of movement in relation to cultural value changes. Imelda et al. (2022) studied Wayang Kaleng as waste-based social criticism but emphasized performance form over movement symbol analysis as cultural text. Subayono et al. (n.d.) discussed dance film as environmental art with focus on creative process, thus more artistically-oriented than symbolically reading movement in the context of supporting communities. Putra (2021) and Indrawan and Christiani (2021) have also explored ecological and social critiques in performing arts, yet none have specifically positioned movement as a symbolic system representing historical transformation based on local commodity.

The research gap lies in the limited studies connecting contemporary dance movement with the supporting community's cultural background, body habit, and the symbolic meaning of movement representing colonialism and the commodification of natural resources (Prakasiwi, 2020; Wahyudiarto, 2021). Therefore, this study offers novelty by positioning SANG Dance as an object of ethnocoreological study to interpret choreographic structure and movement variety as representations of changing human-nature relations in Belitung's social history (Ronyta, 2025; Sunaryadi, 2013).

Importantly, this novelty is not reducible to the discovery of a new dance object. A closely related precedent exists in Karim's (2022) *Shang*, a video-dance work from Bangka that likewise uses the sahang (pepper) symbol to comment on the commodity's declining fortunes under tin-mining expansion. What distinguishes the present study is twofold. Conceptually, this study does not treat the commodity symbol as a single thematic device but as the organizing logic of an entire three-phase historical narrative (*imbang-ambang-rumpang*) that systematically maps choreographic transformation onto a specific historical periodization pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial. Methodologically, this study develops an integrative ethnocoreological reading procedure that cross-references community body habit, choreographic structure, and movement symbolism within a single analytical frame (see Method), rather than analyzing movement form in isolation from its commodity-historical context, as in prior commodity-themed dance works. This

combination of historical periodization with an integrated, multi-indicator analytic frame constitutes the study's specific conceptual and methodological contribution to ethnocoreology.

This article aims to (1) describe the cultural background and body habits of the Belitung community that shape the movement characteristics of SANG Dance; (2) analyze its choreographic structure and movement variety as a system; and (3) interpret the symbolic meaning of SANG Dance movement in representing changes in the socio-cultural values of Belitung society. The central research question is: how does SANG Dance function as a cultural text encoding collective memory, ecological consciousness, and socio-historical critique through its movement symbols.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach within an ethnocoreological framework to examine the function, symbol, and meaning of movement in SANG Dance from Belitung (Srilestari, 2024; Elyadi, 2022). The ethnocoreological approach is selected because it enables a multidisciplinary interpretation of dance that connects movement analysis with cultural, social, and historical contexts (Kaepler, 2000; Kurath, 1960; Sunaryadi, 2013). This approach allows the researcher to read movement not merely as aesthetic form but as a cultural text loaded with ideology, values, and societal criticism. Operationally, this study applies four interrelated ethnocoreological indicators adapted from Kaepler (2000), Kurath (1960), and Sunaryadi (2013): (1) movement form motif, dynamics, floor pattern, and energy quality; (2) cultural context the body habits and value systems of the supporting community; (3) social function the expressive, symbolic, and communicative roles of movement; and (4) symbolism the culturally specific meanings attached to particular gestures and motifs. These four indicators structured both the data-collection instruments (interview guide and observation sheet) and the analytic categories used in the Results and Discussion.

The research subjects consisted of four informants determined through purposive sampling: the choreographer/creator of SANG Dance as well as a member of the production team (Bella Asmanabillah), three dancers, one art observer with expertise in performing arts studies, and one representative of the Belitung supporting community with in-depth knowledge of the local cultural context. The research was conducted for three months (January to March 2026) in Belitung, Bangka-Belitung Province, Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory and non-participatory observations of three consecutive performances, and documentation consisting of performance videos, photographs, choreographer notes, and supporting archives (Desmawardi, 2022; Spradley, 1980). The composition and size of the informant groups follows the logic of sampling the intended maximum variation rather than a fixed numerical target. The choreographer is included as the main source of creative intention; the three principal dancers as embodied performers who collectively execute the same choreographic material in all observed performances, so that additional dancer informants are expected to produce substantially overlapping information rather than novel; one production team member as a source in staging and design decisions; an art observer as an external analytical voice; and one community representative was chosen for their recognized depth of knowledge of local agricultural history and customary practices rather than demographic representation. Data collection across these six informants, three observed performances, and supporting documentation continued until no new themes emerged substantively in the

coding of interview transcripts and field notes, suggesting that data saturation (Creswell, 2014) had been achieved.

