

The Heroism Value in Totokng Dance at The Nurutni' Ceremony Dayak Salako Community in West Kalimantan

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Abstract

This study aims to explore and analyse the heroism values embodied in the Totokng dance, a traditional ritual performed as part of the *Nurutni'* ceremony by the Dayak Salako community in West Kalimantan. These values play a crucial role in shaping collective character and preserving cultural identity amid the pressures of globalisation and the ongoing crisis in character Education. The research is driven by the limited academic attention given to the dimension of heroism within the cultural expressions of the Dayak people, particularly in the context of rice harvest rituals. Adopting a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach, the study collected data through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and literature review. Informants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in the tradition. The findings reveal that the Totokng dance conveys heroism values such as courage, sacrifice, solidarity, responsibility, and loyalty. These values are expressed through symbolic movements, the social roles of the dancers, and the spatial design of the performance, all of which are rooted in spiritual and historical relationships. Rather than functioning solely as an aesthetic performance, the dance serves as a medium for transmitting values and as a tool for character Education grounded in local wisdom. These findings reaffirm the importance of preserving intangible cultural heritage as a key component of sustainable development and multicultural Education in Indonesia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Amid the rapid currents of globalization, local cultures, including that of the Dayak Salako indigenous community, face serious challenges in the form of eroding traditional values and the marginalization of cultural practices that have long served as the foundation of collective identity. The advancement of science and technology presents a dual impact. While it broadens access to information, it simultaneously shifts the orientation of younger generations away from spiritual and communal values toward a more pragmatic and individualistic lifestyle [1]. In the context of the Dayak Salako, this transformation has affected the continuity of customary practices such as ritual ceremonies and traditional dances, which are gradually being abandoned due to the weakened intergenerational transmission of ancestral values. Contemporary society is now often described as living in a

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post-heroic era, in which values such as courage and self-sacrifice have been displaced by individualistic ideals [2]. As a result, traditional symbols of heroism have experienced a decline in cultural significance. In this context, the preservation of intangible cultural heritage should not be viewed merely as a symbolic gesture, but rather as an active strategy for building cultural resilience. Contemporary anthropological and sociological studies emphasize that cultural expressions such as traditional dances and rituals function as symbolic spaces that embody a community's values, social structures, and spirituality [3]. However, the global flow of information has accelerated a shift in values, leading many younger individuals to perceive tradition as outdated or irrelevant. Despite these challenges, the Dayak Salako community continues to undertake deliberate efforts to preserve its customary traditions, which serve as systems of values and norms regulating daily social interactions [4]. These efforts have been realised through the transmission of indigenous knowledge, the active involvement of youth in ritual practices, and the revitalisation of sacred dances. Culturally based Education thus plays a crucial role in instilling a strong sense of identity and reinforcing the cultural integrity of the younger generation. One tangible manifestation of this cultural preservation effort is the performance of the *Nurutni'* ceremony, within which the Totokng dance holds a central and significant role. As a ritual dance, Totokng is imbued with heroism values that hold substantial potential for shaping the character of younger generations, particularly in light of the current deficit in character Education across Indonesia [5]. Preserving this dance involves not only maintaining its artistic form but also sustaining the heroism values embedded within it—such as courage, sacrifice, and loyalty to the community—which remain highly relevant as foundational elements in nation-building amid the dynamics of cultural change.

Anthropologically, the *Nurutni'* ceremony can be interpreted as an agrarian ritual that not only fulfils social functions but also serves as a symbolic mechanism for nurturing cosmological relationships between humans and spiritual forces. As Geertz explains, religion in traditional society's functions as a system of meaning that governs collective behaviour and belief systems [6]. *Nurutni'* is not merely a harvest celebration; it constitutes a sacred space for communicating with ancestral spirits and seeking blessings from nature. The Dayak Salako community believes that agricultural success is not solely the result of human labour but also a gift granted through the protection and blessings of *Awo Pamo* (ancestral spirits) and *Jubato* (God) [7]. As part of its ritual process, offerings are made to the *Tengkorak Kepala Kayau* obtained through *Ngayau*, which serve as spiritual conduits between the human world and the supernatural realm. The *Tengkorak Kepala Kayau*, or the skull of an enemy taken during the traditional Dayak headhunting ritual (*Ngayau*), is regarded as a sacred object believed to contain spiritual power. This tradition also acts as a form of cultural memory, reconstructing the community's historical connection to *Ngayau*, which has now been sublimated into symbolic reverence within a religious context. Within this ritual structure, the Totokng dance holds a central position. It is not merely an artistic expression but an integral and sacred component of the ceremony. Drawing on Turner's Theory of performativity, the Totokng dance can be understood as a form of ritual performance that activates collective memory and reinforces community solidarity during the liminal phase between planting and harvest seasons [8]. Beyond its ritual function, the Totokng dance also serves as a symbol of the cultural identity of the Dayak Salako people. This is reflected in specific elements such as floor patterns, traditional costumes, distinctive musical accompaniment, and choreographed movements that signify vigilance, courage, and social roles. The floor formations do not merely reflect social arrangements but also express cosmological principles such as balance and the life cycle. The cultural identity shaped through the Totokng dance is not solely about aesthetic representation; it also involves the transmission of values and indigenous worldviews.

In a broader context, the dance operates as a symbolic mechanism for preserving the collective narrative of the Dayak Salako community amid the cultural homogenization brought about by modernization. By maintaining the dance within both ritual spaces and public representations, the community asserts the existence and authority of its customary values as part of a resilient collective identity that resists marginalization.

