

LARIANGI: DANCING MAIDEN, PALACE AND ROYALS OF THE BUTONESE KINGDOM IN SOUTHEAST SULAWESI, INDONESIA

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Abstract

The Lariangi dance represents an emplaced classical tradition of the Royal Wolio-Buton Palace in Southeast Sulawesi at the height of its rule in the 19th century. The dance, however, was displaced from the center of power at the Wolio-Buton court to a remotely far corner of Bharata Kaledupa, one of the four strategic principalities forming the ramparts of the Wolio-Butonese kingdom. Although displaced far from the central court of Wolio-Buton, the dance of Lariangi signified a strategic triumvirate of power, governance and spirituality represented by female dancers and singers, contrasting patriarchal rulers who were in the seats of power in the central court of Wolio-Buton. The Lariangi dancing maiden of Bharata Kaledupa were the sentinels of mystical Sufism and keepers of the esoteric relationship of rulers, their royal abode and the omnipresence of spirituality in the Royal Wolio-Buton Palace. When the seat of absolute power of the Wolio-Buton court was abolished by the newly emerged Indonesian republic in the mid twentieth century, Lariangi remained to be performed to this day as an emplaced living classical tradition of a bygone era signifying a profound connection between the defunct Palace and contemporary mystical presence of the “spiritual other” of the Wolio-Buton court in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. This paper attempts to illustrate the dialogics of an emplaced memory over a displaced dance tradition, commemorating the past in the present.

Keywords: Lariangi, dancing maiden, place, Wolio-Buton Kingdom & Southeast Sulawesi

Introduction

This paper deals with the Lariangi classical dance tradition of the former royal court of Wolio-Buton in the island of Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia over two periods of time. The first period, is from 1542 to 1960, which details the emergence of the Buton Sultanate and the coming of Islam when the Lakilaponto (or also known as Halu Oleo), the 6th King of Buton, converted to Islam and became Sultan Murhum Kaimuddin Khalifatul Khamis. The second period occurs after the death of the Sultan Muhammad Falihi Kaimuddin, the 38th Sultan of Buton in 1960 to the present time. These two periods emplaced Lariangi as a classical dance that once had a ruling class as its place of patronage and a dance form that is still extant in spite of the absence of its place of patronage. In the present time, Lariangi has become an emplaced memory of a displaced dance tradition commemorating the past in the present. Lariangi presents the notion of a “place,” an area or indefinite boundaries of the Wolio-Buton kingdom and all its territories or principalities that held special meaning fostering a sense of attachment and belonging.

The Place

The dance of Lariangi was believed to have been part of the Wolio-Buton classical dance heritage from the time when Buton or often referred to as Wolio (henceforth will be cited as Wolio-Buton royal court) existed as a kingdom with its capital city in Bau Bau in the sixteenth century (1542-1960). The Wolio-Buton kingdom was an important maritime center for spice trade during the fifteenth century and the city of Bau Bau served as an important stop-over for spice ships traversing between the Straits of Malacca and the Banda Sea. Although the mythical origin of the Wolio-Buton kingdom was attributed to four Malay warriors from the Malay Peninsula in 1332,¹ the importance of Wolio-Buton as a strategic kingdom on the spice route and the affirmation of court performance traditions, including Lariangi, as sentinels of mystical Sufism became significant from mid sixteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century.

Administratively, the kingdom and Sultanate of Wolio-Buton was administered through a hierarchical structure consisting of the central authority of the Sultanate of Wolio on the top; the Bharata principalities represented by principalities of Kaledupa in the Southeast, Kulincusu in the Northeast, Muna and Tiworo in the West at the midlevel; and smaller administrative units or territories known as Kadie administered by a leader, Sara Kadie, at the lowest level. The four Bharata(s) or principalities strategically served as the most important administrative and political ramparts for the Wolio-Buton kingdom. These four Bharatas were metaphorically referred to as the “outriggers” to the main sailboat, which is represented by the central administrative center of power within the seat of the Wolio-Buton Sultanate in Bau Bau. Each of the four Bharatas were ruled by chiefs who represented the Sultan and held immense power while each of the four

Bharatas replicated the 'place' of the ruling Sultan through administrative, cultural and esoteric practices.

