

PAGEBLUG : RUWATAN IN THE BEROKAN PERFORMANCE ARTS

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini memiliki tujuan mendeskripsikan serta menganalisis seni pertunjukan Berokan dalam prosesi ruwatan di Indramayu, dalam bentuk gagasan yang berbentuk penyajian tari. Seperti diketahui, kesenian Berokan merupakan salah satu kesenian tradisional *buhun* masyarakat Indramayu. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif analisis yang dikaji dengan etnokoreologi dan menggunakan teori hermeneutika sebagai penguat dalam menganalisis terhadap teks, tanda, simbol. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan metode observasi, wawancara, studi dokumentasi, serta studi literatur. Hasil dalam penelitian ini menunjukkan pertunjukan Berokan terdapat, *ruaat* atau *ruwat* yang merupakan upacara pembersihan diri atau membuang keburukan dari segala macam bahaya, ataupun tolak bala. Dalam kehidupan masyarakat Jawa, penyakit yang mewabah dinamakan *pageblug*, *kaparag ing salah sawijining lelara* (suatu daerah dilanda suatu penyakit). Kesenian Berokan *ruwat* berfungsi juga sebagai alternatif pengobatan salah satu anggota keluarga yang sakit, dan sebagai penangkal marabahaya, proses penyajiannya di dalam rumah menggunakan *sesajen*, lalu berokan tersebut melakukan ritual dengan membaca doa-doa sesuai dengan ajaran agama Islam.

Kata kunci: Berokan; kesenian tradisional; *pageblug*; *ruwatan*; *sesajen*

Abstract

This study aims to describe and analyse the Berokan performing arts in the ruwatan procession in Indramayu, presented as a dance. Berokan is one of the traditional arts of the Indramayu community. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method, examined through ethnochoreology, and employs hermeneutics theory to enhance the analysis of texts, signs, and symbols. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, documentation studies, and literature review. The results show that the Berokan performance includes ruwat, a cleansing ceremony to eliminate negativity and ward off dangers. In Javanese society, an epidemic is known as pageblug, a situation where a particular area is affected by disease. The Berokan art form in ruwat serves as an alternative treatment for a sick family member and as protection against

calamities. The ritual is performed inside the house using offerings, with the Berokan reciting prayers in accordance with Islamic teachings.

Keywords: *Berokan; traditional art; pageblug; ruwatan; sesajen.*

INTRODUCTION

Art is the manifestation of beauty that resides within the human soul, which can be expressed through hearing (music), sight (painting), or movement (dance). Thus, art is the product of an individual's creative activities, giving it a dynamic role in life, as cited in the journal article by Masrifah Ulandari, Henny Rohayani, and Ace Irawan (Ulandari et al., 2024). Art is one of the universal elements of culture, an element that reveals characteristics, uniqueness, and quality. Therefore, art is a fundamental component of Indonesia's national culture. Through art, aesthetic needs, whether directly or indirectly, can be fulfilled, reflecting humanity's existence as part of culture (Kasmahidayat et al., 2024).

Berokan is a traditional folk performing art, depicting a large, frightening animal with a form resembling a *barongsay* (lion dance) and *bangbarongan* (a mythical creature in Sundanese culture). Its face is red, with large eyes, a wide mouth, messy, flowing hair, and a body wrapped in burlap sacks. The tail is made of wood with striped colours and a pointed end, resembling a fish tail. The *Berokan* performance is led by a *dalang* (puppet master) accompanied by simple musical instruments, including a drum (*kendang*), tambourine (*terebang*), cymbals (*kecrek*), and a small gong (*bende*). These instruments are played by a group of six people. In its performance, during the time when people still adhered to their ancestral beliefs before the arrival of Islam, it was used as a traditional ceremony among the Indramayu community.

Berokan represents a sea creature, with only its head visible, depicted in a frightening form. The meaning of *Berokan* is believed to serve as a talisman to ward off evil and to scare children who do not obey their parents. A symbol is something that typically serves as a visible sign that stands in for an idea or object. As a sign, a symbol can have various meanings, but for the group that venerates it, a symbol holds a singular meaning (Kasmahidayat, 2012). The meaning is the description conveyed by the symbol, where, in simple terms, the symbol is a text in its own form, and the meaning is nothing more than the context contained within that text..