The Totokng dance depicts the triumph of Dayak Salako war commanders within the tradition of *Ngayau*, a cultural practice among the Dayak people involving the act of severing enemies' heads [9]. This practice does not reflect savagery or cruelty; rather, it is deeply rooted in religious beliefs embedded within the community's cultural framework [10]. Historically, *Ngayau* did involve real violence and served specific social functions in premodern societies. The enemy's head was not merely regarded as a trophy but was believed to possess spiritual value and protective power for the community. In this context, *Ngayau* functioned as a mechanism for upholding internal social order through systems that rewarded bravery, loyalty, and communal responsibility in facing external threats. This affirms that the practice was part of a historical dynamic governed by its cultural value system, rather than a mere act of brutality. In Dayak Salako's belief, the material and spiritual worlds are deeply interconnected. The Totokng dance thus serves as both a tribute to ancestral spirits believed to protect the community and a symbolic expression of preparedness against physical and metaphysical dangers. The dance's firm and rhythmic movements reflect vigilance, courage, and self-mastery—core heroism values passed down through generations as part of the community's cultural identity. The transformation of *Ngayau* from actual warfare into symbolic ritual through the Totokng dance illustrates how the community has adapted traditional practices to remain relevant in a modern socio-cultural context, while preserving their historical and spiritual meanings. This process exemplifies the capacity of indigenous societies to sublimate past forms of violence into cultural expressions with educational, spiritual, and identity-building functions, reframing them meaningfully in contemporary settings rather than erasing their historical roots. The principles of peaceful and secure living are realised through the spirit of *Isen Mulang* (perseverance) and *Mamut Menteng* (bravery) [11]. The *Pamarani*, a protective caste, bears both physical and spiritual responsibilities: guarding the community, ensuring social harmony, and maintaining connections with supernatural forces. This reflects an understanding of heroism as a sacred and collective power. Unlike Western cultural narratives, which often associate heroism with individual achievement, Dayak heroism is grounded in a commitment to preserving collective harmony. However, in the face of globalisation and growing individualism, these spiritual values are increasingly marginalised by popular heroism narratives centred on personal success. Therefore, reinterpreting Dayak heroism as an ethical and philosophical force is essential for shaping the character of younger generations, grounding them in cultural identity and balanced values.

In recent years, various studies have examined traditional dances and rituals in Indonesia. Guntar et al. [12] investigated the value of heroism in the Caci dance of the Manggarai community, portraying it as a symbolic male duel that embodies values such as courage, perseverance, and loyalty. However, their study primarily focused on the lyrics of the accompanying songs, rather than on the movement elements or historical context. Wahyudianto [13] explored the concept of *Greget* in the Ngrema Dance of Surabaya as a representation of the fighting spirit of *Arek Surabaya*, with heroism conveyed through movement and costume symbolism that represents the figure of the warrior Cakraningrat. Meanwhile, Oktariani et al. [14] discussed the function of the *Ngensudah* ritual in the Dayak Melahui community, emphasizing social values such as cooperation and responsibility through the presence of the Bigal dance. However, they did not specifically examine heroism within its symbolic dimension. Although these studies reflect a growing interest in the values embedded in traditional cultural expressions, no academic research has specifically explored the dimension of heroism in the Totokng dance, a key element of the

Nurutni ceremony of the Dayak Salako community. The Totokng dance is not merely an artistic performance but serves as a symbolic representation of heroism rooted in the history of *Ngayau* and the community's spirituality. This lack of exploration indicates a significant gap in the literature, particularly within the context of West Kalimantan, where scholarly investigations into the symbolic values of heroism remain very limited. The urgency of this research is increasingly relevant in the current social context, where younger generations face a crisis of cultural identity, weakened character Education, and a lack of leadership figures grounded in local wisdom. The Totokng dance holds great potential as a source of heroism values such as bravery, sacrifice, and loyalty to the community, which could contribute to character Education and culturally rooted leadership development. These values align with both national and global educational visions, emphasizing the preservation of intangible cultural heritage as an integral part of identity formation. Furthermore, this research holds international relevance in line with UNESCO's agenda for cultural preservation within the framework of sustainable development. From this perspective, local cultural identity is viewed as a strategic resource that can strengthen social cohesion and community resilience [15]. Therefore, the exploration of heroism values in the Totokng dance is not only important for enriching local scholarship but also contributes meaningfully to cultural discourse at both national and global levels.

Considering the gap in the literature, the social urgency, and the potential contributions to cultural preservation and character Education, this study aims to explore and analyse the values of heroism by examining the symbolic meanings of movement, floor patterns, and historical context in the Totokng dance, as an integral part of the *Nurutni*' ceremony of the Dayak Salako community. This research is also intended to serve as a reference for younger generations in navigating the challenges of modernization, particularly in strengthening their connection to cultural identity, while addressing the academic void that has thus far overlooked the aspect of heroism in the cultural expressions of the Dayak Salako people.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at exploring and understanding the meanings that emerge from social or human phenomena [16]. Qualitative research aims to gain a profound understanding of social issues by examining how individuals construct meaning from their surroundings and how that meaning shapes their behaviour. The study is conducted in a natural setting, without any deliberate treatment or manipulation of variables [17]. The specific approach utilised is ethnography, which, from the perspective of cultural anthropology, seeks to describe and understand the culture of a group by viewing the world from their point of view [18]. In this context, the anthropological framework enables the researcher not only to observe cultural behaviour but also to explore the symbolic structures, belief systems, and social dynamics within the Dayak Salako community. This approach was chosen because it effectively explains the relationship between cultural expressions, such as the Totokng dance, and the collective values that the community upholds. Theoretically, this study is further supported by Turner's performative Theory, particularly the concepts of ritual performance and liminality, which conceptualise ritual as a transformative process through which a community experiences the strengthening of social cohesion and the articulation of collective identity. Within this framework, the Totokng dance is understood as part of the liminal phase in the *Nurutni*' ceremony, during which the community undergoes a symbolic transition between the planting and harvest seasons. The dance serves as a medium for activating collective memory, reinforcing communal solidarity, and transmitting heroism values across generations.