During the period of 1542-1960, the four Bharatas had a degree of autonomy in the way their social classes reconstructed the perception of an emplaced performative traditions in their classical dance repertoires. Apart from being political ramparts of the Wolio-Buton kingdom, the four Bharatas inherited specific classical dance traditions that were unique and different from the central kingdom. Whilst the center court of Wolio-Buton in Bau Bau had specific repertoire of male dance based on the martial arts, the four Bharatas had female dances performed by girls and young women trained in the art form before they were sent off in marriage. This gave rise to a distinctive demarcation of "place" for the different forms of court dances. The male Galangi dance, which was performed in the Wolio-Buton central court and in all the four Bharatas, was perceived as dances of the warriors or guards of the ruler. They did not only represent the male martial art dance of the royal audience hall or Baruga but was also a dance of obeisance where gestures and movements of the body expressed deference and homage to the ruler. On the contrary, the female dances in the four Bharatas were significantly different in their repertoires as each of the different repertoires signified the "place" of practice and the connection they had with the overarching spiritual mystics of Sufistic practices of the central court. Hence, each of the four Bharatas has its own female dance repertoire, the Lariangi dance in Kaledupa, the Lense dance in Kulincusu, the Linda dance in Muna, and a variant of the Linda dance in Tiworo. Each of these dances emplaced their repertoires as signifiers of origin and "place," hence they could never be performed without emplacing the principality they represented.

The 'place' of the ruler or Lakina was affirmed through the hierarchical social structure dividing the ruling class and those who served the rulers. Four social classes consisting of the Kaomu (royals), Walaka (ruling class and Islamic clergy), Papara (commoners) and Batua (slaves) formed the Wolio-Buton "social structure" reflecting different levels of political and socioeconomic stratification. On the macro level, the social structure reflected socioeconomic and political stratification through the functionalities of the different social classes with patterned relationship between the large social groups. On the meso level, the "social class" of Wolio-Buton tied individuals and their stratified groups within the perimeters of politics and religiosity reflected amongst others in the dances of each Bharatas or principalities. At the micro level, the functionality of social classes within the Wolio-Buton kingdom was mirrored at each Bharatas to sustain the practices of center court within the periphery courts of the four Bharatas, shaping the way of preserving classical dances assigned to the respective Bharatas as hegemonic symbol of mystical practices of the central Wolio-Buton court in Bau Bau.

However, the efficacy of the hierarchical social structure began to wane when the Wolio-Buton kingdom entered a contract with the Dutch East India Company or VOC (Dutch: *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) in 1613 to secure

political assistance from the threats of power struggle from the Sultanate of Goa in Makassar (South Sulawesi) and the Sultanate of Ternate in the Maluku Islands (Moluccas). The VOC, an established chartered company from the Netherland that was granted a 21-year monopoly to carry out colonial activities in Indonesia by the State-General of the Netherlands (Dutch: *Staten-Generaal*), freed Wolio-Buton from the threats of political intrusions while at the same time subjugated Wolio-Buton as a territory administered under the Pax Neerlandica (overseas territory of the Kingdom of the Netherlands) between 1667-1669. Although Wolio-Buton remained as a kingdom with a certain degree of autonomy under the Dutch "supervision" from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, the effects of Dutch hegemony over the East Indies (Indonesian Archipelago) was felt in Wolio-Buton through an eventual lessening of autonomous interactivities amongst the Lakina (royals) from the Kaomu class and the administrators and Islamic leaders from the Walaka class. It affected Lariangi to a certain extent when commoners (Papara) had access to learning and performing the dance in spite of not being descendants of the elite ruling classes. Eventually, Lariangi became synonymous with the peripheral principal courts of Kaledupa when Wolio-Buton became part of the Republic of Indonesia in 1949. With the death of the last reigning Sultan of Wolio-Buton in 1960, Lariangi completely lost its court patronage in spite of being a cultural heritage of Kaledupa and as an emplaced tradition.