The understanding or meaning of *Berokan* varies widely. According to an interview with Wa Aong, *Berokan* comes from the word *barokah* or *berkah*, which means safety or blessing. This art form, which originates from the community and does not have a fixed movement pattern, is visualized as an animal emerging from the sea, with only its head visible. For this reason, this art is performed during ritual ceremonies to seek safety and protection from misfortune, such as during *ruwatan* (a cleansing ceremony to ward off evil) to combat pageblug (an epidemic), the *ngunjung buyut* ceremony (a ritual to honour ancestors), and the *kirab sawan* procession (a ritual to ward off illness). Additionally, *Berokan* is believed to repel evil and expel supernatural forces or evil spirits that could disturb the community's life at the time (animism), making *Berokan* a symbolic medium of communication between humans

and the Creator of the Universe. The Berokan performance art is not only a part of traditional rituals but also serves as a regular performance and a means of self-purification from *pageblug* (disease outbreaks). In Javanese society, an epidemic is referred to as *pageblug*.

It is also interpreted by Soewita and Kadarlamet (1938: 8) as *sawijining panggonan kaparag ing salah sawijining lelara* (a region affected by a disease), as cited in Adji & Priyatmoko (2021). According to Rudy Wiranata M. Hum, a lecturer in the Javanese Literature Program at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, UGM, in the *Makalangan* journal, from the Javanese perspective, *Pageblug* is understood as a cosmological phenomenon. This drives humans to restore balance and harmony between themselves and their God (Subayono, 2021). The term *Pageblug* or *Bageblug* itself refers to an outbreak of disease. The root word or tembung lingga of *pagebluk* is *Gebluk* or *Bluk*, which can mean falling, collapsing, or can also refer to an explosion. Therefore, *Pagebluk* describes a condition where many people fall, collapse, or drop simultaneously, often on a large scale, causing many casualties, resembling the meaning of *Gebluk*, which is an explosion. Thus, it can be concluded that *Pageblug* is a local term used to refer to an epidemic or outbreak.

Ruaat, *ruwat*, *ruwatan*, *ngruwat* refer to ceremonies for self-purification or the removal of negative influences and dangers, or to ward off evil. According to the *Adat dan Budaya* journal, in Javanese, *ruwat* means to remove bad luck or to protect from harm. Therefore, the *Ruwat Desa* (village cleansing ceremony) is conducted to cleanse the village of any misfortune and to bring about improvement. The ceremony aims to ensure that the entire community is blessed with health and safety, and that their livelihood can proceed smoothly. The *Ruwat Desa* is held during the month of Suro (the first month of the Javanese calendar) when all community members gather the produce from their land. This collection of harvest is an expression of gratitude from the community to God (Hakiki, 2022). Based on an interview with the main informant, Wa Aong, *Ruwat*, *Ruwatan*, *Ruaat*, or *Ngruwat* involves efforts for self-purification, avoiding or warding off calamities and disasters. In the Berokan tradition, there is a ritual called *Kirab Sawan*. *Kirab Sawan* is a ritual to expel *pageblug* or an epidemic, symbolized by a pillow that is bitten by the Berokan and then thrown onto the roof tiles before being left out to dry.

The historical background is one of the key measures that can describe and affirm the existence of an art form. This background is present in the story of Berokan, which was later turned into a dance performance (Hamrin, 2018). The background of the *Ruwat* performing arts process in Berokan, as revealed in an interview with Wa Aong, the main informant, is that Berokan is considered to have magical elements due to its frightening facial appearance. When a *dalang* enters the Berokan mask, it seems to come to life, as if a spirit has entered the mask. The movement structure or choreography in Berokan does not follow fixed movements; it only involves exploratory movements that follow the rhythm of the music. Choreography is the process of planning and then selecting or choosing movement motifs to form a sequence or arrangement commonly referred to as movement choreography, which includes form, technique, and content (Sunaryo, 2020). In the *Ruwat* ritual, no songs are performed; only one musical instrument called *somporet* is used, played by the

dalang with the instrument held in his mouth.