During fieldwork, data were collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews. Observation was conducted directly over five days during the *Nurutni*' ceremony, focusing on the dancers' expressions, community responses, and the symbolic elements

embedded in the movements of the Totokng dance. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather interpretations and deeper insights from informants recognised for their cultural authority. Four interview sessions were held with Ignasius Mito (head of Pelanjau Hamlet), Leonardus Joko (traditional practitioner), and Budiman (Totokng dancer). A semi-structured interview format was employed to allow for open exploration of the informants' experiences and interpretations [19]. This research was conducted in the customary area of Pelanjau Hamlet, Bukit Sigoler Village, Tebas Sub-district, and Sambas Regency. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes to obtain comprehensive and in-depth data. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in traditional practices, cultural knowledge, and ability to articulate the meanings of rituals. This process adhered to established research ethics, including obtaining informed consent, maintaining data confidentiality, and respecting local customs and values. Data collection was further supported by visual documentation and literature review to strengthen the field findings. The data were analysed through three main stages: data reduction, systematic presentation, and conclusion drawing. After transcribing interviews and field notes, the researcher conducted multiple readings to identify patterns, themes, and relational meanings. Analysis was performed using open coding, through which units of meaning were grouped into thematic categories, including the function of the dance, symbolic structures, social roles, and heroism values. These themes were identified based on recurring patterns and validated through source triangulation and member checking to ensure the credibility of the interpretations. The researcher acknowledges the potential for bias in qualitative research, particularly within ethnographic approaches that are inherently interpretive and subjective. To minimise this, continuous critical reflection was applied alongside triangulation of data sources and validation of interpretations with informants, ensuring the objectivity and validity of the research findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *The Nurutni' Ceremony*

The Nurutni' ceremony is a sacred tradition of the Dayak Salako community, held to welcome the first rice harvest season. Typically conducted in February over five days, the ceremony involves a series of rituals that have been passed down through generations. The procession begins with the preparation of ceremonial elements, including the performance stage, musical instruments, and offerings. It then continues with the ritual of bringing out and cleansing the Tengkorak Kepala Kayau, followed by the performance of the Totokng dance. It concludes with the mountaintop ritual (Padagi) and the Besamsam tradition. More than a mere harvest celebration, this ceremony serves as an act of reverence and a request for blessings from Jubato (the Supreme Being) and Awo Pamo (ancestral spirits). This spiritual worldview aligns with Sumardjo's perspective on the dualistic relationship between humans and nature, which ultimately returns to a singular transcendent source [20]. Such a belief is reflected in the community's conviction that the success of a harvest relies not only on human effort but also on the grace of spiritual forces. A vital element in Dayak Salako cosmology is Sumangat Padi, the rice spirit considered the source of life and thus deserving of reverence. The Nurutni' ceremony becomes a medium for sustaining harmony among humans, nature, and the supernatural realm. The Tengkorak Kepala Kayau also holds a central position as a sacred ancestral relic that receives offerings through the Totokng dance. The ceremony is not only symbolic but is also believed to protect from misfortunes, locally known as Boo. Through devout performance of this ritual, the community believes they receive blessings while also maintaining cosmic balance. This notion aligns with the Mandala concept, which illustrates the synergy between life elements, forming unity and harmony [21]. Similar ritual patterns can be found in the Reba tradition of the Ngada people, which also reflects the common practice of honouring spiritual and ancestral forces through harvest ceremonies [22]. However, the Nurutni' ceremony presents a distinctive character

through the presence of *Tengkorak Kepala Kayau* and *Sumangat Padi* as spiritual entities, which are not found in other harvest rituals.

Amidst the currents of globalization and modernization, the community's continued adherence to these practices demonstrates cultural resilience. It serves as a form of resistance against the erosion of its local identity. Rituals such as the *Nurutni'* ceremony and the *Totokng* dance function as mechanisms for reproducing customary values within an ever-changing social context. By preserving and revitalizing these practices, the Dayak Salako community strengthens social solidarity and reaffirms its collective cultural values. Heroic virtues such as courage, responsibility, and sacrifice, embodied in the *Totokng* dance, continue to hold a central role within the community's social structure. While their forms of expression may have evolved, values such as *Mamut Menteng* (bravery) and *Isen Mulang* (perseverance) remain alive through practices such as cooperation, traditional leadership, and environmental stewardship. The *Totokng* dance not only serves as a visual symbol of heroism but also acts as a space for enacting social roles, where the younger generation learns to perform their functions within the customary communal structure. This ritual further functions as a mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of social roles. The role of *Pamarani* as protector is not merely symbolic; it represents a customary leadership system that continues to be respected today. Through participation in the ceremony, young people are taught to understand their responsibilities as inheritors of ancestral values and as guardians of spiritual balance. In this way, the *Nurutni'* ceremony not only preserves cultural heritage but also actively shapes a collective character that remains relevant in contemporary contexts.

3.2. The *Totokng* Dance

The *Totokng* dance is a ritual performance that plays a central role in the *Nurutni* ceremony of the Dayak Salako community. This dance is also known within the Dayak Kanayatn tradition, as explored by Imanisa et al. [23] in the context of the *Notokng* customary ceremony. Although both versions share a common historical root in the *Ngayau* tradition, there are notable differences in their presentation. A distinct feature of the Salako version lies in the dancer's gesture of lifting the *tengkorak kepala kayau*, a ritual element absent from the Kanayatn version. Originating from *Ngayau*, a traditional Dayak warfare practice, the *Totokng* dance was initially a powerful manifestation of valour and martial excellence among Dayak Salako warriors. Over time, this physical expression of heroism evolved into a cultural performance that preserves spiritual and social values such as bravery, resilience, and honour. The *Ngayau* tradition once served as a measure of individual courage and strength in battle [24], with the severed enemy head regarded as a spiritual object that conferred status and power, especially when taken from high-ranking adversaries. These heads were believed to embody *Sumangat* (spiritual energy), capable of providing protection and empowering their possessors, thus becoming a sacred component in the Dayak Salako's value system. The formal end of *Ngayau* was marked by the enactment of the Tumbang Anoi Peace Agreement in 1894 [25]. However, rather than eliminating violent expression, the community transformed it into a symbolic form through cultural performance. Within Turner's ritual Theory, particularly the concepts of ritual performance and liminality, the *Totokng* dance can be understood as a liminal expression in which historical violence is sublimated into a socially accepted and spiritually meaningful narrative of heroism [9]. In this process, the ritual serves not only as a cultural artefact but also as a transformative space that reinforces social cohesion, constructs collective identity, and transmits values such as courage, endurance, and honour across generations [26]. This kind of transformation is not unique. Similar processes can be observed in other cultures, such as the *haka* of the Māori, which originated as a war dance but has evolved into a modern representation of identity, solidarity, and spiritual strength [27]. In Bali, the *Baris* dance, which once embodied martial tradition, has likewise shifted into a religious offering imbued with

aesthetic and spiritual meaning [28]. These comparisons indicate that the ritualization of violence into heroism symbolism is a widespread cultural mechanism that allows societies to retain core values without maintaining their violent forms. In this light, the Totokng dance stands not only as a witness to the history of warfare but also as a contemporary form of cultural resilience that reconciles a violent legacy with the ethical consciousness of a modern collective.