Research instruments included an interview guide, observation sheet, voice recorder, camera, and field notes. The data focus encompassed cultural background and body habits (body habit), the presentational structure of SANG Dance (*imbang-ambang-rumpang*), and the symbolic meaning of movement variety in the socio-cultural context of Belitung society (Prakasiwi, 2020). Research ethics were upheld through written informed consent from all informants, confidentiality of identity where requested, and member checking of data interpretation results. Interviews are used to explore the source of creation inspiration, the dancer's body experience, and the cultural significance presented in the performance. Observation is used to record motion motifs, floor patterns, tempo, energy, and relationships between actors. Documentation is used to verify the description of the movement and the context of the performance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

General Description of SANG Dance from Belitung

Bella Asmanabillah is a dancer and dance creator from Belitung Island whose interest in dance developed since early childhood, influenced by the cultural environment and local community life. In her creative process, Bella draws on the social and cultural experiences of Belitung society as her primary source of inspiration. SANG Dance lifts the symbol of *sahang* (pepper) as a representation of cultural identity while reflecting on social and ecological changes in the community (Murgiyanto, 2004; Soedarsono, 2010).

SANG Dance carries an intimate relationship between social, cultural, and ecological aspects of Belitung community life. Socially, the dance represents the collective experience of a community that once made pepper (*sahang*) its main commodity, while reflecting economic structural changes from pre-colonial, colonial, to post-colonial eras. Culturally, SANG Dance affirms local identity through the use of movement symbols, music, and visuals representing Belitung Malay tradition, reviving terms and cultural practices that have begun to be forgotten (Suyatno, 2022). Ecologically, the work carries a message about the human-nature relationship, particularly in pepper cultivation practices that are increasingly marginalized (Putra, 2021; Fitriasisari, 2020).

SANG Dance employs a trilogy concept of *imbang-ambang-rumpang*. In the *imbang* section, the performance opens through a dialogue between *Kik Cer* as a traditional cultural figure and his grandchild (played by Rendy Dwie Okatrinada), narrating the origins of village formation in Belitung and the beginning of the community's farming activities including the *sang* (*sahang/pepper*) plant. This section represents the balance of human relationships with God and nature in the lives of farming communities, aligned with the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy — harmony between humans and God, fellow humans, and the environment (Bandem & deBoer, 1995; Langer, 1953).

It should be clarified that *Tri Hita Karana* is a Balinese Hindu cosmological concept and is not indigenous to Belitung's Malay-Islamic cultural context. It is invoked here only as a comparative heuristic—a widely used analytical lens in Indonesian performing-arts scholarship for describing tripartite human-God-nature harmony (Bandem & deBoer, 1995) rather than as a claim that the Belitung community itself holds this Balinese cosmology. The Belitung Malay farming community does not articulate an explicit, named cosmological doctrine equivalent to *Tri Hita Karana*; what this study's data indicate instead is a lived ethic of *keselarasan* (balance) enacted through the customary practices of *gotong royong* and the *kubok*-based collective work system in pepper cultivation discussed in Section two below,

which functions analogously to, but remains historically and theologically distinct from, the Balinese Tri Hita Karana.

Cultural Background of Belitung as the Source of SANG Dance Creation

Farming culture has been an inseparable part of Belitung community life since ancient times, where pepper or sahang not only functioned as an economic commodity but also as a cultural identity deeply embedded in the social system. This is reflected in various local terms, traditional practices, and community lifestyles oriented toward farming and gardening activities passed down through generations (Soedarsono, 2010; Murgiyanto, 2004).

