



## Symbolic Study- Representation in Nyongsong Dance

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### Abstract

Nyongsong dance tells of the activities of clove harvesting farmers in the Anambas Islands. Harvesting cloves includes climbing, picking, crushing, and drying cloves. This research is qualitative. The data collection technique was carried out by researchers through participatory observation, and the data analysis stage used qualitative descriptive methods. The presentation of the Nyongsong dance consists of three rounds, act 1 presents the farmers climbing and picking cloves symbolized by up and down movements exploring the clove tree setprop, act 2 presents the activity of crushing cloves symbolized by female dancers exploring the movement of *ukei* and exploring the properties of the jute sack by male dancers, and in act 3, the activity of farmers drying cloves is presented, symbolized by seven dancers exploring brown cloth together. This Nyongsong dance used corrective makeup with brown and green clothes. The props used in this dance are inspired by the tools farmers use when harvesting cloves, such as bags, winnowing, and burlap sacks. Danced by seven dancers, including two male dancers and five female dancers. The accompanying music is created life using Malay musical instruments such as selondang, serunai, violin, mong, gong, bebano, darbuka, flute, multiped percussion, and sequencer. This research aims to examine the Nyongsong dance from the perspective of representational symbols as enriching knowledge about the study of choreography through symbols and representations.

## INTRODUCTION

Representation in dance is a manifestation of human soul expression conveyed through aesthetically choreographed movements. Conceptually, the Nyongsong dance depicts the activities of farmers during the clove harvest in the community of the Anambas Islands, particularly in the town of Tarempa, Anambas Regency, Riau Islands Province. The presentation begins with the process of picking cloves, separating them, and ultimately sun-drying the cloves. The term "Nyongsong" in the dance title is derived from the local language, signifying the common phrase used when heading to the plantation to harvest its produce, especially cloves.

Historically, the Nyongsong dance is inspired by the clove farming activities in the Anambas Islands, Riau Islands Province, which are geographically located in the northern part of Siantan Island, with the capital being Tarempa—the residence of the Nyongsong dance choreographer. Tarempa is a region surrounded by the sea, and as a result, the majority of its residents are engaged in fishing. However, Anambas also has inland areas surrounded by hills, and people living in these hilly areas typically work as farmers, including clove plantation farmers (Martini, 2015). Clove plantations are among the largest harvests in the city of Tarempa, and cloves, a spice with significant benefits, thrive abundantly in Indonesia, especially in mountainous regions.

The conceptual idea behind the Nyongsong dance highlights all the activities of farmers during the clove harvest, which typically spans a period of six to eight months. Cloves ready for harvest usually exhibit a reddish color before the cloves blossom. In a single stalk, there are usually ten to twelve cloves. Farmers can harvest three to four sacks of

cloves from a single tree. The necessities for clove harvesting include climbing equipment, bags for collecting the harvest, and even climbing labor, all of which are prepared by clove farmers because harvesting cloves requires the effort of more than one person. Before heading to the fields or plantations, farmers usually prepare provisions and equipment for their time in the field. Provisions are packed in a basket carried by tying it with a rope and hanging it on the head. They typically also bring a machete to cut grass in the field, and the machete is fastened to the waist for easy access.

The harvesting process involves climbing the branches of clove-bearing trees, and the cloves are plucked from the branches. If the tree is too tall, farmers often use a ladder made of bamboo as a tool to reach the higher branches. After plucking, the cloves are placed into bags/sacks prepared atop the tree, and the contents of each bag are combined into a larger sack. The second process involves separating the cloves from their stems, known as "repih." This process doesn't involve additional tools; it relies solely on the hands. The left palm serves as a support, while the right hand works to separate the cloves from their stems. The cloves are then stacked on the left palm until the cloves and stems are separated. The third process is drying, which takes place in the morning. The weather here influences the drying process, as warmer weather speeds up the drying of the cloves. Drying occurs in open areas such as roadsides, fields, and house terraces. If the cloves are dry enough and the quality is good, the final step for the clove owner/farmer is to sell them at the highest price to clove traders or merchants. Dried cloves can last for months when stored in a dry room.