Since the enactment of the Tumbang Anoi Peace Agreement, the practice of *Ngayau* has ceased to be carried out by Dayak communities. However, the Totokng dance continues to be preserved as an essential part of customary rituals. In the past, warriors who returned from *Ngayau* carrying human heads as proof of their victory were welcomed as honoured guests and regarded as heroes within their communities [29]. The Totokng dance was performed not only to welcome these victorious warriors but also as an expression of gratitude to *Jubato* (God), believed to have granted them strength and protection during the raid. Over time, the function of the Totokng dance shifted from celebrating returning warriors to serving as a ritual act of care and offering to the *tengkorak kepala kayau*. The Dayak Salako believe that offering sustenance to the *tengkorak kepala kayau* plays a vital role in maintaining harmony between nature, humanity, and the spiritual world. By performing this ritual, they seek protection and blessings, particularly for the success of their agricultural endeavours and the well-being of their community. As a form of reverence, these heads must be cared for across seven generations, by ancestral tradition. Today, the Totokng dance is no longer associated with warfare but has assumed a spiritual role, symbolizing reverence for the ancestors and the balance between the natural and supernatural realms. Nevertheless, the heroism values once embodied in the *Ngayau* tradition still resonate within the dance. Traditional dances from other regions also reflect heroic values, such as the concept of *Greget* in the Ngrema dance from Surabaya, which emphasises the dancer's interpretive strength in conveying struggle [13], or the patriotic and nationalist spirit expressed in the Badrong dance from *Ing Cilegon* [30]. Still, the Totokng dance holds a distinct position. Its expression of courage, resilience, and pride is not merely artistic but deeply rooted in the historical *Ngayau* tradition, which once formed part of the Dayak social and spiritual system. With every performance, the spirit of heroism continues to live on and is internalized as part of a cultural identity passed down through generations. This uniqueness makes the Totokng dance not just a representation of heroism, but a medium for preserving indigenous values firmly rooted in the cosmology and collective memory of the Dayak Salako people in West Kalimantan.

As a ritual dance, the Totokng dance is governed by specific rules that the Dayak Salako community must strictly observe. Not everyone is permitted to perform this dance; only individuals directly descended from the ancestral lineage of the *Panglima Kayau* are allowed to do so. This restriction is closely tied to the use of the *tengkorak kepala kayau* in the performance, which is believed to function correctly only when placed on the head of a dancer with a legitimate bloodline connection. This belief is rooted in the community's cosmology, wherein the *tengkorak kepala kayau* possesses magical power linked to a specific ancestral lineage. From the perspective of social role Theory, such structures reflect how individual roles and status within traditional communities are defined by inherited expectations, legitimized through both cultural and spiritual authority. In the context of the Totokng dance, social roles are not the result of personal choice but represent a form of



Figure 1. Dancers of the Totokng Dance
[Source: Slamet, 2024]

symbolic legacy that is institutionally and spiritually sacralized. This is similar to observations in the *Mullu Kuruma* community, which preserves gender roles and ritual obligations despite the influence of modern cultural shifts [31]. The dance is performed by seven dancers, consisting of one male *Panglima Kayau* and six female *Anak Kayau*. This division reveals a gender-based role structure, where the male occupies the authoritative position as the ritual leader. At the same time, the females serve as spiritual companions who reinforce the sacred values of the rite. This aligns with Hogan and Liddell's findings [32], which emphasize that women in Indigenous communities often serve as cultural custodians and transmitters of spiritual knowledge, playing a vital role in intergenerational socialization and the preservation of collective identity. Before the performance begins, the *Panglima Kayau* recites a prayer to request permission from the spirit residing in the *tengkorak kepala kayau*, ensuring that the ritual proceeds smoothly and without disturbance. This ritual also affirms the role of the *Panglima Kayau* as a mediator between the human world and the spiritual realm—a sacred position grounded not only in gender but also in social and spiritual legitimacy. This indicates that social roles in traditional societies are symbolic and inherently carry dimensions of power. As Pierre Bourdieu explains, symbolic capital, such as honour and spiritual recognition, functions as a legitimized source of power embedded within traditional social structures [33]. Following the invocation, all dancers simultaneously sprinkle yellow rice toward the *tengkorak kepala kayau* as a symbolic act of summoning *Sumangat*, the ancestral spirit believed to dwell within [34]. This initial ritual embodies deep respect for ancestral tradition and reflects the Dayak Salako's belief in the balance between the visible and invisible worlds. Furthermore, it highlights that roles within the dance are not merely cultural constructs, but are performed as sacred duties passed down from one generation to the next.

The *tengkorak kepala kayau* is placed on an *apar*, a ceremonial vessel used to present offerings alongside other ritual items. Among these offerings are *tumpi*, a traditional Dayak cake made from glutinous rice flour and palm sugar; *antek*, a set of ritual ingredients consisting of betel leaves, lime, areca nut, gambier, and tobacco; *poe'*, a mixture of rice and coconut milk cooked in bamboo symbolizing fertility and blessing; *arak*, an alcoholic beverage fermented from coconut used to honor ancestral spirits; coconut oil, symbolizing spiritual purification and protection; and yellow rice, signifying purity and prosperity. The most sacred element is



Figure 2. The Offerings in the Totokng Dance.

