



## **The Symbolic Meaning in The Reog Ponorogo Performance**

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### **Abstract**

Reog Ponorogo is a traditional art form from East Java that has many symbols and cultural values. In addition to serving as entertainment, this performance conveys social, religious, and identity messages of the Ponorogo community. The purpose of this study is to discover the symbolic meaning of the main elements involved in the Reog performance, such as Singa Barong, Warok, Jathil, Gemblak, and the composition of music and dance. This research was conducted using a qualitative ethnographic approach through direct observation, interviews, and literature study. The results show that Singa Barong represents power and resistance against authority; Warok represents wisdom, spirituality, and guardian of morality; Jathil and Gemblak represent gender dynamics and changing cultural roles; and music and dance represent harmony and communal identity of the community. Overall, the Reog Ponorogo performance can be considered a representation of spirituality, resistance, and strong local identity in the modern world. By showing how local traditional symbols reflect social relationships and collective values of the community, this research contributes to cultural sociology studies.

**Keywords** : symbolic meaning; Reog Ponorogo; cultural events; Javanese traditions; Global South

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## INTRODUCTION

Reog Ponorogo is one of the traditional arts of East Java that is very important in the cultural history of Indonesia. In addition to serving as entertainment, this performance has symbolic meanings that reflect the social, religious, and identity values of the Ponorogo community. The structure of the Reog performance consists of various symbolic elements that make it unique. Among them are *Singa Barong*, which acts as a giant mask with a tiger head decorated with peacock feathers, the figure of *Warok*, who functions as a spiritual figure and moral guardian, and the *Jathil* and *Gemblak* dancers who display gender dynamics. All of these are combined with gamelan music and dance to form the harmony of the performance. All these components make Reog a cultural text with social and spiritual messages.

Historically, people believe that Reog Ponorogo originated from the story of Ki Ageng Kutu who opposed the Majapahit empire. This narrative shows the people's resistance to tyranny and also contains criticism of cruel power. For example, the Barong lion is a symbol of the power of wild animals and rulers who are challenged through performing arts. *Warok* is seen not only as a dancer but also as a respected figure because of his inner strength and moral fortitude. Conversely, the existence of *Jathil* and *Gemblak* shows a shift in gender roles in tradition and indicates cultural transformations that have occurred over time. Modernization and globalization present both challenges and opportunities for preserving the Reog Ponorogo tradition. With this transformation, Reog performances are now presented not only in rituals or traditional events, but also at cultural festivals, tourism events, and international diplomacy. This expands the space for Reog to express the cultural identity of the Ponorogo community throughout the world. However, the symbolic meaning of Reog can change if the context of entertainment changes, because religious and philosophical values are often less important than entertainment aspects.

Sociological studies of the symbolic meaning of Reog are increasingly important, especially to understand how local traditions adapt to modernity. According to cultural sociology, symbols play an important role in giving meaning to social activities and practices. Culture is a system of symbols that gives meaning to human life experiences, according to Clifford Geertz (1973). A symbolic analysis of Reog Ponorogo helps to understand how the people of Ponorogo negotiate identity and values amid social change because Reog is considered a cultural text laden with symbols. Although many researchers have investigated

Reog Ponorogo, the focus of research has mostly been on historical, artistic, and preservation aspects.

Haryono (2018) emphasizes the aesthetic and historical aspects of Reog from a performing arts perspective. According to Sutarto (2017), Reog is a symbol of local culture that strives to survive in the era of globalization. While international studies on performing arts such as Kelong (Nur, 2024) or Tiban (Amalina 2025) find that the symbolism of traditional performances can reflect cultural customs, identity, and the reproduction of social values, Widaryanto (2015) reveals the transformation of Reog in the context of identity and meaning. However, there has been little sociological research specifically investigating the symbolic meaning of Reog Ponorogo. This study aims to fill this gap in research.