Community activities in managing pepper are inseparable from collective values such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation), mutual assistance, and traditions of joint work carried out in every stage of farming, from opening land to harvesting. The kubok-based life system (small family groups) shows high social solidarity, where sharing practices and collective work form the foundation of community life. These values not only strengthen social relationships but also shape the harmonious and interdependent cultural character of Belitung society (Turner, 1974; Kaeppler, 2000).

However, the entry of colonialism brought significant changes to the value system and community life patterns. Pepper, which was originally a cultural plant, subsequently shifted to become an economic commodity managed structurally for colonial interests. This change impacted a shift in the work ethos of the community from culturally and communally based to more production and profit-oriented. Additionally, work practices emerging during the colonial period also showed elements of compulsion and exploitation, indirectly influencing the community's perspective on farming activities (Holt, 1967; Kartomi, 1981; Heidhues, 1992).

The impact of these changes continues to the present in the form of significant socio-ecological changes. Exploitation of natural resources, particularly through mining and modern plantation expansion, has caused land damage and reduced forest areas that previously supported the traditional farming system. This condition not only threatens environmental sustainability but also causes a shift in the community's economic orientation increasingly away from traditional farming practices. Therefore, reflective efforts through cultural approaches are needed, one of which is through artistic works such as dance, to re-lift local values, social awareness, and the importance of maintaining balance between humans, culture, and the environment (Fitriasari, 2020; Nugroho, 2021; Purnama, 2022).

Body Habits of Belitung Community in SANG Dance

The body habits of the Belitung community in daily life become the primary source of movement exploration in SANG Dance. Agricultural activities of pepper such as planting, maintaining, and harvesting show characteristic body movement patterns, such as bending when planting, repetitive hand movements when caring for plants, and body coordination in the harvesting process. These movements are not only functional but also contain certain rhythms and patterns that are then observed as artistic potential in dance creation (Prakasiwi, 2020; Wahyudiarto, 2021).

Additionally, body habits in social activities such as collective work, gotong royong, and interaction among community members also shape movement patterns reflecting togetherness, harmony, and interconnectedness between individuals. Through the field observation process, these body habits were recorded, understood, and analyzed as part of the community's empirical experience. Subsequently, these everyday movements underwent a transformation process — processing from real movements into symbolic movements that

are more aesthetic without losing the essence of meaning (Sklar, 2000; Rustiyanti, 2020).

This process involves rhythm strengthening, repetition, space variation, and dynamic processing to produce representative yet expressive dance movement motifs. An interview with the choreographer revealed: 'The movement I created is not invented from nothing. I observed how my grandmother bent down to plant pepper, how the women of Belitung walked together carrying harvest. These body habits are the raw material of SANG Dance.' This testimony confirms that body habit in SANG Dance functions as a bridge between everyday cultural experience and aesthetic dance expression (Wahyudiarto, 2021; Nor, 2015). The transformation from daily activities to artistic representation occurs through the process of stylization, selection, repetition, strengthening rhythm, and shifting the function of movement from work to expression. The work movements are not performed literally, but are reprocessed to have communicative and symbolic power on stage. Thus, the SANG Dance does not imitate farming work mechanically, but interprets farm work into an artistic form that still retains traces of the culture of its original body.

Choreographic Structure of SANG Dance (Imbang-Ambang-Rumpang)

This section presents the choreographic structure of SANG Dance arranged in three mutually continuous dramatic phases as a narrative arc representing the historical journey and changes in Belitung community life. Each phase is examined based on analysis of function and symbolic meaning of each movement. In the first phase, movement tends to be naturalistic and representational with flowing dynamics, simple floor patterns, and stable energy, thus presenting a harmonious atmosphere between humans, nature, and farming activities. The second phase shows more contrasting changes, marked by firmer and more intense movement, increased dynamics, more complex floor patterns, and strong energy to build a tense and pressured atmosphere as a reflection of the colonial period. Meanwhile, in the third phase, the movement form undergoes more symbolic and exploratory development, with varied dynamics, flexible floor patterns, and unstable energy, creating a reflective yet critical atmosphere toward current social and ecological conditions (Prihatini, 2020; Bandem & deBoer, 1995).