[Source: Slamet, 2024]

seven stalks of rice, which represent life, abundance, and the intimate relationship between humans and nature. In this context, offerings are not merely material gifts but acts of performative efficacy—rituals that enact real effects in the world through symbols and symbolic action. Offerings in the Totokng dance activate the spiritual dimension by connecting the human and spirit realms through two semiotic mechanisms: indexicality and iconicity. Indexically, the ritual elements—especially the smoke generated by burning or evaporating tobacco, *arak*, and coconut oil—serve as channels for spiritual communication. As in many cultural traditions, smoke functions as a sign of presence, bridging the profane and sacred worlds and connecting humans to their ancestors (*Awo Pamo*). This is comparable to tobacco rituals among Indigenous American groups such as the Lakota, where smoke serves as a medium for prayer and spiritual dialogue with ancestral spirits and natural guardians [35]. Iconically, the offerings visually represent the community's cultural hopes and values. The seven stalks of rice, as the central component of the offering, symbolically embody fertility, abundance, and the ecological interdependence between humans and

nature. These elements are not mere aesthetic symbols; they are believed to carry spiritual energy capable of invoking well-being. This is similar to Hindu-Balinese offerings, such as *banten saiban* and *canang sari*, in which elements like rice, flowers, and coconut not only reflect cosmic harmony but also actively invoke spiritual balance between *Sekala* (the material world) and *Niskala* (the spiritual world) [6]. Therefore, the offerings in the Totokng dance are not merely ceremonial accessories but active ritual instruments possessing symbolic and spiritual power. In *Tambiah's* framework, such offerings do not merely represent belief; they perform relational work: activating blessings, negotiating spiritual reciprocity, and reinforcing the moral and cultural structure of the Dayak Salako community.

3.3. The movements of the Totokng Dance

A. *Nyamboh*

The *Nyamboh* movement in the Totokng dance belongs to the category of meaningful gestures, signifying not only reverence for ancestral spirits but also functioning to invoke the *Sumangat*, the spiritual essence believed to reside within the *Tengkorak Kepala Kayau*. The gesture is performed with the arms extended forward in a prayer-like posture, followed by an inward rotation of the palms as if drawing something in, accompanied by a lowering of the body and alternating footwork supported by the heels. This movement is carried out in unison by the *Panglima Kayau* and the *Anak Kayau* in a horizontal formation, producing a harmonious and symbolically charged visual within the ritual context. *Nyamboh* constitutes a liminal experience, a symbolic passage in which spiritual and social values are transformed through embodied action [8]. The gesture functions as a dominant symbol, mediating between the material world and the spiritual realm while simultaneously affirming the dancer's social position within the community structure. As a multivocal symbol, it conveys both homage to *Jubato* (God) and a reaffirmation of heroism, identity and moral values rooted in Dayak Salako cosmology. Moreover, it reinforces communal solidarity and serves as a performative arena for the renewal of collective social ethics. The *nyamboh* gesture aligns with the initiation phase of the universal heroism narrative—a symbolic threshold where the hero engages with spiritual forces and returns transformed, bearing knowledge and strength that revitalizes the community [36]. In this ritual context, both *Panglima Kayau* and *Anak Kayau* embody not merely historical actors but cultural hero archetypes, whose actions perpetuate ancestral values within the living structure of tradition. Aligned with Farnell's concept of embodied knowledge [37], *Nyamboh* represents a form of non-verbal cultural transmission. Through bodily repetition imbued with spiritual and social significance, knowledge of leadership, honour, and collective responsibility is transmitted. In the Dayak Salako worldview, this knowledge is not merely spoken; it is performed. The *Nyamboh* movement thus becomes a symbolic act that reaffirms the dynamic relationship between humans, ancestors, and the sacred realm, while simultaneously regenerating the moral framework that sustains collective identity.



Figure 3. The *Nyamboh* Movement in the Totokng Dance
[Source: Slamet, 2024]

B. *Binaul Menyula'*

The *Binaul Menyula'* movement is a type of meaningful gesture that symbolizes an eagle soaring through the sky, gracefully flapping its wings with alertness and poise. In the Dayak Salako worldview, the eagle is regarded as a sacred animal, believed to convey omens of danger and embody vigilance, courage, and the leadership qualities of a protector. This movement is performed by the *Anak Kayau*, who circle the *Panglima Kayau*, mimicking an eagle shrivelling its prey. With arms extended and moving rhythmically from side to side, a lowered body posture, and agile footwork, the dancers evoke a symbolic image of readiness and active guardianship. This gesture carries a symbolic function within the process of status transformation and role redefinition. Unlike *Nyamboh*, which emphasizes invocation and submission to ancestral spirits, *Binaul Menyula'* represents the transformative phase of ritual, wherein the *Anak Kayau* transition from ordinary roles to those of spiritual protectors, adopting the eagle's attributes of leadership, sharpness, and awareness. Turner posits that during the liminal phase, symbols used in ritual serve as mediums of transformation, wherein participants relinquish their prior identities and enter a state of becoming, negotiating new social meanings [8]. Through *Binaul Menyula'*, the *Anak Kayau* do not merely perform choreographed movements; they embody their emergence as stewards of communal safety, reflecting a shift from recipients of cultural values to bearers of collective responsibility. The eagle symbolism also reflects what Turner calls anti-structure—a temporary suspension of rigid social norms that allows ritual participants to enter a space of fluid identity, enabling the redefinition and renewal of their roles within the community. The movement's centripetal orientation around the *Panglima Kayau* emphasizes the Locus of spiritual and social power, positioning the dance not merely as a symbolic expression but as a performative arena in which heroism values are reaffirmed and transmitted across generations. Thus, *Binaul menyula'* not only conveys the meaning of vigilance and spiritual readiness but also functions as a pivotal moment within a ritual of social and spiritual transformation, enacted collectively through symbolic performance.



Figure 4. The *Binaul Menyula'* Movement in the Totokng Dance
[Source: Slamet, 2024]

C. *Ngayau*

The *Ngayau* movement in the Totokng dance serves as a symbolic expression representing the triumph of the *Panglima Kayau* upon returning from battle, bringing the *tengkorak kepala kayau* as a trophy of victory. This movement is characterized by high intensity, wide and asymmetrical gestures, and dynamic body rotation, depicting both physical dominance and the spiritual power gained through combat. The *tengkorak kepala kayau* is alternately held in the right and left hands while the dancer spins counter to the *Anak Kayau*, eventually transitioning into synchronized motion. This contrast in movement direction reflects a liminal moment—a threshold of tension between life and