Symbolic interaction (Blumer 1969; Mead 1934), which emphasizes that symbolic interaction creates social meaning, serves as the theoretical basis for this research. In the interaction between performers, audiences, and the community, each element of Reog is collectively understood and interpreted. Additionally, Geertz (1973) uses a cultural semiotic approach to help understand Reog as a cultural text that needs to be processed. On the other hand, cultural identity theory (Hall 1997) provides a basis for understanding how this performance reinforces the identity of the local community of Ponorogo amid the shifts of the modern world. Therefore, further research on the symbolic meaning of the Reog Ponorogo performance is very important. Reog is important as a cultural heritage and as a tool for affirming spirituality, local identity, and cultural resistance.

This study was conducted to answer two main questions. First, what is the symbolic meaning of each element of the Reog Ponorogo performance? Second, how are the social, religious, and identity values of the Ponorogo community reflected in these symbols? The purpose of this research is to discover the symbolic meaning of the main elements of the Reog Ponorogo performance and see how they relate to the identity, gender, spirituality, and social values of the community. Therefore, it is hoped that this research will contribute to the development of cultural sociological research, especially by considering the symbolism of local traditions as a dynamic representation of social life.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach to explore the symbolic meanings of the Reog Ponorogo performance. The research was conducted in Ponorogo

Regency, East Java, from January to April 2024. The ethnographic method was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand cultural meanings from the perspective of local actors (Spradley 1980; Geertz 1973).

The focus of this research was to interpret the symbolic meanings contained in the main elements of the Reog Ponorogo performance—Singa Barong, Warok, Jathil, Gemblak, and music composition—and relate them to the social, religious, and identity values of the Ponorogo community. The research took place in Ponorogo Regency, specifically in areas known for active Reog communities such as Jetis, Kauman, and Siman districts. The fieldwork lasted for approximately four months, allowing the researcher to participate in both routine Reog obyog performances and major festivals such as Grebeg Suro.

To obtain in-depth and valid information, three primary data collection techniques were used: a) Participant Observation : The researcher directly observed Reog performances and community preparations. Field notes were taken to record symbolic elements, gestures, and audience reactions; b) In-depth Interviews : A total of 10 key informants were interviewed, including Reog artists, Warok figures, Jathil dancers, community leaders, and local cultural experts. The interviews explored meanings, experiences, and values attached to each symbol in the performance; c) Documentation Study : Supporting data such as books, academic journals, photographs, and video recordings of Reog performances were analyzed to strengthen the findings (Huberman and Saldaña 2014).

Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of three concurrent activities: 1) Data Reduction – selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data from observations and interviews; 2) Data Display – organizing information in descriptive form to identify patterns and relationships; 3) Conclusion Drawing and Verification – interpreting symbolic meanings based on theories of culture and interaction. To ensure the validity of the findings, the researcher applied triangulation of sources and methods (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Observation results were cross-checked with interviews and literature data. Additionally, prolonged engagement in the field and peer debriefing were conducted to enhance credibility.

The interpretation process followed a symbolic interactionism perspective (Blumer, 1969; Mead 1934) and cultural semiotics (Geertz 1973). Each symbol in the performance was analyzed as a cultural text representing social interaction, power relations, and identity negotiation within the Ponorogo community

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Singa Barong is A Symbol of Strength and Resistance

Singa Barong is the main symbol of the Reog Ponorogo performance. This giant mask in the shape of a tiger's head decorated with peacock feathers weighs more than fifty kilograms and requires extraordinary physical strength to play. Singa Barong is a symbol of strength, courage, and tyranny. As a symbol of performing arts, Ki Ageng Kutu criticized the Singa Barong as a representation of the cruel rulers of Majapahit (Widaryanto 2015). From a cultural semiotics perspective, the Barong Lion can be seen as a representation of resistance against political and social power (Geertz 1973). Today, it is also considered a symbol of local pride and identity, a form of "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1986) that enhances the perception of the Ponorogo community in the eyes of the world.



**Figure 1.**

*Singa Barong*

Source : Documentation by the author

The Singa Barong is enormous, weighing up to fifty kilograms or even one hundred kilograms. In most cases, this mask can only be worn by individuals possessing exceptional physical strength. A concrete example of human strength, courage, and fortitude is the dancer's ability to lift and manipulate the mask. Furthermore, the dancer's ability to physically control the Singa Barong demonstrates the philosophy that true power resides in the symbol and also in the individual who can master it. This power can be seen as the body's resistance to dominating symbolic power (Turner 1995). The Singa Barong is considered to possess a spiritual dimension in addition to physical strength. The people of Ponorogo believe that every

Reog performance carries supernatural powers. The Singa Barong is considered a pathway between the supernatural and the human world. Thus, the power it upholds is not only physical but also metaphysical (Hidayat 2019).