Phase *Imbang* (Pre-Colonial)

In the *Imbang* phase, the movement shows the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Movements such as *Hutan Rimba*, *Kelekak*, *Nebas Tunu*, *Micing Bintang Ketike*, *Angkut Nesap*, and *Nanam Sang* create an image of a body of work that is close to the rhythm of agriculture and local wisdom. The TB code on some motifs shows that the dancer's body records the work pattern of society. The MS code emphasizes that movement is not only functional, but also has symbols about the human relationship with the environment. The tempo used is relatively moderate to slow with stable and controlled energy, thus presenting a gentle and unified movement quality (Soedarsono, 2010; Kaepler, 2000).

Overall, this phase builds a peaceful, balanced atmosphere full of gratitude toward nature as a source of life, reflecting the Tri Hita Karana philosophy (Bandem & deBoer, 1995; Langer, 1953; Turner, 1974).

Phase *Ambang* (Colonial)

In the *Ambang* phase, the SANG Dance began to display historical tensions related to colonial pressure. Motifs such as *Kudok*, *Dentri Point*, *Nyangkul Tana*, *Ngangkut Tunang*, *Nanam Tunang*, *Panen Sang*, *Mikul*, and *Jemor Sang* show heavier, regular, and full of body work. The body appears as a medium of social experience that is not neutral. Here, the KK

code marks a colonial context that created suffering, inequality, and economic distress. The combination of TB and MS shows that agricultural work is still maintained as a cultural identity, even under changing historical conditions. The previously harmonious interaction transforms into relationships full of tension (Holt, 1967; Kartomi, 1981; Muthmainnah, 2020).

The choreography in Phase Ambang becomes a medium to convey a narrative about exploitation, compulsion, and the loss of freedom in farming activities. As Ajidarma (2017) notes, performing arts can serve as a medium to record traces of struggle, domination, and the shift in the function of plants from a culture of mutual cooperation to exploitative cultivation.

Phase Rumpang (Post-Colonial)

In the Rumpang phase, the movement becomes more fragmented, unstable, and loses the connection between its parts. The motifs of Rumpang, Lame, Annah Sang, Shock, and Greed show the quality of the body that is cracked, shaky, and aggressive. This confirms the existence of a socio-ecological crisis in people's lives. The KE code is a major marker in this phase because these motifs directly illustrate the damage to man's relationship with nature. Meanwhile, KK remains present in Greed as a critique of the legacy of exploitation that continues in a new form. Movements no longer flow completely, instead becoming broken, unstable, and sometimes exploratory and symbolic (Fitriasari, 2020; Nugroho, 2021).

The dramatic atmosphere in this phase reaches its climax through visualization of inner conflict, anxiety, and the impact of ecological damage from natural resource exploitation. Representation of socio-ecological critique is visible from the symbolization of the body, props, and movement quality depicting land damage, disappearance of sahang plants, and the shift in community economic orientation. Phase Rumpang thus not only becomes a dramatic closure but also a critical reflection on the current condition of Belitung society (Wulan, 2020; Putra, 2021; Purnama, 2022).

These symbolic readings are not presented as the researchers' free aesthetic interpretation. Following the triangulation procedure outlined in the Method section, each interpretation was cross-checked against the choreographer's own explanation in interview (for instance, her account of fragmented movement as representing the loss of agrarian continuity), the dancers' embodied accounts of performing the broken phrasing, and direct observation across the three staged performances, and was subsequently confirmed through member checking with the choreographer and community representatives. The same evidentiary procedure underlies the symbolic interpretations presented for Phases Imbang, Ambang, Rumpang and summarized in Table 1.