Figure 5. The *Ngayau* Movement in the Totokng Dance
[Source: Slamet, 2024]

death, individuality and collectivity—resolved through a synthesis of motion that symbolizes the restoration of social harmony [8]. Furthermore, from the perspective of gesture dialectics, the *Ngayau* movement embodies a complex interplay of meanings. On the one hand, it celebrates a heroic victory; on the other, it implies a reflective acknowledgement of the violence endured. Streak asserts that gestures are not fixed expressions but rather negotiated fields in which bodily experience, collective memory, and cultural meaning converge. In this context, the bowed body and forceful stomps are not merely assertions of strength but tributes to the sacrifice embedded in the *Ngayau* tradition. These gestures also activate an emotionally charged memory that oscillates between glory and mourning [38]. This dialectic creates a gestural space that does not settle into a single interpretation but functions as a transformative realm uniting strength and vulnerability. The synthesis of these movements not only resolves symbolic conflict but also reconstitutes collective identity. What begins as an individual act by the *Panglima* evolves into a shared choreography that builds communal consciousness within Dayak Salako society. In Turner's terms, the act of carrying the skull becomes more than a symbol of supremacy; it is a form of spiritual legitimacy, received and celebrated communally, reaffirming shared respect for courage, historical memory, and collective solidarity. Thus, the *Ngayau* movement in the Totokng dance is not merely a narrative of triumph but a sacred and dialectical process that regenerates cultural identity through symbolic and performative synthesis.

D. *Nyuampe*

The *nyuampe* movement in the Totokng dance is a meaningful gesture performed by the *Anak Kayau* to symbolize victory, expressed through the act of lifting the *Tengkorak Kepala Kayau*. This gesture involves crisscrossed footwork that opens and closes in alternating directions, creating a dynamic yet symbolically rich rhythmic pattern. This motion reflects the inherent duality within the narrative of heroism: between life and death, friend and foe, triumph and sacrifice. In the context of Turner's ritual Theory, such patterns can be understood as dominant symbols that do not merely reflect social conditions but actively represent the tension between opposing cultural values [8]. The crossing and alternating movements signify that victory is never singular or absolute; rather, it emerges through a complex process of symbolic conflict and reconciliation. Turner emphasizes that within the liminal phase of ritual, participants undergo a suspension of their previous identity, navigating ambiguity before being reintegrated into a renewed social structure. In this movement, the *Anak Kayau* assumes a transformative role, embodying the reconciliation of binary values and actualizing the inherited spirit of heroism. The positioning of the hands parallel to the ears, with inward-turning palms, conveys a reflective dimension—a gesture of accepting the moral and spiritual responsibilities that accompany victory. The repetitive shifting of the feet from right to left suggests readiness, adaptability, and vigilance, constructing a narrative of heroism not just in conquest, but also in consciousness, in knowing the weight and consequences of struggle. In this sense, the *nyuampe* gesture becomes a space of articulation for paradoxical yet mutually reinforcing values of heroism: courage and caution, glory and humility. Thus, *Nyuampe* does not simply affirm victory as an endpoint but marks a crucial phase in the transformation of social and spiritual identity through collective ritual performance.



Figure 6. The *Nyuampe* Movement in the Totokng Dance
[Source: Slamet, 2024]

3.4. Design of the Totokng Dance Floor

A. Horizontal Floor Design

In the context of the Totokng dance, the horizontal floor pattern appears in the *nyamboh* movement. Although visually simple, the linear pattern formed on the dance floor holds profound symbolic meaning within the Dayak Salako tradition. The straight or horizontal line is regarded as a symbol of reciprocal relationships among humans and a representation of correlative interconnectedness between individuals [39]. It signifies equality and balance within the community's social structure. Here, the horizontal movement pattern is not merely an aesthetic formation but an expression of a collective social structure that emphasizes solidarity, shared responsibility, and communal harmony. The synchronized execution of the *nyamboh* gesture by the *Panglima Kayau* and the *Anak Kayau* reflects not only harmony but also the affirmation of collective roles in upholding cultural and spiritual values within the community. A study by Duche-Pérez and Mami-Daza [40] reveals that in indigenous communities such as the Uchumiri in Peru, movement patterns in ritual dances serve to articulate social systems, power relations, and collective identities institutionalized through shared embodied action. Similarly, the use of straight and parallel lines in Totokng signals that every individual—regardless of gender or lineage—holds an equal position and responsibility in maintaining the balance between the physical and spiritual worlds. In this context, the horizontal floor design serves as a visual representation of a social system that rejects vertical dominance and instead upholds horizontal power, emphasizing the power of cooperation, communality, and collective strength in practicing shared heroism values. As noted by Finnegan [41], collective dancing in indigenous communities is not merely an aesthetic performance but also a tool for distributing social power, affirming that authority can be accessed and shared through synchronized movement rather than hierarchical control. The horizontal formation in the Totokng dance thus reflects a social structure grounded in equilibrium, solidarity, and collective responsibility—all of which are integral to the living heroism spirit embedded in the Dayak Salako cultural tradition.

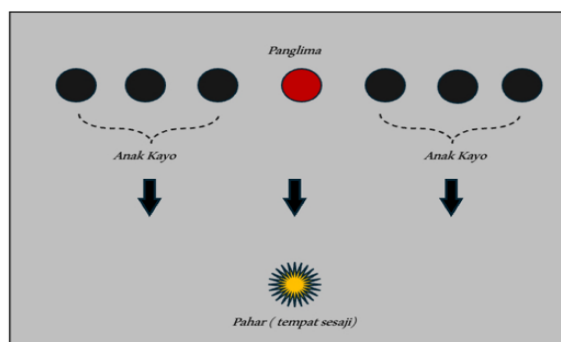


Figure 7. Horizontal Floor Design in the Totokng dance
[Source: Slamet, 2024]

B. Circular Floor Design

The circular floor design in the Totokng dance emerges during the *binaul menyula'*, *ngayau*, and *nyuampe* movements, formed as the *Anak Kayau* move in orbit around the *Panglima Kayau*, who stands at the centre. This circular formation carries profound symbolic meaning, representing the social structure of the Dayak Salako community, in which the traditional leader serves as the core of collective strength. At the same time, the surrounding members act as guardians of cultural values, identity, and solidarity. Philosophically, the circular pattern resonates with the concept of the Mandala, where the centre symbolizes