Performance Art is an art form that involves the actions of individuals or groups in a specific place and time (Kasmahidayat & Herliawan, 2023). Performance typically includes four elements: time, space, the artist's body, and the relationship between the artist and the audience. A performance consists of several components that form a unified whole, with the most essential elements of dance being movement, space, and time. These three aspects are inseparable and interdependent, each relying on the other to create a complete unity (Kotjah, 2017). The *Ruwat* performance in Berokan is very simple, involving only offerings and the *dalang of Berokan*, according to an interview with Wa Aong.

Ethnochoreology is the study of dance to understand it as an expression of culture and humanity. The term ethnochoreology is derived from the words ethnic and choreography, thus ethnochoreology refers to the science of ethnic dance. Ethnochoreological analysis includes the involvement of the community that supports the dance itself. It is an approach that analyses movement, history, makeup, and costumes in the Berokan art form within both context and text, using various academic disciplines. According to a journal article by Rizki Rosmana, Yoyoh Siti Maryah, and Ayo Sunaryo, ethnochoreology is one of the sciences used to find answers to the problems faced (Rosmana et al., 2024). Ethnochoreology comes from three words: *ethno*, meaning ethnic group or more specifically tribe; *shoors*, meaning dance or group; and *logos*, meaning science. This is fitting because certain dances are used to thoroughly explore the historical insights of ethnic dances in both textual and contextual ways (Fauzi et al., 2022). Meanwhile, according to Narawati (2020), the ethnochoreological approach can be considered multidisciplinary, as it applies theories from various disciplines, including history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, semiotics, aesthetics, education, and more. The purpose of this study is to describe the background of the *ruwat* ritual in the *Berokan* performing arts. Additionally, this study aims to serve as a reference for academics, artists, and the Indramayu community.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach using descriptive analysis methods. One of the research techniques that utilize analysis and description to solve problems is the descriptive method. Descriptive research in qualitative studies is referred to as qualitative descriptive research. Before the events are thoroughly examined to identify any emerging patterns, qualitative descriptive research focuses on answering research questions about who, what, where, and how an experience or event occurs.

The qualitative research method, often called the naturalistic method because it is conducted in natural settings, is also known as the ethnographic method, as it was initially used for studies in cultural anthropology. Because the data collected and its analysis are more qualitative in nature, this method is known as the qualitative method (Sugiyono, 2014). Furthermore, the descriptive method in this study is applied to explain and define the issues related to the background of *Berokan* art, which leads to the existence of the *ruwat* ritual. This descriptive research is based on the

characteristics of facts and the process of organizing existing data, which then serves as the foundation for the research presented in the field.

Participants

The subjects of this study are the *ruwat* ritual in the Berokan performing arts, the background of this ritual, and its presentation. In this context, the participants involved are key or primary informants and supporting informants. The study and findings are only related to specific social settings and are not applicable to the general population. Consequently, the term “population” is not used in qualitative research. Instead, the qualitative sample consists of informants, participants, and sources.

The researchers obtained data samples for qualitative research using a purposive sampling strategy. Purposive sampling is a method for selecting data sources according to specific criteria. For example, the researchers might choose to interview primary sources with extensive knowledge of Berokan art to strengthen their findings. In this study, the sample selection process was completed during the observation phase. The information collected guided the sampling purpose. In this case, the participant or informant who served as a key source in this research is Wa Aong.

Research Location

The focal point of a research project is its location. The village of Karangasem, Terisi District, Indramayu Regency, serves as the primary source for this study, being the home of the *Berokan* arts studio. The researchers chose Wa Aong’s *Berokan* studio as the research site because Wa Aong is the third-generation successor of the *Berokan* tradition. The function of the performance has evolved; it was originally a traditional ceremony or ritual, and also used for street performances. However, after being taken over by Wa Aong, it has shifted to being a regular performance art, while still retaining elements of traditional ceremonies and rituals. The researchers are interested in studying *Berokan* using descriptive analysis with a qualitative approach due to its growing popularity among the community, as well as the changing meanings and symbols associated with the *Berokan* art form over time.