Figure 1: Farmer activities during clove harvesting in Tarempa, Anambas, Riau Islands, part of the creative process by the Nyongsong dance choreographer. (Source: Febrianti, January 31, 2022)

This research is focused on observing the form of the Nyongsong dance, which is a representation of the clove harvesting activities of farmers in the city of Tarempa. In connection with this, the dance form can be seen as a performance event with its nature that can demonstrate an 'unusual' experience (exaggerated or heightened) through dialectical relations with the 'ordinary' reality (daily life) as its foundation (Lono Simatupang, 2013). This can be observed in its presentation, which is divided into three stages: Stage 1. Clove-picking activity; Stage 2. Clove-separating activity; and Stage 3. Clove-drying activity. The movements of Nyongsong itself have unique and aesthetic dance variations to be studied. The dance movements presented by the dancers originate from the form and technique of representing movements in the clove harvesting process, such as walking, picking, squatting, jumping, and handling their props. The dance presentation emphasizes a sense of togetherness and the spirit of cooperation in the activity of harvesting cloves.

Form and content are two aspects of unity that constitute the fundamental essence (value) of a work of art. This is explained by Sumardjo (2000), stating that:

"The form of art is also the content of art itself. No artist creates their

work of art without awareness. They create a work of art because there is something they want to convey to others, whether it be their feelings, the mood, their thoughts, a message, or a conviction, all expressed through a form that aligns with the intended content."

The description above aligns with the concept of representation, which relates to the idea that the form of a work of art has a content that allows it to evoke emotional effects (joy, sadness, happiness, and other feelings) in its audience (artists and viewers) (Boas, 1955). Additionally, there is another viewpoint that representational refers to the expression of dance works presented with meanings that can be directly perceived or real, while symbolic is the opposite, involving symbolic expressions that allow for conveying non-direct meanings (Smith, 1985). According to Saussure, symbolic meaning is a form of sign that is semi-natural and not entirely visible directly (Saussure, 2010).

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research is qualitative in nature. According to Sugiyono (2013): The research method employed is qualitative or naturalistic research method because the study is conducted in a natural setting; it is also referred to as ethnographic method, as it was initially more commonly used in cultural anthropology research; and it is termed qualitative method because the gathered data and analysis are predominantly qualitative in nature.

The data collection technique employed by the researcher involves participatory observation or engaged participation and in-depth interviews. Here, the researcher actively immerses themselves in and directly participates in the creative process of choreographing the Nyongsong dance

up to its performance, which was produced in Batam City in 2023.

After the data is collected, the next step involves data analysis using qualitative descriptive methods. According to Sukmadinata & Syaodih (2008), qualitative descriptive methods aim to describe and interpret existing conditions/relationships, utilizing a broader and more diverse approach to study social life or natural and uncontrived events. During the data reduction process, the initial data obtained from various sources are categorized to generate simpler data, along with data transformation. The subsequent stage involves developing these data into well-organized descriptive information. This ensures that the research findings on the symbolic-representational study in the Nyongsong dance, which highlights the clove farmer's activities in Anambas, are presented comprehensively and accurately. The research's objective is to delve into the Nyongsong dance from the perspective of symbolic representation, enriching knowledge about choreography studies through symbols and representation.

## RESULT & DISCUSSION

### Dance Work Concept

#### Dance Movement

Movement is the expression of the body as a means of conveying a message that carries meaning as an intermediary medium (Smith: 1985). This is evident in the movements of the Nyongsong dance, which emphasize the hand movements, specifically the fingers, representing farmers in the clove harvesting process. The basic movement of "ukel" serves as the foundation for the choreographer to be creatively adapted, resulting in a variety of "ukel" movements. This can be observed in the performance, where in each stage, such as in the first stage, the use of "ukel"

movements is demonstrated with a breaking motion, while in the second stage, "ukel" movements are shown with a rotating wrist motion. Movements in the transition sections highlight graceful and running movements. Additionally, the motifs expressed by the Nyongsong dancers represent the clove harvesting process, including walking, running, climbing, picking, and drying motions (*menghepeh*).

#### Dancer

The concept of the dancers is based on gender, number, and body posture. The Nyongsong dance ensemble consists of seven dancers, including two male dancers and five female dancers. The characters portrayed by the dancers depict clove farmers. To achieve a natural appearance, the selection of dancers by the choreographer considers not only height or body size but also the technique, style, and expressive movements of the dancers in presenting the clove farmers during their performance on stage.