In post-independence Indonesia, the royal Wolio-Buton kingdom represents a historical site of a former Sultanate and Kingdom of Wolio-Buton. Prior to the death of the last reigning Sultan in 1960, the site of Wolio-Buton kingdom was confined to the old Buton fortress in Bau Bau where the Kaomu, Walaka, and Papara social classes interacted as a reenactment of the past practices whilst the Batua class was long gone prior to the Indonesian revolution for independence in the 1940s. Although political allegiance between the Wolio-Buton court and the four principal Bharatas became dysfunctional with the onset of the new Indonesian republic when the seat of government moved to Kendari, the capital city of the post-independence Indonesian province of Southeast Sulawesi, the Wolio-Buton Sultanate remained as a "place" of history and identity. As a historical site and former seat of the Wolio-Buton kingdom, the territories and principalities of Wolio-Buton emplaced the former classical dances of the Wolio-Buton royal courts into assigned positions of revered performance traditions sanctified by the location where these dances are performed and practiced.

The Dance

The Lariangi dance, which is the subject of this discussion, is a dance that is still being performed by women in the island of Kaledupa, one of the other islands in the Tukangbesi archipelago Southeast of Bau Bau (now the archipelago is known as Wakatobi) in spite of the demise of the royal court in 1960. The dance of Lariangi is performed by rows of women who dance in lineal formation, in double or single rows while singing poems (Kabanti) to the beats of accompanying drums and

gongs from the Ganda ensemble. Similar to the mythical origin of the Wolio-Buton court, the pre-Islamic Lariangi dance has its resemblance to the mythical origin of a sacred dance performed by the heavenly princess.² However, little is known of how the dance was performed before Islam prior to the influence of Sufism to the royal Wolio-Buton courts in the fourteenth century. Today, Lariangi emplaces the mystical relationship of Sufism in the form of mysticism associated to a Tasawuf or Sufi traditions signifying a strategic alliance between the central royal court of Wolio-Buton and Kaledupa as an important Bharata or principality of Wolio-Buton kingdom.

Today, mysticism in Lariangi is practiced through the use of esoteric poetry with texts in the Malay, Arabic and Wolio languages and in the way the dance movements are executed with the use of fans and scarves to the accompaniment of the Ganda music ensemble.³ Only a few older women understand the entirety of the multi-language sung poetry while most young women dancers are only able to sing the memorized text. However, the presence of “place” represented by the cultural territories of Lariangi in the former Bharata of Kaledupa adds value to the myth and glory of an esoteric dance tradition from the Southeastern flank of the former Wolio-Buton kingdom. The Lariangi dance represents an emplaced tradition of esoteric dance form of the Wolio-Buton kingdom far from the central seat of power signifying a strategic triumvirate of power, governance and spirituality represented by female dancers and singers, contrasting patriarchal rulers who were in the seats of power in the central court of Wolio-Buton.

Performed within the grounds of the old Kamali (palace) in Kaledupa near the site of the old audience hall or Baruga, the Lariangi dance has today become synonymous with an emplaced tradition of “old” Kaledupa perpetuated by a continuous practice of teaching, training and performing the dance to the younger generations. Lariangi remains to be performed to this day as an emplaced living classical tradition of a bygone era signifying a profound connection between the defunct Palace and contemporary mystical presence of the “spiritual other” of the Wolio-Buton court in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. That “spiritual other” is represented in the way the dance performance is ‘ritualized’ through an intensive preparation that involves hair trimming on the girls’ foreheads, gluing the girls’ side locks with bees wax and letting it rest and glued overnight, trimming the eye brows, intricate hairdos and hair buns, wearing colorful dance costumes, and waiting patiently over long hours before the dance performance commences in the evening. Older dance mistresses would hover around the young maidens as soon as they gather within the performance space to maintain an assuring ‘presence’ that the dancers are being looked after and that the dance will be successfully executed. To the young dancers, Lariangi is not an ordinary dance. To be chosen as one of the dancers is regarded an indication of excellence achieved in vocal training, dancing and manipulating of the fans and scarves.