Data Collection

The data collection techniques used in this research include pre-observation, observation, interviews, documentation, and literature review. Pre-observation is the stage of research conducted before observation or field surveys. During this pre-observation phase, the researchers observed and watched the training sessions of the *Berokan dalang* as they prepared for a performance in Bali in 2022. The researchers conducted non-participatory observation in this study, observing and interviewing informants, and collecting documents using cameras and video equipment. The purpose of this observation was to directly understand the type of performance presented. The observation for this research was conducted at Wa Aong’s *Berokan* studio.

The primary purpose of the interviews was to gather information from the interviewees by asking them to respond to the questions posed by the interviewer.

The interviews regarding *Berokan* art were conducted in an unstructured format by the researcher. Unstructured interviews allow the interviewer to ask questions relevant to the research problem due to the lack of systematic and comprehensive interview standards in data collection. The researchers focused more on what was conveyed by the sources or respondents, as they are key data items to be collected in unstructured interviews. Documentation and literature review were conducted to strengthen the data already collected in the study.

Data Analysis

To enhance the accuracy and clarity of the collected data, the researchers employed a triangulation approach as a consequence of the observation, interview, and documentation methods used in this study. Triangulation is a technique for verifying the truthfulness of data by using sources other than the data itself to compare or confirm the findings. It involves combining different approaches to investigate related events from multiple perspectives. Technical triangulation is the process of collecting data from a single source using several data collection methods. For the same data source, the researchers employed documentation, in depth interviews, and observation. To achieve the research objectives, the researchers conducted a more thorough analysis and review of the collected data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Research Location

Indramayu Regency is a regency in West Java Province, Indonesia. Its capital is Indramayu, with Indramayu serving as the centre of governance and the main hub of activity, particularly in the Jatibarang area. The regency is bordered by the Java Sea to the north, Cirebon Regency to the southeast, Majalengka and Sumedang Regencies, and Subang Regency to the west. Indramayu Regency consists of 31 districts, further divided into 313 villages and sub-districts. The administrative centre is located in Indramayu District, situated along the coast of the Java Sea.

The study was conducted in Karangasem Village, Terisi District, Indramayu Regency. The majority of the residents of Terisi Village are farmers, and they have a deep appreciation for Indramayu's cultural heritage. One such cultural treasure is *Berokan*, which continues to be preserved and enjoyed by both children and adults alike due to its entertaining nature. *Berokan* has been a part of the community since 1960, established by Wa Durman, according to an interview conducted on January 29 with Wa Aong, the fourth-generation successor of *Berokan*.

Background of Berokan

Indramayu is a blend of Javanese and Sundanese cultures, with the majority of its population being farmers and fishermen. However, a portion of the community also engages in *bebarang* or *ngamen* (street performances) to meet their needs, as described in the book *Melestarikan Seni Tradisi Indramayu: Wayang Kulit, Berokan, Jaran Lumping* (Preserving the Traditional Arts of Indramayu: Shadow Puppets, Berokan, Jaran Lumping) by Kusyoto, Minanto, and Abdul Aziz. A group of

Indramayu residents living in Jatibarang Village used masks called Barong or Berokan for their street performances. In its time, Berokan was used in ritualistic arts and involved going from house to house to perform ruwatan (a cleansing ritual) for new homes or to cure illnesses of the inhabitants, and it was believed to ward off evil (Kusyoto et al., 2023).

The Berokan art form spread across Java, particularly in the northern coastal regions, including Indramayu. The Berokan known in Indramayu is a result of cultural enculturation from the Barongan art, which is widely developed in Central Java. The word Berokan derives from “barokahan,” meaning safety or blessing. According to a journal article by Usman, Berokan – also known as Barong Kepet – refers to the mask used in traditional arts around the Cirebon and Indramayu areas. This mask is made of wood and is crafted to resemble a frightening creature (Usman, 2014).

The development and spread of Berokan can be found in villages along the northern coast of West Java, such as in Indramayu and Cirebon. In Indramayu, Berokan has been developed using various traditional musical instruments, with different styles of performance, including a terrifying design for the Berokan mask. The art form is still being developed and preserved by several artists, such as the Wa Aong Group. Historically, Berokan has become part of the folk culture of West Java, with meanings related to the spread of Islam, safety, and the warding off of evil. The background of Berokan in Indramayu is deeply rooted in three narrative perspectives. The first background is linked to the story of King Prabu Parikesit, whose kingdom was under attack and also faced a pandemic at that time. The second perspective differs from the story passed down through generations among Berokan artists in Indramayu, which tells that Berokan is actually a legacy of Prince Korowelang or Prince Mina, the ruler of the Java Sea in the Cirebon and Indramayu regions. Lastly, the third perspective suggests that Berokan was a creation of Mbah Kuwu Prince Cakrabuana, used as a medium for spreading Islam in the Galuh region.