#### Dance Music

The dance music presented in the Nyongsong dance serves to accentuate the dramatic atmosphere within the dance, ensuring that the dance concept and the emotions of the dancers are effectively conveyed to the audience. The music for this dance is performed live by eight musicians playing traditional Malay instruments such as selodang, serunai, violin, mong, gong, bebano, darbuka, flute, multiped percussion, and sequencer. Additionally, digital instrumental music is used to emphasize the dramatic

atmosphere in each stage of the performance.

Figure 2. Instruments and Musicians of the Nyongsong Dance during the



creative process (Source : Febrianti, Januari 3, 2023)

The role of music in the Nyongsong dance is to serve as a partner/accompaniment for the dance movements, as well as to emphasize the dramatic atmosphere in specific parts according to the dance concept.

#### Facial Makeup & Costume

The Nyongsong dance employs a corrective facial makeup concept with shades leaning towards brown for eyeshadow, powder, and lipstick. The dancers also wear a head covering known as "tengkolok," which is a long piece of fabric creatively fashioned as a head covering for female dancers in the form of a rolled tengkolok. This type of tengkolok is commonly used by Malay communities during gardening activities.



Figure 3. Costume and Makeup of Female Dancers as Representations of

Clove Farmers (Source : Dhani, June 10, 2023)

The costumes worn by female dancers include a long kebaya in green with yellow trim, paired with brown pants. Additionally, they use a side cloth made of a material resembling burlap sack, which also serves as a costume setting and later becomes a dance prop. Female dancers wear a yellow belt as a waist ornament.

Male dancers wear a "baju kurung teluk belanga" with a green checkered pattern, paired with brown pants. They also wear a headwrap known as "semutar," made of black fabric. Semutar is a type of head ornament made of fabric wound around the head and tightened, commonly used for daily activities by Malay people such as fishing and gardening. The costume concept in the Nyongsong dance represents the attire of clove farmers during their agricultural work.



Figure 4. Costume and Makeup of Male Dancers as Representations of Clove Farmers (Source : Dhani, Jun 10, 2023)

### Dance Properties

The props used in the Nyongsong dance include bags or baskets made from sacks, used by male dancers to represent the motion of picking cloves. The "tampi" prop used by female dancers is utilized for separating cloves, and they also use burlap sacks as props for drying cloves. The burlap sack is incorporated as a detachable side cloth for the dancers.



Figure 5. Props – Bags and Sacks – Representing the Process of Picking Cloves and Collecting the Harvest (Source : Febrianti, January 26, 2023)



Figure 6. Props – Cloth for Drying Cloves and "Tampi" – Representing the Activities of Drying and Separating Cloves (Source : Febrianti, January 26, 2023)

### Stage Decoration

The stage decoration, often referred to as the setting in the Nyongsong dance, includes a set prop tree that is approximately three meters tall. One set prop is used as a symbolic representation of a clove tree. In this context, a set prop refers to the tree object; if not explored by the dancers, it functions as part of the stage setting, but when explored by the dancers, it serves as a prop. The tree set prop in the Nyongsong dance is represented as a clove tree/plantation.



Figure 7. Tree Set Prop as a Representation of a Clove Tree/Plantation (Source : Febrianti, May 30, 2023)

The Nyongsong dance performance is presented on a Proscenium stage located in the Harmoni Auditorium of Universitas Universal Batam. The stage is designed in a way that it can be viewed only from one side, which is the front, and it has a static characteristic.

### Symbolic-Representational Forms in the Presentation of Nyongsong Dance.

Form is the result of interrelated complementary structures (M Jazuli, 2016, 45). The presentation form of the Nyongsong dance begins with an introduction, featuring a single male dancer walking from the right corner of the stage, carrying tools for picking cloves. The dancer then walks while reciting poetry as an opening. Subsequently, another male dancer enters from the left corner of the stage. The two dancers communicate through exchanged verses, concluding with them sitting on the front stairs of the stage. In this position, the activity showcased by the two dancers involves sewing movements, utilizing burlap sack bags as explored props.

The dance movements performed by the two male dancers in this introduction section embody the representation of farmers preparing equipment for clove picking before heading to the clove plantation. On



another note, the dance movements presented by the dancers, such as the sewing movements, not only representational but also introduce symbolic movements. The symbolic aspect lies in the dance movements that explore the prop of bags, with forms of movement that are multifaceted and can be interpreted in various ways by the audience.