According to oral tradition, Singa Barong is Ki Ageng Kutu's satire of the Majapahit King. Although the lion symbolizes a mighty king, the peacock feathers on top of it represent the king's wife's perceived excessive power. This sharply criticized the political situation at the time, where personal interference in power weakened the kingdom (Pangaribuan et al., 2021). Gramsci's theory of hegemony describes folk culture as a site of resistance against elite power. Singa Barong is a clear example of how the people of Ponorogo use art as a tool for social criticism. According to Storey (2018), this art serves as a platform for collective expression where people can voice their disagreements without engaging in direct confrontation with the government. One can view a Reog performance with Singa Barong at the center as a ritual depicting resistance.

The audience not only enjoys the dance but also receives a message expressing dissatisfaction with injustice. Therefore, every performance of Reog Ponorogo actually reflects the collective memory of the people's struggle against power (Geertz 1973). The Singa Barong is a cultural identity of the Ponorogo people, serving as a symbol of strength and resistance. To this day, the Singa Barong has become a local icon that fosters community pride. This identity is important because through symbols, communities can maintain their cultural identity in the era of globalization (Dewantara and Miskawaih, 2018). The Singa Barong is also used to teach ethics to children. This symbol demonstrates courage, perseverance, and a spirit of resistance to injustice. According to Hidayat (2019), this symbol teaches the importance of courage in facing adversity and vigilance against deviant power. Today, Singa Barong is a cultural tourism asset. Reog Ponorogo is a tourist attraction frequently featured at international festivals. However, the symbolic meaning of resistance remains behind this economic function, demonstrating that culture can change without losing its original meaning (Purnomo 2017). Many theoretical approaches can be used to study the Singa Barong symbol:

Clifford Geertz's Symbol Theory (1973): Singa Barong is a "symbolic system" that carries cultural meaning for the people of Ponorogo. This symbol demonstrates the community's collective experience with power and resistance. According to Antonio Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony, Singa Barong is a symbol of popular resistance to the power of the ruling class, and art is used as a tool to counter cultural hegemony. Michel Foucault's Body Theory



states that the dancer's ability to physically control the heavy Singa Barong mask reflects bodily discipline, where the body becomes an arena for resistance against symbolic power structures.

### **Warok : Guardian of Spirituality and Morality**

Warok is very important in the structure of Reog. He not only leads the performance group, but is also a respected and charismatic figure in society because he is considered to have inner strength and spiritual power. Warok symbolizes wisdom, moral steadfastness, and the preservation of customs. From a symbolic interactionism perspective, Warok functions as a collective representation of the Ponorogo community. With his presence, the performing arts affirm that they are not merely aesthetic acts; they also serve to maintain social and spiritual balance (Blumer 1969). Warok also builds social solidarity through patron-client relationships with the community, where the figure of Warok is attached to the values of mutual cooperation, sacrifice, and leadership (Sutarto 2017).



**Figure 2.**

*Warok*

Source : <https://id.pinterest.com/pin/750271619149093964/>

Warok are considered to possess high morals because their actions, speech, and thoughts serve as examples for others. Warok are considered crucial for regulating social order, as they are believed to maintain harmony. Warok are often depicted as moral protectors. They refrain from engaging in deviant behavior such as greed, conflict, or injustice. Therefore,

Warok can be considered an ideal representation of Javanese people who uphold virtue and honesty (Rahardjo 2020). Warok possess not only morality but also courage. In the Reog tradition, Warok are seen as individuals who can protect their group from external threats. However, Warok's courage is not blind, but courage based on truth. Thus, Warok are depicted as people who always follow ethics, even when there is conflict (Hidayat 2019). Warok are known to live a deeply religious life. They engage in ascetic practices such as fasting, cycling, and controlling their desires. Most believe that this asceticism gives them extraordinary inner strength. Warok's spiritual power is believed to protect the Ponorogo community in Reog performances and social life (Geertz 1973).