Berokan was used as a medium for the spread of Islam when Prince Cakrabuana, the son of Prabu Siliwangi, founded the Cirebon Kingdom in the 15th century and expanded its influence into the Galuh region. Mbah Kuwu Cirebon, Prince Cakrabuana, played a crucial role in the spread of Islam in Cirebon, which later extended into the Indramayu area. He established the Islamic foundation in Cirebon, which became the basis for the growth of Islam in the region. He created the Berokan art as a tool for spreading Islam and warding off evil, using it to introduce the religion and drive away supernatural beings that disturbed humans, influencing the local community with Islamic teachings and local culture. In this way, Mbah Kuwu Cirebon played a central role in the spread of Islam in the area.

Shape of Berokan

The shape of Berokan known in Indramayu is more akin to mythical creatures, resembling a crocodile, with a giant face featuring mirrored eyes, a striped tail, and a body made from burlap sacks and a back covered in goat skin, each element carrying its own symbolism and meaning. For instance, the frightening face symbolizes the head of an animal or giant and represents leadership, self-awareness, and grandeur, despite its terrifying appearance. Meanwhile, the body and tail symbolize gentleness,

simplicity, and equality in society, according to an interview conducted on May 8 at UPTD SDN 2 Kebulen with Wa Aong, the founder of the studio and a Berokan dancer.

As a folk art form, *Berokan* performances require an open field, and there is no interactive distance between the *Berokan* performers and the audience, making Berokan one of the most popular and accessible forms of traditional art. The Berokan mask is made of wood and resembles an animal, painted red with glowing eyes, and a mouth that can move (open and close), producing a sound like “I.” Its body is made from repurposed rice sacks sewn together in such a way that they cover the performer, creating the impression of a large, hairy creature (with added fibres and rope fragments). The mask is then attached to a wooden tail with red and white stripes, ending in a pointed tip resembling the tail of a sawfish.



Figure 1: Berokan Form in 2012
(Source: Doc Usman in *Sobat Budaya Journal*)



Figure 2: Berokan Form in the Wa Aong Generation in 2019
(Source: *Personal Documentation*, 2024)

Costumes and Musical Accompaniment

In the *Berokan* art form, there are six gamelan musical instruments, which include the *kendang* (drum), melody instrument, *tipluk* (a type of percussion), *gong*,

kecrek (cymbals), and *suling* (a traditional flute). According to an interview with Wa Aong on May 9, 2024, the musical instruments used in the 1960s included the *kendang* or *terebang* (tambourine), *tipluk*, *gong*, *kecrek*, and *suling*. However, with the passage of time, the rhythm or melody of the Berokan *suling* performance has been modernized, sometimes using only audio tracks without the traditional gamelan, or incorporating a modified version of the gamelan with six instruments: *kendang*, *kecrek*, *melodi*, *tipluk*, *gong*, and *suling*. The use of gamelan is also tailored to the preferences of the hosts who invite the performance. The costumes and makeup in *Berokan* are very simple, including using makeup to enhance appearance and traditional clothing such as *komboran* (traditional Javanese clothing).

Choreographic Structure or Movements in Berokan

The movements in *Berokan* do not follow any fixed patterns; they are typically exploratory. However, there are some meaningful movements within *Berokan*, particularly during the process of offering to the ancestors, the *Berokan* itself, and the audience. This part of the performance also includes ritual elements, such as circling around the *Berokan*. The act of circling the *Berokan* symbolizes respect and asking for permission from the *Berokan*, signifying that the *dalang* is about to enter the *Berokan*. The *dalang* then sits with their head bowed, symbolizing their request for permission to perform. Following this, the *dalang* places seven types of flowers into the mouth of the *Berokan*, which symbolizes bringing the *Berokan* to life. During this segment, the *dalang* also touches their fingers to the *Berokan*'s teeth and the ground with their feet, symbolizing the connection between the sky and the earth, representing the idea that we should always be grateful to the Creator for the existence of the sky and the earth.