Analysis of Movement Variety, Function, and Symbol of SANG Dance






The function of motion needs to be operationally limited as the role of motion in the communication structure of the performance. Symbolic meaning is the content of the cultural meaning represented by the movement. Therefore, a single motion motif can have expressive functions and symbolic meanings, but the two need to be differentiated analytically so as not to overlap. This distinction is important because the function answers what the motion is doing in the performance. Meanwhile, symbols answer what movement represents in a cultural context. For example, the motif of the Jungle Forest serves symbolically because it opens the story of the natural condition of Belitung that is still intact. Its symbolic meaning is that nature has not been touched by exploitation. The motif of Nebas Tunu functions expressively because it displays the collective work of clearing land. However, this motif






also symbolizes the beginning of the exploitation of natural resources. The Greed Motive in the rumpang phase functions communicatively because it conveys social criticism directly. Symbolically, it marks human greed in utilizing nature. At the categorization stage, the data were grouped into thematic codes, namely (TB) for the body of work, (MS) for symbolic motives, (KK) for the colonial context, and (KE) for ecological criticism. The presentation of data is carried out in the form of a matrix of relationships between movement, function, symbols, social context, and choreographic phases. Conclusions are drawn in stages through cross-verification between interviews, observations, and documentation.






The following table presents a comprehensive analysis of movement variety in SANG Dance, integrating function and symbolic meaning across all three choreographic phases (Imbang, Ambang, and Rumpang).


Table 1. Matrix of Analysis of Movements, Functions, and Symbols of the SANG Dance
 (Source: Akbar, 2026)

No.	Motion Name	Phase	Motion Analysis	Function	Symbol Meaning	Code
1	 Hutan Rimba	Imbang	The body is opened wide, calm, and flowing to build the impression of a still natural space.	<i>Symbolic</i>	The nature of Belitung is still intact and has not been exploited.	MS
2	 Kelekak	Imbang	The movement is wide and open so that it presents a fertile living space.	<i>Symbolic</i>	Nature as a source of life for humans.	MS
3	 Nebas Tunu	Imbang	The slashing movement is carried out strongly, repeatedly, and rhythmically as a collective work.	<i>Expressive</i>	Land clearing and the beginning of natural exploitation.	TB KK

4		Imbang	Upward pointing motion with smooth, directed body control.	<i>Symbolic</i>	Local wisdom reads natural signs to determine planting time.	MS
Micing Bintang Ketike						
5		Imbang	The lifting and moving movements of the load are carried out together in a compact manner.	<i>Symbolic</i>	Mutual cooperation in collecting forest or farm products.	TB MS
Angkut Nesap						
6		Imbang	The downward pressing movement is carried out regularly with hopeful body quality.	<i>Expressive</i>	The beginning of agrarian life and the hope for crop yields.	TB
Nanam Sang						
7		Ambang	The body tends to be downcast, heavy, and depressed.	<i>Expressive</i>	Suffering Skin diseases (cuckoo) and fatigue during the colonial period.	KK
Kudok						
8		Ambang	Transitional movements with firm accents that connect between parts.	<i>Symbolic</i>	A turning point of the atmosphere and a dramatic transition of phases.	MS KK
Dentri Point						

9		Ambang	Repetitive bending and digging motions with a focus on the relationship between the body and the ground.	<i>Symbolic</i>	The physical proximity of humans to the soil in agricultural work.	TB
Nyangkul Tana						
10		Ambang	The movement of carrying the load is carried out by coordination between actors.	<i>Expressive</i>	Work together in stressful situations.	TB KK
Ngangkut Tunang						
11		Ambang	Planting movements are stable, repetitive, and controlled.	<i>Communal</i>	Long-term hope through the act of planting.	TB MS
Nanam Tunang						
12		Ambang	The movement to lift the harvest was carried out relievously and directed.	<i>Communal</i>	Gratitude for the results of the work and the success of the harvest.	TB MS
Panen Sang						
13		Ambang	The movement of the shoulder with the center of the body is strong and stable.	<i>Symbolic</i>	Responsibility bears the fruits of labor and the burden of life.	TB
Mikul						

