

# The Changing Formation of *Guel* Dance in Gayo, Aceh, Indonesia

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**Abstract**—*Guel* dance is one of the dance performances that comes from the Gayo tribe of Central Aceh. The purpose of this study is to documenting in written text about the transformation of the *Guel* dance performance to the *Munalo* Dance. This research departs from the interest of researchers in making *Guel* Dance as the focus of research because it is considered unique and different from the dance performances that exist among Acehnese people. The background that became the idea of *Guel* Dance, as the identity of the glorious memories of Gayo people of the Linge Empire, is different from others dance performances in Aceh, which in general aims to preach Islamic teachings such as *Seudati* Dance and *Laweut* Dance. Researchers emphasize the analysis of *Guel* Dance performances on the changes in its form and structure of its presentation, both in textual and contextual form. The paradigm used is qualitative with descriptive method of analysis and multidisciplinary approach using Ethnocoerology Theory as grand theory. The results of this study show that the form of *Guel* dance performance is a paired dance that changed into *Munalo* Dance with a form of group dance. *Guel* dance develops among *Gayo* people in nobility category called elite culture and Dance *Munalo* develops among other Acehnese society called popular art.

**Keywords**—*dance; Guel; Gayo tribe*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Culture can be seen as a characteristics of a movement environment that function to channel or constrain its development and that defines what behaviors are legitimate and acceptable [1]. Culture is defined as a communities action which has uniqueness and perhaps will not be found in other communities. The existence of dancing is more work on ritual context which connects human and the Creator. The ritual is not only from the forms, but also it is looked from the emotional believe or the people belief system, such as the belief system of people in Aceh province.

States that Aceh province is populated by different race and live in harmony, peace and unite in Islam [2]. As mentioned in Gayo's tradition norms, as stated in Gayonese Language, "*Agama urum edet lagu zet urum sipet*", "*Edet ken peger agama ken senuwen*", "*turuni edet ari Petuwe merhum, turun agama ari Cik Serule*" which means Islam and *Gayo's* tradition seems like a substance and the nature, *Gayo's* tradition as a hedge while Islam as a plant, the culture things

are coordinated under governments and the religion things are coordinated under priests [3].

*Guel* in Gayo language knows as "sound" defines as one of Gayo's tradition heritage which must be developed, preserved, and cared. *Guel* dance was born from a history about *Kerajaan Linge* in Gayo predicted occurred in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. *Sengeda* history and *bener Meria* happened in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Kingdom under the command of the 12<sup>th</sup> Sulthan Alaidin Ri'ayat Syah al-Qahhar (945-979 H or 1539/1571 M) [4]. The white elephant is reincarnation of a man named Bener Meria.

A local actor, Ibrahim Kadir states that the development of *Guel* dancing since 1903-2013 or started from 1903 until 1945, *Guel* dancing is a local dancing which means the socialization for the Gayonese people around is through the formal ceremony, such as a king coronation, a headman coronation, and becomes an obligation ceremony in wedding for the king family [5]. Further, in 1950-2013 continue until 2016, *Guel* dancing is coming into art performance such as welcoming ceremony for official guess and become a part of marriage culture ceremony for Gayonese.

The change of forms, the movements and the music used in 1980s for marriage ceremony in Gayonese, *Guel* dancing changes the name which taken from one of marriage culture part of Gayonese, known as *Munalo*. *Munalo* is taking a groom to the decided place [6].

## II. METHOD

The paradigm used in this study is qualitative paradigm with descriptive analysis method. The problems for qualitative research is temporary, tentative, and will be developing after the researcher is in the field [7]. Descriptive methods are a method by describing and analyzing go together [8]. This study uses descriptive method because the process of collecting data are from the verbal interaction, action and meaning from the dancing which was watched and seen.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. The Guel Dancing for Gayonese

*Guel* is a dancing comes from the folklore in Gayo. The history is about Sengeda and Bener Meria. In 1980s, *the Guel* is started by developing the story of the folklore and the *Guel* is created based on the theme, Sengeda and Bener Meria legend. Peteriana Kobat (as the interview result in 2018, 6<sup>th</sup> April) says that the first changing was done by Muchlis Gayo. He is a studio choreographer Buntul Kubu in Jakarta for opening ceremony in Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII) in 1980s. The significant changes have been done by Cultural Department of the Middle Aceh Government when performed *Guel* dancing in PKA III in 1988 by decreasing the Sengeda dancer and added a few female dancers.

Before that, in the Gayonese marriage ceremonial, there is a *Manulo* process. the process is about finding out the groom and the bride and *the Guel* is performed. The performance involves the male dancers named *Guru didong*. While *beberu* (young lady) who are accompanying a bride and a groom wearing the traditional costumes, namely *Kerawang* to celebrate the wedding ceremony. *Guel* happen perhaps can be seen from the *Munalo* process in the marriage ceremony in Gayo. So the *Munalo* is a developing from *Guel* dancing performance.

#### B. The Forms and Structures of Guel and Munalo Dancing Performance

The duet dancing represent interaction patterns and it makes this dancing commonly represents a strong relation among the dancers [9]. The relation between Sengeda and Bener Meria is a relationship between the sister and the died brother.