Furthermore, local people believe that Warok have a connection to the spiritual world. They are considered to possess supernatural powers or special abilities that ordinary people do not possess. However, the purpose of these supernatural powers is not for pride, but to maintain social and cosmic balance. Therefore, Warok spirituality has an important social role, namely maintaining the balance between the supernatural world and the human world (Turner 1995). Warok become a spiritual part of the Reog performance. The performance is not only entertainment, but also a means of reflection. Every movement, music, and symbol of Reog retains spiritual meaning because Warok exist.

Warok are charismatic community leaders. They are often sought for advice on family and social issues. Warok are figures capable of mediating conflicts and maintaining social resolution due to their moral and spiritual strength. Warok are part of the Reog Ponorogo and are responsible for preserving traditions. They serve to safeguard cultural values from being lost to modernization. Warok emphasize that art should be based on moral and spiritual values rather than mere entertainment (Dewantara and Miskawaih, 2018). Warok are considered a hallmark of the Ponorogo community. They demonstrate internal strength and local wisdom. This identity is crucial for maintaining community self-esteem, especially amidst rapid social change.

There are many ways to understand Warok within a sociological culture: Clifford Geertz's Symbol Theory (1973): Warok are cultural symbols that reflect the moral and spiritual values of the Ponorogo people. According to Durkheim's functionalist theory, warok perform social duties to maintain solidarity, harmony, and order in society. Gramsci's Hegemony Theory: Warok can be seen as cultural agents who emphasize asceticism and spirituality to counter the dominance of modern materialist values.



### **Warok as Guardian of Identity and Symbol of Resistance**

Warok is a central figure in the Reog Ponorogo tradition. He is not only a dancer or artist, but also a cultural figure possessing charisma, prestige, and moral authority within the community. In performances, Warok usually appears as a figure accompanying Singa Barong, symbolizing the guardian of truth and balance. The presence of Warok emphasizes that Reog is not merely a spectacle, but rather part of the value and ethical system lived by the people of Ponorogo. Warok are known for their physical and spiritual strength. They practice austerity practices, such as abstaining from certain things, maintaining a simple lifestyle, and emphasizing self-control. Thus, Warok symbolizes humans who are able to control their desires in order to achieve inner strength.

Warok represent values considered noble by the people of Ponorogo: courage, loyalty, simplicity, and social responsibility. Warok are not simply individuals, but personifications of the Ponorogo community's ethos, which upholds morality and solidarity. The presence of Warok also strengthens the community's collective pride. They are seen as guardians of cultural heritage and living role models. Therefore, when Reog is performed, the figure of Warok is not only present on stage but also in the community's consciousness as a representation of Ponorogo's communal identity.

**Warok as Cultural Resistance** Warok also play a crucial role in cultural resistance. In the past, Warok were often associated with resistance against oppressive powers. Their firm, courageous, and principled character reflects a spirit of resistance against injustice. In the legend of Reog's origins, Warok symbolize the courage of the common people who resisted the domination of the Majapahit king. In modern times, Warok continue to play a role as guardians of Reog's authenticity. When Reog art faces commercialization and foreign cultural influences, Warok are seen as figures who ensure that traditions are carried out according to their original principles and values. Thus, Warok become a symbol of resistance against the penetration of global culture that has the potential to erode Reog's philosophical meaning.

However, the existence of Warok is not without controversy. In ancient traditions, Warok are often associated with the practice of *gemblakan*, a special relationship between Warok and young boys (*gemblak*), seen as part of spiritual practice and a symbol of fertility. This practice creates an ambivalence, between being revered as spiritual figures and being criticized from a modern moral perspective. However, this ambivalence actually reveals the complexity of Warok's role in Ponorogo's social structure. He is not a black-and-white figure,

but rather a symbol that represents the dynamics of cultural values, resistance to external moral standards, and a unique form of local identity.