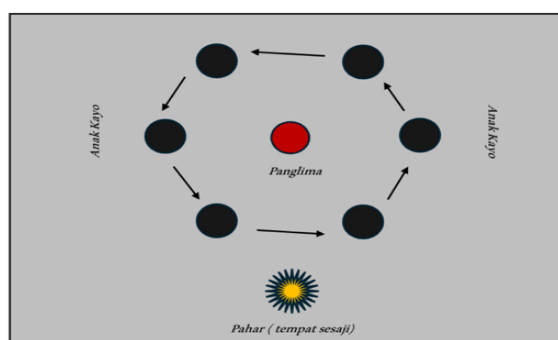


Figure 8. Circular Floor Design in the Totokng dance
[Source: Slamet, 2024]

spiritual power and integration, and the circular movement expresses interconnectedness among individuals [42]. The circular formation transforms an ordinary space into a living ritual space, reorganizing power relations and solidarity through symbolically centered collective participation. In the Totokng dance, the *Panglima Kayau* at the centre embodies not only physical leadership but also spiritual authority, while the *Anak Kayau* forming a circle around him reflect loyalty, vigilance, and inherited honour. Research by Sahnir [43] on the Molulo dance in Southeast Sulawesi also illustrates that circular patterns in traditional dances are deeply linked to collective ethics of protection, unity, and indigenous social structures embedded in local philosophies. The circular formation in Totokng affirms both social positioning and heroism values as elements of collective consciousness. It reveals that power is not solely centralized but dispersed through the encircling movement of solidarity, shaping a social system grounded in courage, loyalty, and shared responsibility.

3.5. The Value of Heroism in the Totokng Dance

A. Courage

Courage in the Totokng dance is embodied in the figure of the *Panglima Kayau*, who serves as the *Pamarani*, or war leader and protector of the community. In Dayak Salako culture, this figure is not merely depicted as an individual hero but as a collective representation of moral fortitude and spiritual preparedness in the face of threats. The dance's firm, upright, and dynamic movements—especially the forceful stomping—serve as visual markers of bravery, grounded in a sociocultural context that ties individual actions to the collective norm of maintaining honor and communal balance. The *Ngayau* movement itself symbolizes bravery and is echoed in other Dayak rituals, such as the *Pesta Dalok* of the *Dayak Uud Danum*, where human relationships and the connection to the supreme being *Tahala'* are constructed symbolically as nodes of spiritual and collective strength [44]. In this framework, courage is not solely an individual act but a form of social obedience to customary values and cosmological order. In Dayak tradition, bravery is intersubjective, emerging from communal responsibility rather than personal impulse. This interpretation of ritual bravery invites critical reflection on the shifting values that globalization has induced. In modern life, where individual freedom is emphasized, courage is no longer tied solely to service to the community but also to the capacity for autonomous decision-making under conditions of uncertainty and complexity. The spirit of *Isen Mulang* (never retreat) and *Mamut Menteng* (bold courage), as conveyed in the Totokng dance, may be reinterpreted as principles of mental resilience for facing social pressures, economic challenges, and cultural identity crises in the contemporary era. Such values remain highly relevant within the Dayak Salako's educational and social systems. Bravery is not merely taught as a cultural legacy but applied as a foundational principle in shaping a younger generation that is resilient, confident, and morally responsible. For instance, conflict resolution strategies within the community are grounded not only in rational negotiation but also in moral courage—the willingness to confront tensions openly and with dignity. However, the transmission of these values to younger generations encounters challenges, particularly due to shifting meanings and contexts. In a society increasingly influenced by modern individualism, the concept of courage as a collective responsibility risks being dislocated if not supported by educational mechanisms and value reinforcement through cultural media, such as the Totokng dance. In this framework, courage retains its essence. However, it is continually renewed as a dynamic value that sustains identity and community resilience for the Dayak Salako in an ever-changing world.

B. Sacrifice

Sacrifice in the Totokng dance is embodied in the figure of the *Panglima Kayau*, who assumes the role of *Pamarani* with a readiness to risk his life for the safety of the community.

However, this sacrifice is not carried out individually but rather as a collective and distributed responsibility. The role of the Anak Kayau as companions to the Panglima emphasizes that struggle, within the Dayak Salako cultural framework, is a shared duty. Movements depicting the Anak Kayau supporting, reinforcing, and protecting the Panglima reflect a collaborative and functional form of sacrifice aimed at achieving collective success. Nevertheless, it is important to critically examine the power structures embedded within the narrative of sacrifice. The central position of the Panglima, who receives heroism legitimacy and symbolic elevation, tends to reinforce patriarchal values, where social and spiritual status is predominantly centered on dominant masculine figures. Meanwhile, although the Anak Kayau also participate in the sacrifice, they are often relegated to complementary roles without equal recognition in the social hierarchy. This illustrates a symbolic distribution of roles that is not always equitable, inviting reflection on how leadership and social recognition are constructed through performative representation. The value of sacrifice in this context is also found in other ritual dances, such as *Lang Nginang* of the Dayak Mualang, which emphasizes spiritual and physical sacrifice for the protection of the community [45]. Such values illustrate that, in Dayak belief systems, sacrifice is a form of spiritual devotion that reinforces solidarity and collective resilience. In contemporary social contexts, sacrifice remains a foundational element of the Dayak Salako community's endurance. Economically, the willingness to share harvests and collaborate in resource management reflects this value. In traditional politics, sacrifice is manifested through decision-making that prioritizes communal welfare over personal ambition. The value is also instilled in local Education systems as a character principle: that communal success outweighs individual achievement. Thus, sacrifice not only reinforces past cultural structures but also serves as a moral resource for confronting modern challenges with a collective spirit and resilience.