The movements from the *Guel* dance are simple and repetition. For example, when the hand moves as *ukel* in the front parallel to the shoulder, the head is parallel in front of the body. Then, the hand movements are still as *ukel*, however make it beautified because *Munalo* dance is added male and female dancers which causes the movements are generalized as female dancers did. Basically the special movements are a shoulder moving in each *Munatap* movements. The performance of *Munalo* dancing is still on the shoulders movements, but it separated in several dancing, not only in *Munatap*. In *Runcang* movements, *guduk*, and *Ketibung* using shoulders as characteristics movements from *Guel* dance. The composition aspect has been combined by coordination from many patterns and continuity.

The movements in *Guel* dance appear nature as a source of movements and using Elephant as a main of story because nature gives inspiration for Gayonese in exploring their creativity. There are the old classic Gayonese proverb which says about the dancing, "*kepur nunguk tari nuwo (kepur nunguk tarini wo)*" [10]. The proverb implies the two bird's movements which becomes the basic movements for Gayo dances. Gayonese believes there are a connection between human and animal live. The bird's movements in *Guel* dance can be seen in various of *sengker Kalang* movements and *Kepur Nunguk* such looking for something. It has a tradition values for Gayonese living.

The *Guel* dancers have no makeup because the dancers are male. Gayonese though that make up is not suit to the male because it can break their self-esteem. As mentioned by Gayo's tradition has one main value, named as *Mukemel*, which means self-esteem [3]. *Mukemel* is a main value because it is about the self-esteem which determines the life.

Gayonese ban the contradiction between values and religious norms, and culture, which means *sumang* (taboo). The taboo (*sumang*) in Gayo's tradition are four types, are *sumang perceraken* (talking), *sumang kenunulen* (sitting), *sumang peralanan/pelangkahan* (journey) dan *sumang penengonen* (seeing) [11]. The make up for male is *sumang penengonen* means the thing is forbidden. Therefore, *Guel* dance do not give make up as a primary feature of the dancers because it breaks the dancers' self-esteem (*mumble*) as male and claimed as *sumang*.

The make up for *Munalo* dance performance are in female dancers and it uses collective make up to strengthen the face because it will be watched by the audience from away. The *Guel* dance costumes can be said as a simple costume as drawn in the figure 1 below.



Fig. 1. The dancing costume sketch at the beginning.

*Ponok* is armaments had by Gayonese such as *rencong* owned by Acehnese. *Ponok* which has a handle on its head is wore as accessories and placed in the left waist. *Ponok* represents Gayonese when they are coming into the forest and bring the armaments (interview Kadir, 2018, 19st March).

The costumes wear in *Munalo* dance consists of female and male dancer's costumes. For male, they do not use *Ponok* as accessories. at beginning, *ponok* is used to represent Gayonese habitual in forest adventure and use *ponok* as protection tools from wild animals. It links to the *Guel* dance theme which look for white elephant in the forest. *Ponok* is rarely find and therefore it does not used further for *Guel* dance accessories. The costumes show in figure 2 and 3.



(source: self-documentation, Nanda Wahyuni, 2018).

Fig. 2. The male costume.



(source: documentation by Nanda Wahyuni, 2018)

Fig. 3. The female costume.

While the created costumes by art studios or communities just for being more beautiful that are used to do *Munalo* performance with more colorful but still use *kerrawang* in the dancer's costumes as the characteristics.

The lyric used in *Guel* dance was sung in Gayonese vocal, namely as *Jangin* which sings by Sengeda dancer. The *Jangin* lyric contains of people request to look for the White elephant.

While *Munalo*, the lyric is sung by the musician, commonly by a female singer. The vocal is *pepongoten* which means in the first body movement called as *semah*. *Pepongoten* is about the sadness. There are changing between the lyric and the way hot to sing because the changes of religious norms among Gayonese. Gayo was commonly known as the moslem citizen and influenced by the old tradition and belief. Before Islam coming to Aceh in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Gayonese is animism. The lyric in *Guel* dance contains of the honor to the God and deliver to the spirit in the forest, because the Gayonese, at that time, still have the old tradition about their old belief on the earth. The lyric was sung in *Jangin* for singing in high rhythm for male. While *munalo* lyric is delivered to the groom guess in *pepongoten*. The changing on the lyric is because there are changes in the belief norms among Gayonese in the past and the present.

### C. The Function of *Guel* and *Munalo* Dance

The art patterns into two, are primary and secondary [12]. The primary is specified into three categories based on "who"

are the connoisseurs. If the connoisseurs come from the spirit, then the function is for the ritual. If the connoisseurs are the actors, the performance is for entertain themselves, and if the connoisseurs must be paid, the performance is for esthetics presentation.