### **Gender Ambivalence and Cultural Transformation, by Jathil and Gemblak**

Initially, Jathil dancers were young men (gemblak) dressed in horse costumes, but later female dancers took on this role. This shift is interesting because it shows different gender roles in Reog culture. Gemblak is traditionally associated with Warok, which in modern society has both symbolic and complex meanings. According to several studies, the Warok-Gemblak relationship is a cultural custom that emphasizes discipline, loyalty, and courage (Astuti and Yusufi 2025). Conversely, the transformation of Jathil dancers into women in the modern era shows a process of cultural values aligning with broader social norms. Therefore, Jathil and Gemblak, which depict gender differences, and Reog performances can be considered a platform for discussing masculinity, femininity, and social transformation (Hall 1997).



**Figure 3.**

*Jathil dancer*

Source : <https://id.pinterest.com/pin/307722587057566265/>

Initially, Jathil was depicted as a valiant knight riding a horse. However, this role evolved into a horse-drawn dance (*jaranan*), often performed by women, as Reog performances evolved. This change demonstrates a shift in gender meaning. On the Reog stage, Jathil became a space for women's expression, demonstrating that traditional art remains dynamic and adaptable to changing social contexts. According to Rahardjo (2020), the

presence of female dancers in Jathil roles also opened doors for women to participate in social settings previously dominated by men. Gemblak is a young boy who was once often associated with being a companion to a Warok. In ancient traditions, the relationship between Warok and Gemblak is often viewed ambiguously: on the one hand, it is a spiritually symbolic relationship, while on the other, it can be interpreted as erotic.

Gender ambivalence is clearly visible in the Gemblak's position. He appears with feminine attributes, dances with fluid movements, yet remains considered masculine because he is under the guidance of the Warok. This phenomenon reflects how the traditional society of Ponorogo expresses relations of power, sexuality, and identity through the arts (Hidayat, 2019). Although the practice of Gemblak in its traditional sense is increasingly rare, its symbolic traces remain in the Reog narrative. The presence of Gemblak challenges rigid understandings of masculinity and femininity and opens up the scope for research into gender construction in Java. Although biologically male, Gemblak occupies a position symbolically considered feminine, indicating its gender "confusion," and Jathil shifts from a symbol of masculinity to a feminine space, demonstrating the moment of gender roles in culture.

This ambivalence demonstrates that traditional arts do not always represent a rigid social order; rather, they also serve as sites of social experimentation where gender identity is debated. Gender identity in Reog can be understood as a result of performance rather than biological innateness, according to Judith Butler's performativity theory. Modernization and changing social values have had a significant impact on the roles of Jathil and Gemblak. Jathil is now synonymous with female dancers and has even become a major attraction of Reog in the context of cultural tourism. This transformation demonstrates how traditional arts can survive by adapting to new values, such as recognizing women's roles in public spaces (Purnomo 2017). Conversely, the practice of Gemblak has experienced a drastic decline. In a modern society that is more open to issues of gender and sexuality, Gemblak is often viewed as controversial. However, the historical traces remain important because they show that traditional Javanese society has long been familiar with gender fluidity, although in a form that differs from contemporary understanding.

Over time, since the mid-20th century, the role of Jathil has begun to be played by women. This shift occurred due to changing social and aesthetic values, with society becoming more attracted to dances that are fluid, beautiful, and attractive. Jathil movements have also undergone a feminization, placing greater emphasis on flexibility, beauty, and visual appeal.

change signifies the opening of space for women's participation in traditional arts, something that was previously more limited. The presence of female Jathil not only enriches the aesthetics of the performance but also symbolizes the inclusion of values of equality in local arts (Rahardjo 2020).

Today, Jathil are depicted as female dancers playing the horse-drawn horse, or jaranan. They are a major attraction at local and international Reog festivals. This phenomenon demonstrates how traditional art evolves to meet the needs of modern society while maintaining its historical significance. Gemblak is a young boy who accompanies the Warok, who, according to ancient traditions, wears certain trousers, including trousers worn during sexual intercourse with women. Furthermore, Gemblak accompanies the Warok in their daily lives and during Reog performances. Gemblak is often depicted with feminine attributes, such as attractive clothing, fluid movements, or even dressing up to resemble a woman. He is still biologically male. Besides challenging heteronormative standards, this disagreement creates a gap between masculinity and femininity.