Figure 8. Introduction Section, Clove Farmers' Preparation for Harvesting, Tree as a Representation of Clove Plantation (Source: Dhani, June 13, 2023)

In Act 1, two male dancers perform swinging hand movements, representing farmers cleaning the plantation to facilitate the clove-picking activity. Subsequently, there are climbing movements on the clove tree set prop, which was initially placed in the middle of the backstage. The two dancers explore up-and-down movements, utilizing the set prop as a representation of farmers climbing and picking cloves. Then, four female dancers appear alternately with hand-clapping movements, symbolizing how farmers communicate while on the plantation. This is a general portrayal of how farmers communicate on the plantation by clapping hands and shouting without mentioning names. The lively atmosphere of the farmers in the silence of the forest becomes palpable to the audience. After the clove-picking activity, the six dancers perform movements carrying sacks containing the harvest. The dancers lifting the burlap sack prop with

heavy expressions symbolize that the yield from picking cloves is substantial.



Figure 9: Act 1, Clove Picking - Female dancers use hand movements like "ukel" and clapping as representations of picking cloves (Source: Dhani, June 13, 2023)

Act 2 begins with the entrance of four female dancers from the left and right corners of the stage, carrying "tampi" props. This act portrays the atmosphere when the Anambas community is engaged in the activity of separating cloves. The dancers carry "tampi," which is commonly used by the community during the clove-separating process. This act also narrates the liveliness and solidarity of the women during the clove-separating activity and is performed by five dancers.



Figure 10. Act 2 *merepih cengkih*, para penari perempuan menekan pada gerak lengan tangan seperti ukel sebagai representasi *merepih cengkih* (Source : Dhani, 13 Juni 2023)

Act 3 is marked by the entrance of two male dancers who are observing the weather. They will soon begin the process of drying cloves. This act starts with the entrance of five female dancers, and the drying process begins as they remove the side cloth, which serves as a prop setting.

The dancers collectively perform movements representing the drying of cloves. This act presents the process of drying cloves carried out by farmers and the surrounding community. Drying is done during the daytime in sunny weather. There are several symbols displayed using the side cloth of the female dancers. In this performance, the symbolic meaning represents how farmers cope with the hot and intense sunlight. After they achieve a satisfying harvest, farmers usually feel joyful and content with the results. Therefore, this dance piece portrays the euphoria that reflects the joy of the farmers.



Figure 11: Act 3, Drying Cloves - Female dancers exploring the cloth prop as a representation of drying cloves  
(Source: Dhani, June 13, 2023)

The ending of this piece depicts the gratitude of farmers after going through several processes, and it conveys the farmers' hope that these processes will continue in the future. The dancers are assigned various roles, some picking cloves, separating cloves, drying cloves, and selling cloves. Each role represents the farmers' sense of gratitude for having gone through various stages in the clove harvesting process.



Figure 12: Ending - Expression of Gratitude. The dancers collectively review the harvesting activities in a serene manner as an expression of gratitude from the farmers for the clove harvest results.

(Source: Dhani, June 13, 2023)

## CONCLUSION

The conceptual idea of the dance titled "Nyongsong" highlights all the activities of farmers during the clove harvest in the Anambas Islands, Riau Islands Province. The Nyongsong dance is a choreography performed by a group consisting of five female dancers and two male dancers. The costumes worn by the female dancers in this piece include long green kebaya, brown pants, batik head covering, and the use of side cloth. The male dancers wear green checkered tops, brown pants, and head adornment with "semurtar." The performance incorporates live music with eight musicians, and the props used include trees, burlap sacks, bags, and "tampi." The symbolic and representational elements in this dance highlight the activities of clove farmers during the harvest. Act 1 represents farmers climbing and picking cloves, symbolized by up-and-down movements exploring the clove tree set prop. Act 2 portrays the activity of separating cloves, symbolized by female dancers exploring "ukel" movements and male dancers exploring the burlap sack prop. Act 3 depicts the farmers' activity of drying cloves, symbolized by seven dancers collectively exploring brown cloth.



The research aims to delve into the Nyongsong dance from the perspective of symbolic representation as an enrichment of knowledge in the study of choreography through symbols and representation.

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