The Ruwat Ritual

Ruwat, *Ruaat*, *Ruwatan*, or commonly known as *Ngruwat*, is a ritual aimed at self purification, avoiding or warding off disasters and calamities. Within the *Berokan* tradition, this includes the *Kirab Sawan*, a ritual to expel *pageblug* (epidemics or diseases). According to an interview with Wa Aong, *Kirab Sawan* involves symbolically removing the *pageblug* by having the *Berokan* bite a pillow, which is then thrown onto the roof and left to dry in the sun. This ceremony is performed as a means to release oneself from impending disasters throughout one's life. The *ruwatan* ceremony is marked by a sacred atmosphere, with the *dalang* leading the ritual through the recitation of mantras, accompanied by offerings and the burning of incense, alongside the mystical sounds of the gamelan. Fundamentally, the *ruwatan* ceremony is an effort to establish contact with the supernatural world, summoning spirits for specific purposes.

According to Rukiyah (2017), *ruwatan* originates from the word *kataruwat*, meaning: 1) to escape from a curse or bad omen, and 2) to be freed from divine burdens and punishments. *Ruwatan* essentially means a ritual for safety. The purpose of conducting *ruwatan* is to ensure human safety, protection from danger and misfortune, and freedom from curses and negative influences, allowing one to live in peace. Rukiyah (2017) also explains the background and history of *ruwatan*, beginning with the story of Batara Guru, who was riding the bull Andini with Dewi Uma and

traveling around the world one beautiful evening. Batara Guru desired intimacy, but Dewi Uma refused; however, *kama* (the seed of life) had already been released and fell into the ocean. This uncontrolled *kama*, called *kamasalah*, eventually became a giant as large as a mountain. When they returned to heaven, Batara Guru learned of chaos on earth and ordered the gods to find the cause. The chaos was caused by a giant searching for his father and demanding food. The turmoil ended when Batara Guru acknowledged the giant as his son, named him Batara Kala, and granted him a quota of food, which included children or people who were *sukerta* (those born under bad omens).

However, the food quota given to Batara Kala was so large that it could result in the destruction of humanity. Realizing his mistake, Batara Guru ordered Batara Wisnu and the other gods to descend to earth to save humanity. Batara Wisnu acted as the *dalang* Kandhabuwana, and the other gods served as musicians, performing the *ruwatan* ritual to save those destined to be eaten by Batara Kala. This myth is the foundation for the *ruwatan* ritual, which continues to be practiced by the Javanese to protect their loved ones who fall under the *sukerta* category from being consumed by Batara Kala (Rukiyah, 2017). The purpose of the *ruwatan* ritual in the Berokan performing arts is rooted in the belief among the people of Indramayu that the *Berokan* embodies a good spirit within its body or mask. This belief is associated with the *Kirab Sawan*, where the *pageblug* or epidemic is expelled. Therefore, the *ruwatan* ritual is conducted as a means of self-purification or to avoid and ward off dangers that might befall an individual.

Discussion

Ruwat in the Berokan Performing Arts

The Ruwat ritual within Berokan holds a deeply mystical significance, and it is not something that just anyone can perform; it is reserved for a *dalang* who is a descendant of the founder or a successor of *Berokan*. In this context, Wa Aong, the third-generation successor, took on this role after the passing of Wa Durman, the founder of the *Berokan* studio in Indramayu. Initially, the tradition was not continued by the second generation, Wa Warna, who eventually handed down the responsibility to his child, who became known by the stage name Wa Aong. *Berokan* involves the ritual of *Kirab Sawan* or the expulsion of *pageblug* (epidemics or diseases), rooted in the belief that performing ruwat can protect individuals from impending dangers or misfortunes.