From a sociological perspective, Gemblak can be considered a manifestation of traditional gender fluidity. According to Hidayat (2019), its existence demonstrates that traditional Javanese society has a unique way of expressing diverse identities within the local cultural context. The practice of Gemblak is often considered controversial in the modern world because it is associated with non-heterosexual sexual relations. As a result, Gemblak has become increasingly absent. However, it remains important as a symbolic part of the Reog Ponorogo story. The presence of Jathil and Gemblak in one performance demonstrates social contradictions regarding gender: Jathil represents a feminized masculine role, while Gemblak represents a softened feminine role. This ambivalence demonstrates that traditional arts do not always establish strict gender roles; instead, they allow for the weakening of identities.

Theoretical Concept Gender is not a fixed identity, but a recurring performance. This is explained by Judith Butler (1990) with her theory of gender performativity. Reog showcases Jathil and Gemblak as concrete examples of how gender is displayed through the body and movement rather than simply biological traits. Culture is a system of symbols, according to Clifford Geertz (1973). One way to examine gender in Ponorogo society is through Jathil and Gemblak. According to Michel Foucault (1978), power relations are always intertwined with sexuality. In Javanese society, the Warok-Gemblak relationship demonstrates how the body and sexuality become part of structures of power and spirituality. Jathil Technology The role of

Jathil is increasingly modern. It has performed at national and international festivals, making it an icon of Ponorogo's cultural tourism. This transformation demonstrates how traditional arts can survive by embracing new values, such as modern aesthetics and women's involvement in public spaces (Purnomo 2017).

Reducing Gemblak Conversely, the practice of Gemblak has declined drastically. Gemblak is seen as problematic in a society increasingly open to issues of gender and sexuality. This reduction, however, does not mean eliminating Gemblak entirely; it remains present in the story as an important component of the Reog tradition. The negotiation of cultural identity is evident in the transformation of Jathil and the reduction of Gemblak. Adaptation is carried out by the Ponorogo community by maintaining modern aspects that are acceptable to the community and reducing controversial aspects (Jathil). According to Jathil and Gemblak, the Ponorogo community has a unique way of representing gender. They not only follow patriarchal norms, but also allow feminine expression in masculine and feminine bodies. The performance teaches the community that gender can change. This ambivalence can be considered as an indirect social education about identity, although from a different perspective than that used in the modern era. Ponorogo's identity as a place rich in tradition is strengthened by the existence of Jathil and Gemblak. Their symbolic value remains as part of local cultural pride, despite having changed.

### **Music and Performance: Community Harmony**

Gamelan accompanied by drums, gongs, and other traditional instruments creates the distinctive atmosphere of Reog performances. Music not only serves as accompaniment but also symbolizes collective harmony. It is possible that the dancers' movements, which begin with the bold steps of Jathil and the steadfastness of Warok, represent the value of togetherness. From a cultural sociology perspective, dance and music serve to enhance the communal identity of the community. It has evolved into a symbolic tool for communication that unites actors and audiences in a collective experience (Nur 2024). Reog unites the Ponorogo community through music and dance, in addition to being an art event.



**Figure 4.**

Musical Instruments

Source : Documentation by the author

The simple gamelan used in Reog music typically consists of drums, gongs, kenongs, kempuls, ketipungs, angklungs, and Reog trumpets. Each instrument has a distinct role: the drums set the tempo, the gongs mark transitions, and the trumpets provide dramatic nuances. These instruments are played in a repetitive rhythmic pattern, creating a magical yet dynamic atmosphere. Reog gamelan is more powerful and energetic than classical Javanese gamelan, which is more subtle and meditative. Social Benefits of Music. Reog music is used for: Whenever dancers enter, move, or change formation, the music serves to set the tone for the performance. Building an emotional atmosphere: a fast pace creates tension, while a slow pace allows for thought. Strengthening group solidarity: Each musician works together, fostering a sense of togetherness.