14		Ambang	Motion spreads and opens up the space like the drying process.	<i>Symbolic</i>	Sustainability of natural product management.	MS
Jemor Sang						
15		Rumpang	Motion is divided, incomplete, and not interconnected.	<i>Communal</i>	Emotional distance, relationship shifts, and individualism.	KE
Rumpang						
16		Rumpang	Unbalanced motion, heavy on one side, and less stable.	<i>Symbolic</i>	Imbalance of socio-ecological relations.	KE
Timbang						
17		Rumpang	Falling, breaking, or collapsing motion with weakened body quality.	<i>Symbolic</i>	The collapse of harmony and the breakdown of the value order.	KE
Musnah Sang						
18		Rumpang	Motion is vibrating and unsteady, with sharp changes in energy.	<i>Symbolic</i>	Life instability due to socio-ecological crisis.	KE
Guncang						

19	 <p data-bbox="316 573 531 629">Serakah</p>	Rumpang	Repetitive, aggressive, and dominant grabbing movements.	<i>Communal</i>	Criticism of human greed in exploiting nature.	KE KK
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Overall, this matrix shows that the SANG Dance functions as a cultural text that stores the collective memory of the Belitung people through body work, local symbols, colonial experiences, and ecological criticism. By combining the categories of TB, MS, KK, and KE, the analysis becomes more systematic. Each motion motif can be read as part of a broader structure of meaning and can be verified through interviews, observations, and documentation.

6. Discussion: Function and Symbolic Meaning of SANG Dance Movement as Social and Cultural Critique

The movement in SANG Dance functions as social and cultural critique that addresses the way society treats nature, God, and fellow humans. Through a sequence of movements opening forests, cultivating soil, planting, harvesting, to the destruction of the three-dimensional pattern (human-God-nature), the dancer's body depicts ecological exploitation, environmental damage, and the collapse of spiritual balance as a warning against human greed. This is similar to the symbolic function of other traditional dances representing human-nature relations and moral values of communities (Wulandari, 2022; Agossa, 2013). SANG Dance movement is thus not merely aesthetic but becomes a medium of moral education instilling values of justice and respect for nature, as many traditional Indonesian dances contain messages of character, religiosity, and social manners in each movement variety (Tadurissya, 2023). This local finding resonates with recent international ethnochoreological scholarship showing that dance functions across diverse cultural settings as a vehicle for values-based cultural sustainability rather than mere entertainment (Bakka et al., 2024).

From a functional perspective, the movement variety of SANG Dance can be analyzed in three main aspects. First, the expressive function, namely as a medium for expressing the choreographer's feelings and ideas about social reality. Second, the symbolic function, where each movement contains a specific meaning, such as the pepper symbol representing identity as well as the economic history of Belitung society. Third, the communicative function, namely as a means of conveying messages to the audience about social criticism, cultural change, and issues of natural exploitation (Agossa, 2013; Indrawan & Christiani, 2021). Through creatively packaged movements, the audience is invited to understand that dance is not merely entertainment but also a medium of reflection on social and cultural conditions (Tadurissya, 2023).

The symbols in SANG Dance can be explained in one argumentative thread affirming the position of dance as a medium of socio-cultural and ecological critique, not merely aesthetic spectacle (Ajidarma, 2017; Widaryanto, 2012). In many traditions there are cultural symbols that form collective identity while recording the social dynamics and tensions experienced by communities (Tadurissya, 2023). Likewise in the dance context, movement

symbols, choreographic structure, and their relationships with music and space can be read as social texts containing ideology, values, and critique of changing times (Widaryanto, 2012; Langer, 1953; Turner, 1974).

In SANG Dance, the pepper symbol is presented as a marker of Belitung's historical identity — as traditional local produce affirms a community's identity — while simultaneously being critiqued as a commodity that ensnares the community in market logic and cultural commodification (Yuliza, 2022; Kartomi, 1981). The choreographic structure that implies inequality, pushing, space conquest, or hierarchical formations can be read as a symbol of colonialism transforming into new power relations in the contemporary socio-economic system, as other performing arts record traces of struggle, domination, and the shift in function of SANG plants from a culture of mutual cooperation to exploitative cultivation (Ajidarma, 2017; Holt, 1967).