C. Loyalty

Loyalty in the Totokng dance is reflected through the harmonious movements between the Panglima Kayau and the Anak Kayau, who not only perform synchronized choreography but also strengthen one another to form a unified symbolic entity. This relationship is not merely an aesthetic expression but represents a social system rooted in trust, responsibility, and collective loyalty. In Dayak Salako tradition, as also observed in the *Besamsam* ritual, loyalty toward a leader is not about submission to authority. However, it is grounded in an unwritten social contract—a reciprocal bond between a responsible leader and devoted followers [46]. From the perspective of social contract Theory, this relationship illustrates a form of authority that is not autocratic but dialogical. The Panglima Kayau earns legitimacy not only through his position but also through his ability to safeguard the community and uphold shared values. Meanwhile, the Anak Kayau demonstrate loyalty not as passive subordinates but as active participants in sustaining social harmony. This shows that, within the Dayak community, loyalty is not an instrument of domination but the foundation of trust and stability. However, in a modern context characterized by shifting values and increasing individual autonomy, the meaning of loyalty is transforming. Younger generations tend to seek more egalitarian and transparent relationships, not merely symbolic devotion. While loyalty continues to be taught as a cultural inheritance, its implementation has become more contextualized, manifested through social responsibility, cross-role solidarity, and commitment to collective values rather than blind obedience to authoritative figures. In this regard, the Totokng dance remains relevant as an educational and cultural medium, conveying loyalty as a dynamic value that continues to adapt to the realities and needs of contemporary life.

D. Solidarity

Solidarity in the Totokng dance is visibly expressed through horizontal and circular floor patterns, which symbolize equality, cooperation, and collective protection. The horizontal formation reflects reciprocal relationships among individuals, while the circular arrangement positions the *Panglima Kayau* at the centre of the community, serving as a symbol of protection and unity. Within the framework of social cohesion Theory, this expression of solidarity represents what Durkheim terms *collective consciousness*—a system of shared values and beliefs that maintains the moral and social unity of traditional society [47]. However, solidarity in Totokng is not merely a symbolic mechanism. In the context of Dayak Salako society, it also functions as social infrastructure. Through participation in dance and ritual, the community constructs a social space that reinforces interconnection and collective resilience. In this sense, the Totokng dance acts as a form of cultural infrastructure that unifies the community in facing external pressures such as cultural erosion, economic challenges, and intergenerational shifts [48]. This value of solidarity also serves an educational function for younger generations. Through active involvement and internalization of the values embedded in the dance, youth inherit not only a traditional art form but also a deep understanding of the importance of unity and mutual support in social life. Solidarity in Totokng thus stands as a moral and social foundation that is continually renewed in response to the rapidly changing world.

E. Responsibility

Responsibility in the Totokng dance is embodied not only in the presence of the *Panglima Kayau* and *Anak Kayau* as main performers but also reflects a deeper philosophy regarding their role as part of the *Pamarani*—the protectors of the community on both physical and spiritual levels. This responsibility encompasses safeguarding the people from external threats as well as maintaining balance between humans, nature, and the spirit world. The movements in this dance are not merely aesthetic forms but symbolic actions carrying social and spiritual consequences, as also evident in the *Babukung* ritual, where ritual actors bear the moral consequences of their symbolic acts [49]. In this context, the notion of collective responsibility becomes central. Aligned with the cultural ecology approach, the Dayak Salako community views the human-nature relationship as a system of interdependence that must be preserved collectively. Responsibility for the forest, water sources, and cultural heritage is not imposed solely on individuals, but is carried communally through customary mechanisms and intergenerational participation [50]. Here, the Totokng dance functions as an educational medium to instill ecological and social responsibility from an early age. From a gender perspective, responsibility in Dayak culture is not strictly dichotomous. While the role of *Panglima Kayau* is performed in a masculine manner, women hold crucial responsibilities in preserving cultural values, managing the spiritual domains of the household, and transmitting indigenous knowledge. This reflects Judith Butler's Theory of gender performativity [51], which posits that gender roles are socially and culturally constructed rather than biologically determined. In the Dayak context, responsibility is functionally distributed, with both men and women performing complementary roles according to social position and community needs, highlighting a complementary rather than hierarchical gender relation. Such forms of responsibility contribute to community resilience in the face of modern challenges, including environmental degradation, cultural disruption, and shifting generational values. The values of responsibility embodied in the Totokng dance remain relevant not only for governing social relations but also for cultivating moral and ecological awareness that is adaptive to contemporary contexts. In this sense, responsibility in Dayak Salako culture serves as a bridge between spirituality, social structure, and cultural sustainability.

4. CONCLUSION

The Totokng dance represents a cultural expression of the Dayak Salako people that is not only rich in aesthetic value but also deeply embedded with complex dimensions of heroism. Values such as courage, sacrifice, loyalty, solidarity, and responsibility are manifested through movement structures, floor formations, spiritual symbolism, and the social relationships between the Panglima Kayau and Anak Kayau. These findings reveal that the Totokng dance serves not only as an art performance but also as a transgenerational mechanism for transmitting values, cultivating character, and maintaining balance among humans, nature, and the spirit world. However, such transmission is not linear. In the current context of increasing exposure to globalization, modernization, and digital media, tensions emerge between traditional values and the new frameworks internalized by younger generations. Although the Totokng dance remains respected within ritual contexts, not all youth perceive it as part of their personal or moral identity. Some consider it a sacred relic of the past, yet one that remains largely irrelevant today. This shift indicates a change in cultural reception, where heroism values are not wholly absorbed but renegotiated through encounters with modern life.

The social implications of these values include the formation of leadership structures rooted in responsibility and collectivity, the strengthening of solidarity in times of crisis, and the preservation of spiritual and ecological ethics—an especially urgent concern amid ongoing environmental degradation. Psychologically, these values underpin the construction of a resilient and meaningful community identity in the face of cultural disorientation. Nonetheless, the preservation of these values faces significant challenges, such as youth migration to urban areas, generational knowledge gaps, and the declining use of local languages and cultural symbols in everyday life. Preserving the Totokng dance should not be interpreted as a rejection of modernity but rather as an effort to negotiate local identity within a continuously evolving world. This practice can coexist with modern values, provided there is an inclusive dialogical space between elders and younger generations. Thus, this study not only enriches the understanding of heroism values within Dayak Salako culture but also makes a meaningful contribution to discourses on the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, character Education based on local wisdom, and community strategies for adapting to global pressures.

This research has certain limitations, particularly regarding sample size and the qualitative approach, which is inherently susceptible to interpretive subjectivity. Therefore, the generalization of findings should be approached with caution. Future studies are recommended to adopt longitudinal or comparative research designs across Dayak sub-ethnic groups to explore the dynamics of cultural value transformations more deeply and within broader contextual frameworks.

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