According to some, Reog music also has spiritual elements. Most believe that the performance is a way to communicate with the world in addition to entertaining. This is because the rhythms of the drums and gongs are believed to have the ability to connect with supernatural energy. Even in ancient traditions, music was used to induce trance (trance) in dancers. The Reog dance consists of several parts: The opening—usually begins with the appearance of Jathil, which is the term for a horse rider.

The interaction between Jathil, Warok, and Gemblak is known as a symbolic battle. The appearance of the Singa Barong is the culmination of the performance. This structure demonstrates that the Reog dance is narrative, depicting strength, courage, and resistance. Synergy between Rhythm and Movement. Music and dance in Reog are like body and soul. The rhythm provided by the music and the dance are a direct representation of the energy contained within the music. Dancers move dynamically when the drums are struck rapidly. When the gong is sounded, the dancers stop or change formation. This synergy demonstrates that the Reog



performance is created by many people. No single dancer or musician can stand out, as the harmony of all elements is key to the performance.

The way each person aligns themselves with the group demonstrates communal harmony in Reog. Music and dance serve as representations of the social life of the Ponorogo people, where the principles of solidarity, cooperation, and togetherness are more important than personal interests. Theoretical Perspective on Culture According to Clifford Geertz: Culture as a Symbolic System, consists of a system of symbols that give meaning to life. Reog music and dance demonstrate the solidarity, courage, and spirituality of the Ponorogo people.

Durkheim: Social Solidarity Durkheim emphasized the importance of ritual in building social solidarity. Reog music and dance can be considered collective rituals that foster mechanical solidarity in traditional societies. Victor Turner: Ritual as Social Drama Turner (1995) views ritual as a social drama that demonstrates and resolves conflicts within society. Reog music and dance are not merely entertainment; they are also used to express conflicts, such as those between the people and the rulers, and offer symbolic resolution through harmonious performances.

Today, Reog dance and music are often performed at festivals, carnivals, and international events. To make the dance more appealing to audiences from around the world, musical elements are often combined with modern instruments. This transformation demonstrates how culture can adapt to changing times.

The transformation offers opportunities, there are concerns that Reog music and dance will become mere entertainment, losing their ritual and spiritual significance. If traditional values are not maintained, communal harmony could turn into a mere commercial attraction. However, revitalization continues, as demonstrated by the National Reog Festival in Ponorogo. In addition to showcasing the beauty of the art, this festival emphasizes the importance of solidarity, spirituality, and cultural identity.

### **Reog as Cultural Resistance and Collective Identity**

Reog Ponorogo, a folk art, has developed into an icon of local identity that is recognized nationally and internationally. For example, the Ponorogo National Reog Festival utilizes culture for diplomacy and preservation. From an identity theory perspective, Reog helps strengthen local identity in the context of globalization (Hall 1997). Additionally, the symbols of the performance emphasize Ponorogo's uniqueness and resist cultural homogenization.

Therefore, Reog Ponorogo can be considered a living and evolving cultural heritage. It has become a place where the people of Ponorogo discuss their social values, identity, and beliefs in the face of changing times.

Reog Ponorogo is one of East Java's most famous traditional arts and holds numerous symbolic meanings. Reog is more than just public entertainment; it has evolved into an expression of the Ponorogo people's identity and a symbol of cultural resistance against external cultural domination and hegemony. Reog combines dance, music, costumes, mythology, and the community's strong spiritual beliefs in every performance. As a collective identity, Reog serves as a platform for the Ponorogo people to affirm their sense of togetherness, belonging, and pride in their ancestral heritage. Meanwhile, as a form of cultural resistance, Reog serves to protect local communities from the homogenization of modern culture and the interference of political power. A Tool to Demonstrate Harmony in Ponorogo Society

Reog is inseparable from the Ponorogo community. Reog performances always involve everyone, from the performers, the musicians, the Jathil dancers, to the general public. Communal identity is strengthened through the process of mutual cooperation, demonstrating that Reog represents the entire Ponorogo community and not the property of any one individual. Reog, according to Alberto Melucci's theory of collective identity, functions as a medium that connects individuals through shared symbols, emotions, and goals. Ritual preparation, practice, and cultural celebrations like Grebeg Suro, which involve thousands of people, are evidence of this identity beyond the performances. Affirming Local Identity