The gayonese belief that *The Guel* dance in marriage ceremony can carry the blessing for the bridegroom and the people in the ceremony. The *Guel* dance in Gayonese was danced by one people as Sengeda and called as *Guru Didong* and white elephant was danced by the groom and called as *aman mayak*. Department of Education and Culture in Aceh *Guru didong* and *munatap* movements ask the groom to stand and joint dancing. The *Guel* performance in Gayonese needs to ask permission to *Reje* and each mistakes will be paid. The mistake refers to *sumang* or taboo things, in this case is four things, *sumang perceraken* (speaking), *sumang kenunulen* (sitting), *sumang peralanan* (journey) dan *sumang penengonen* [11].

The main movements in *Guel* are *munatap*, *Redep/dep*, *Ketibung* dan *Cincang Nangka* movements are a part of marriage ritual ceremony in Gayonese. The movements can fulfill the need of spiritual and emotional that belief can created a strong marriage relationship.

According to several researchers, the existence of *Guel* dance or *Munalo* dance has a long journey and fulfill of assumptions from Gayonese about *munalo* dance. In 1980s, the *Munalo* dancing is developing and it shifts *The Guel* existence in the marriage ceremony among Gayonese. Since it, the *Guel* dance is no longer as marriage ceremonial among Gayonese. The *Guel* performance in marriage ceremony is just for entertaining people and guess.

The *munalo* dance shows as welcoming dance, in the marriage ceremonial or festival. The performance needs dancers, costumes, make up, music's which make *munalo* dance as esthetics presentation. The art performance which use to esthetic presentation is a dancing performance needs dancers, costumes, make up, music, stage, and so on [12]. Therefore, the *munalo* performance as esthetic performance is shown to welcoming guess or marriage ceremonial among Gayonese who are able to pay it.

### D. The Influencing Factors of Forms Changes and Structure Performance in *Guel* Dance

This is happening in *Guel* dancing performance which caused by two factors, are intern and extern.

1) *Intern*: the intern factor is the inside changes, means that the adaptation happens naturally. Years by years, the views of human are changing. For Gayonese, the nature changing relates to the *Guel* dance performance in the ceremonial for nobility and ceremonial of king coronation or named as elite culture. Now. The *Guel* dance is performing in public without race or social class and also following in festival, hence the *Guel* dance is mostly known and become popular as artworks among Gayonese and Aceh at all. That an art is a citizen product. If the norm of people changes then the art will be changing [13].

2) *Extern*: the extern factor is the change happens because of the interaction between choreographer of *Guel* dance, Ibrahim Kadir. The change of performance is caused by influencing the creativity of artists who are involved in art activities, even as an actor or connoisseur. The composition process of dance depends on the dancers and it does not allow deciding the rules or methods for achieving the improvements for the permanent regulation which guarantee to the success [14]. If the choreographer a part of one institution, it causes the influence that force him by considering imaginative and intuitive, knowledge of movements, knowledge of construction method, and knowledge of shaping through experience from people artworks [14]. Ibrahim Kadir as *Guel* dance choreographer in PKA II, which has experienced in Institute Kesenian Jakarta year 1971-1973. The influence of his education effects to the creativity, which causes the changes of *Guel* performance.

The supporters are government which lead under Sport and Tourism becomes an influencing factor in politics field. The policy benefits to both sides, that the government and the artist.

#### E. The change of Social and Tradition

The changes happen is natural, because the people has unlimited needs. The social changing is a part of tradition changing such as the change of tradition meaning which includes the changes of knowledge, social organization, the occupation, technology, religious, language, and art systems [15]. The changes occur based on the requirements and people needs.

The Gayonese tradition in 1950s in belief of *Sarak Opat* (for Gayonese Communities) as people role, are *reje* (king), *Imem* (Priest), *Petue* (oldest figure), and *Rayat* (citizen) among Gayonese. In 1980s the tradition had eroded in the belief of *Sarak Opat* for Gayonese. Because of *Sarak Opat*, the show of *Guel* dancing must have permission by the king, as aimed by Kadir (interview result in 2018, 19<sup>th</sup> march) that in the past, *Guel* must have permission from *Reje* for avoid the taboo.

Therefore, the main factor occurs the changes of *Guel* dance is the artist has their own important in economic, existence, creativity, and expression needs. Through *Guel* dance, the artist shows their existence who are creative and innovative with the changes grow based on people needs or called as *popular art*. For the connoisseur, the *Guel* as a solidarity by increasing the status of one art community among citizen, especially for the race and unity important in the social context.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The research result shows that the *Guel* has been changed textually and contextually because of the different influencing

from the connoisseur of *Guel* performance. At first, the *Guel* was developing among elite culture by classic style as identity of Gayonese kingdom in history of Sengeda and Bener Meria in Linge kingdom and *Munalo* dance was developing among popular art by using classic style which still developing nowadays around Gayonese. The *Munalo* dance developing is not only in Gayo but also in the littoral area around Aceh province as connoisseur of *munalo* dance. The changing occurs between *Guel* and *munalo* dance are caused the Gayonese have sociology change and it becomes the changing factors in *Guel* performance. The *Guel* dance which shows purposively in marriage ceremonial and coronation of king in Gayo. Moreover, the *munalo* dance performance is claimed as esthetics presentation.

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