Ruwat Presentation

The concept underlying the *ruwatan* ritual is based on the myth of *kamasalah* or wrongful conception, which led to the birth of Batara Kala, a consequence of improper amorous actions by the highest deity, Batara Guru. The elements of *ruwatan* include the child or person to be cleansed, typically a *sukerta* child. These children, according to traditional beliefs, are considered impure or tainted, bringing misfortune upon themselves, their families, and their surroundings, and are thus susceptible to disturbances from supernatural beings. The *dalang* is a central and crucial figure in the *ruwatan* ceremony. A *ruwatan dalang* is usually a specialist who inherits the skill

through family lineage, meaning their ability to perform as a *dalang* is passed down through generations. In the *ruwatan* ceremony, the *dalang* serves as the intermediary between the physical world and the supernatural realm. In the context of the *Berokan* ritual, Wa Aong is the *dalang* responsible for this process.

Sesajen (offerings) are essential items, often food or other objects, intended for the spirits. *Sesajen* serves as a means of establishing a connection with the inhabitants of the otherworldly realms beyond human existence. Since these realms are considered “subtle,” it is believed that only the aroma of the offerings is consumed by the spirits. As Hazeu (1979) explains, according to traditional belief, it is not the physical form of the food that is consumed, but rather its fragrance. The *sesajen* used in the *Berokan ruwatan* include white rice, coconut, incense, *kemenyan* (a type of resin), seven-coloured flowers, bitter coffee, sweet coffee, market *juanda* (assorted traditional snacks), sweet tea, bitter tea, and *udud kretek* (clove cigarettes), along with plain water. Sleeping equipment such as mats, pillows, and sheets are also part of the offerings, symbolizing the balance of physical endurance. In this tradition, young coconut symbolizes various aspects of human life and has significant meaning for human well-being. In Javanese, it is called *cengkir*, derived from the phrase *kenceng ing pikir*, symbolizing firm resolve and the hope to achieve one’s desires.

Dupa or *kemenyan* (incense) serves as a symbolic connector to spiritual matters. When burned while accompanied by prayers, it is believed that the smoke carries the prayers and wishes to the heavens. *Dupa* is a material like sticks or powder that emits a fragrant smoke when burned. The *juanda pasar* includes market snacks and bananas, symbolizing the importance of mutual support within the family, as working together makes burdens lighter. *Kembang pitu rupa* (seven types of flowers) represents help or *pitulungan*. The seven types of flowers are jasmine, *gambir* jasmine, tuberose, red rose, ylang-ylang, *kantil* (white champaca), and white rose. Bitter and sweet coffee are offered based on the belief that they are meant for the spirits of ancestors who return to visit their living relatives. Similarly, plain water, sweet tea, and bitter tea are beverages that the ancestors commonly consumed during their lifetimes. *Udud kretek* (clove cigarettes) are included as a staple item that ancestors used to smoke, offered as a sign of respect or to seek their permission. These *sesaji* (offerings) manifest the essence of human life, nature, and the supernatural world as a unified solidarity of existence. Humans offer the products of the earth they have cultivated to the gods, with the hope that Batara Kala will relinquish his food quota, ensuring harmony and cosmic balance. *Mantra* (chants) play a crucial role in the mystical elements of the *ruwatan* ceremony. During the recitation of the *mantra* by the *dalang* (puppet master), attendees are prohibited from smoking, eating, or drinking, and pregnant women must leave the location where the *ruwatan* is taking place. The *mantras* recited during the *ruwatan* ceremony can vary.

The *ruwatan* ritual procedures place full spiritual responsibility on the *dalang*. Before performing the *ruwatan*, the *dalang* usually undergoes a strict regimen, known as *nglakoni*, to ensure the smooth execution of the ritual without any obstacles. This regimen includes fasting, abstaining from sexual relations for 100 days (or at least 40 days), practicing silence (*tapa bisu*), which means not speaking from dawn until sunrise, and engaging in deep contemplation to seek inner and outer peace. The *dalang*

sleeps only once per day and night, meaning that after waking up before dawn, they must remain awake until 10:00 PM. Before and after sleeping, the *dalang* must bathe thoroughly and then go for a walk to the best of their ability. During the *ruwatan* process, the *dalang* begins by sprinkling and burning *kemenyan* (incense) while reciting *mantras* or prayers according to their beliefs. Wa Aong typically recites prayers in accordance with Islamic teachings, followed by seeking permission from the ancestors. The ritual continues with the *Berokan* performance, where the *dalang* circles the house, takes the pillow of the person being cleansed, and throws it onto the roof to be dried. On the night after the *ruwatan* ceremony, the entire family participates in *tirakatan*, a night vigil where no one sleeps, especially the parents and the person who has been cleansed. They spend the night praying to God for safety and a better life in the future. The first step in the *ruwatan* ritual process involves burning *kemenyan*, presenting the *sesajen*, and seeking permission from the ancestors.