Reog has long been a symbol of "Ponorogo pride." This identity is emphasized through various aspects, such as the Singa Barong, which symbolizes strength, the Warok, as guardians of morality, and the distinctive gamelan music. In the eyes of the Ponorogo people, Reog is a distinguishing feature and a marker of their existence amidst the cultural diversity of the archipelago. This local identity is further strengthened when disputes over cultural claims arise, for example, when Malaysia included Reog in its list of performing arts. The reaction of the Ponorogo people demonstrated that Reog is not simply art, but a symbol of self-respect and collective existence. c. Intergenerational Heritage As part of collective identity, Reog also serves as a medium for transmitting cultural values. Through intergenerational transmission, children and adolescents are involved in Reog art groups, whether as musicians, Jathil dancers, or musicians. This process not only maintains the continuity of the art but also strengthens

social bonds through the appreciation of values of togetherness, discipline, and respect for ancestors. Historical Background of Resistance

The history of Reog is steeped in nuances of resistance. Popular legend states that Reog emerged as a satire by Ki Ageng Kutu against the King of Majapahit, whom he considered tyrannical. Through the symbols of the Singa Barong and the ranks of mounted soldiers (Jathil), Ki Ageng Kutu conveyed social criticism and political resistance through the medium of art. Thus, from the beginning, Reog has embodied a spirit of resistance, not simply popular entertainment. This resistance was not a frontal form of warfare, but rather a symbolic one through artistic aesthetics that was easily accepted by the wider community.

b. Resistance to Cultural Hegemony

In the modern context, Reog also functions as a resistance against cultural homogenization caused by globalization. Amidst the strong current of global popular culture, Reog persists with its distinctive form, music, and narrative. Every time it is performed, Reog serves as a reminder that local culture has value and competitiveness that is no less than foreign culture. This resistance is also evident in disputes over cultural claims. When Malaysia claimed Reog as part of their heritage, the people of Ponorogo reacted strongly, pointing out that Reog has clear historical roots and identity in Ponorogo. This reaction shows how Reog becomes a tool to defend cultural identity from external threats.

Resistance to Political Power

During the New Order era, traditional arts were often used as tools of state propaganda. However, Reog groups in Ponorogo maintained their autonomy by preserving the symbolic meaning and spiritual values in their performances. In this sense, Reog became a form of cultural resistance against the domination of those seeking to control the expression of folk art.

3. Symbolic Dimensions in Identity and Resistance

Reog, as a collective identity and cultural resistance, is inseparable from the symbols it contains:

- Singa Barong: symbolizes strength and courage, a symbol of resistance against tyrannical rulers.
- Warok: represents the guardian of morality and spirituality, a symbol of societal integrity.
- Jathil: symbolizes gender dynamics and social transformation.
- Gemblak: reflects gender ambivalence and the complexity of power relations.
- Gamelan music and collective dance: represent social harmony and the spirit of mutual cooperation.

These symbols come together in a single performance, forming a rich narrative about the identity of the Ponorogo people and their way of expressing cultural resistance.

## CONCLUSION

The Reog Ponorogo performance is a cultural heritage that not only serves as entertainment but also has many symbols and meanings that reflect the social, religious, and identity values of the Ponorogo community. An analysis of the main elements of the performance shows that Singa Barong represents strength and resistance to tyranny, Warok represents wisdom and the guardian of morality, Jathil and Gemblak represent gender inequality and cultural transformation, and the music and dance represent community harmony. Overall, these elements make Reog Ponorogo a cultural text that reflects the social relationships, beliefs, and struggles of a cultural community.

Studies show that Reog Ponorogo is not only a traditional art preserved for aesthetic reasons; it is also a symbolic practice that is relevant and modern in the modern and global era. In an effort to maintain their local identity and avoid cultural homogenization, the symbolism of Reog shows how the people of Ponorogo do this. Therefore, research on the symbolic meaning contained in Reog performances helps develop sociological culture, especially in terms of understanding the role of traditional performing arts as a tool for shaping identity, spirituality, and social solidarity.

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