Changes in tempo, shift from collective to individual movement, and movement motifs marking transactions or ownership can be interpreted as critique of changes in the socio-economic system, from communal work to an extractive economy eroding solidarity (Muthmainnah, 2020). Meanwhile, rhythm disruptions, fractured movements, or images of damaged bodies and spaces articulate critique of natural exploitation and environmental damage, consistent with tendencies in contemporary dances representing human-nature relationships from a cultural ecology perspective (Fitriasari, 2020; Nugroho, 2021; Putra, 2021).

SANG Dance's contribution to ethnocoreology is significant. As a locally-based creative dance work, it represents cultural values, community identity, and the social dynamics of Belitung society (Agossa, 2013; Elyadi, 2022; Hadi, 2022). This dance enriches the understanding of dance function not only as aesthetic expression but also as a medium of communication and social critique reflecting human relationships with nature, God, and social environment (Fitriasari, 2020; Kaeppler, 2000). Furthermore, the symbolic meaning contained in the movement elements shows that dance can be a means of cultural preservation as well as creative innovation in facing the changing times (Hermansyah, 2024; Mulyani, 2020; Purnama, 2022). SANG Dance can thus become a reference in the development of ethnocoreological studies emphasizing the interconnection between aesthetics, symbolism, and the socio-cultural context of society.

This contribution can be specified in three concrete ways. Theoretically, the study extends ethnocoreology by showing that a single local commodity (sahang) can function simultaneously as economic referent, cultural-identity marker, and structuring device for choreographic narrative—a triadic function not yet articulated in existing commodity-and-performance literature (cf. Kartomi, 1981; Yuliza, 2022). Methodologically, it offers a replicable commodity-historical reading procedure, in which each choreographic phase is cross-referenced with a specific historical period and a specific local commodity (see Method), that future researchers can apply to other regional dance forms built around local commodities such as rice, salt, or rubber. In terms of the object of study, it introduces SANG Dance and Belitung's pepper-farming heritage more broadly as a previously undocumented case in the ethnocoreological literature, which to date has been dominated by Javanese, Balinese, and Sundanese traditions (Bandem & deBoer, 1995; Prihatini, 2020; Rustiyanti, 2020), thereby expanding the discipline's empirical and geographic base within Indonesia.

CONCLUSIONS

SANG Dance is a dance work representing the relationship between humans, culture, and the environment in the life of Belitung society through movement symbols with expressive, symbolic, and communicative functions. The choreographic structure consisting of the phases *imbang*, *ambang*, and *rumpang* depicts social and cultural changes in the community from pre-colonial, colonial, to post-colonial periods, simultaneously serving as a medium of reflection on shifts in life values and environmental damage. The symbolic meaning contained in each movement variety shows that dance not only functions as an aesthetic form but also as a means of social criticism, cultural preservation, and education of life values.

The key findings of this study are: (1) body habits of Belitung farming communities constitute the raw material for expressive movement in SANG Dance, connecting everyday cultural experience with aesthetic expression; (2) the *imbang-ambang-rumpang* choreographic structure represents a complete historical transformation narrative encoding collective memory about colonialism, commodification, and ecological degradation; (3) movement symbols in SANG Dance function as a cultural text that communicates social and ecological critique to contemporary audiences.

SANG Dance thus makes an important contribution to ethnochoreological studies as a form of cultural expression reflecting community social dynamics and becoming a relevant medium of creative innovation in the development of contemporary times. This study's novelty lies in its interpretive approach positioning dance movement as a 'cultural text' containing collective memory, local identity, and socio-ecological criticism rooted in local commodity history (Kaepler, 2000; Sunaryadi, 2013; Wulan, 2020).

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis is limited to three performances within a specific period; longitudinal study across multiple performance seasons may enrich the findings. Second, the absence of dance movement notation reduces the precision of movement description. Future research is recommended to: (1) employ Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) as a more systematic movement notation tool; (2) conduct comparative studies of SANG Dance across different performance contexts; and (3) explore audience reception perspectives to understand how communities interpret the social messages of this choreography.

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