Figure 3 and 4: Process of Ruwat
(Source: Wa Aong, 2012)

The *dalang* enters the body of the *Berokan*, circles the house, and then takes the pillow of the person who is to be cleansed. The pillow is then thrown onto the roof and left to dry. The presentation of the *ruwatan* ritual can be seen in a video, which can be accessed from the following QR code:



Figure 5: Video Process of Ruwat
(Source: Wa Aong, 2012)

Healing Process During the Ruwat

After the *Berokan* circles the house, accompanied by the sound of the *sompret* (a traditional wind instrument), it symbolically drives away the evil spirits believed to be present in the house, which are thought to cause illness in one of the family members. The *Berokan* then enters the room of the sick family member, takes their

pillow, and throws it onto the roof to dry. That night, the entire family engages in prayer and supplication to the Almighty. According to an interview with Wa Aong, after the *ruwat* process is carried out, the person who was sick typically recovers from their illness, which often includes symptoms like fever, *sawan* (a condition often related to spiritual disturbances), loss of appetite, and others. The illness is believed to be caused by a deceased family member visiting the house to ask for food or drink. By offering *sesajen* or *nyuguh* (serving food), it is believed that the ancestor will leave peacefully, according to the beliefs of the Indramayu community.



Figure 6: Recovery Process by Ruwat
(Source: Wa Aong, 2012)

Figure 6 illustrates that when a family member has been ill for several days without showing signs of recovery, an *ustad* (religious teacher) or spiritual leader visits the home. The *ustad* places their hand on the head of the sick person and recites prayers, after which they give the person a glass of water that has also been prayed over. Simultaneously, the *Berokan dalang* throws the pillow, and after about 10 minutes, the pillow is retrieved and left to dry. That night, the entire family engages in *ikhtiar* (efforts) and prays to the Creator. Typically, by the next day, the person who was ill begins to recover.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings, *ruwat* is an integral component of the *Berokan* art form. The people of Indramayu believe *ruwat* to be a ritual of self-purification, aimed at avoiding or warding off dangers and disasters, within which the *Kirab Sawan* process takes place. *Kirab Sawan* involves expelling *pageblug* symbolically by having the *Berokan* bite a pillow, which is then thrown onto the roof and left to dry. The concept underlying *ruwatan* is the myth of *kamasalah*, which led to the birth of *Batara Kala*, who is destined to devour *sukerta* children. The children or individuals who need to undergo *ruwat* are those who are believed to be the designated food for *Batara Kala*, referred to as *sukerta*. The elements of *ruwatan* consist of the *sukerta* individuals, the *dalang*, *sesajen*, and *mantras*. The *dalang* acts as the intermediary between the human world and the supernatural or spiritual realm, using offerings and *mantras* that possess mystical power. The *ruwatan* process includes offering *sesajen*, paying respect to the ancestors, taking the pillow of the person being cleansed, drying it, and concluding with an all-night vigil.

In the healing process for someone who is ill, the *dalang* begins the *ruwat* ritual with offerings as a form of respect to the ancestors. The *dalang* then enters the body of the *Berokan*, circles the house to drive away evil spirits, enters the room of the sick person, takes their pillow, and throws it onto the roof to dry. If the person is severely ill and does not recover, a *ustad* or religious leader is brought in to pray while holding the head of the sick person, reciting prayers, and giving them blessed water. The purpose of the *ruwatan* ritual in the *Berokan* performing arts is rooted in the belief among the people of Indramayu that the *Berokan* embodies a good spirit within its body or mask. This belief is associated with the *Kirab Sawan* process, where *pageblug* or disease is expelled. Therefore, the *ruwatan* ritual serves as a means of self-purification or to avoid and ward off dangers that might befall an individual.

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