An Emplaced Tradition

To the beholders of Lariangi, the dance represents a living classical performance of a bygone era that has retained the notion of 'place' (the defunct Palace of Wolio-Buton) through its profound connection with contemporary mystical presence of the "spiritual other/order".

The spiritual heart of Lariangi is in the sung poems or Kabanti. Dance movements are performed as an extension of the sung text rather than for the single purpose of dancing. Written in Arabic scripts known as Buri Wolio, the Kabanti poems had originated as a pre-Islamic oral tradition of singing laments, yearnings for missed ones as well as for disseminating advices. The word Kabanti in Wolio came from the word Kabanti-banti, which means caustic mocking or singing soft tunes about loved ones or lullabies (senandung). Hence, the extreme vacillation and ambivalence of Kabanti as an instrument for vocal rendition was appropriated by the Sufistic orders (Tasawuf) in Wolio-Buton for the singing of metaphors and spiritual allegories, interleaved with Bismillah or Basmala (Arabic: بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ or بِسْمَلَة) the Arabic noun used in a number of contexts by Muslims as recitative text before reading each Sura or chapter of the Quran. The noun is used as a collective name for the recurring phrase "*b-ismi-llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīmi*," that is translated as "*In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful*," which is usually the first phrase or preamble to dedicated "remembrance" or "reiteration" (*dhikr*). However, there are two kinds of Kabanti in Wolio-Buton, a secular Kabanti and a philosophical Kabanti, the former is sung by ordinary folks and written mostly as love romance, the latter is associated with the esoteric poems of the Palace genre. Lariangi's Kabanti belongs to the Palace genre; hence it is infused with Islamic teachings transposed from prose literature to poems. Lariangi's Kabanti remains esoteric to most performers who are not privileged to Sufistic teaching although its presentation is iconic of the "spiritual other". Lariangi and its sung poems (Kabanti) have positioned a sense of particularity to the "place" of origin and emplace spirituality as the causality for its existence.

An example of interleaved Islamic (Sufistic) poetic text in a Wolio-Buton Kabanti can be seen from a Tanaka section, which is sung before a Lariangi dance ends. Although this example is transliterated in the Roman alphabet, the sectional refrains in Arabic and Wolio are observable. The Arabic words are salutations and reiterations (*dhikr*) while the Romanized words in Wolio, often have esoteric meanings or are onomatopoeic.

Transliterated Tanaka text of a Kabanti in the Roman alphabet:

La ilahi illaulah ya maula
 E muhamadi rasullullah e lamiyali
 Disalla salamullah ya maula
 Wa lamiyola tufahi fahitullah
 E tanaka lutufi liasila ya maula

E .. Bi aruba bisaa odadi e kadasa
Musufi liibura ya maula
Ji hata tana e tanakalo
E fasirita sari liafi ya maula
E .. Butuni tasa raafa
Tibi liha muli alla allaini fi ya maula
Umuri moa moaufalu
E hania .. Linkau minia ya maula
E antafi him faminai faminimumu
E badani lainkamba mo lainkamba tarumbi
Ya maula
Jamali musa musarubalu lele ...

The same Tanaka text of a Kabanti transliterated in Arabic and Roman alphabet showing sporadic interleaving of Arabic-Wolio words infusing a sense of “spiritual other”:

(يا مولى) illaulah (لا اله)
(لامىالى) (رسول الله) (الحمدى) lamiyali
(مولى) Disalla salamullah (مولى)
(لامىولا) lamiyola tufahi fahitullah
(مولى) (مولى) lutufi liasila (مولى تانا كا)
(مولى) .. Bi (مولى) bisaa odadi (مولى) kadasa
(مولى) Musufi liibura (مولى)
(مولى) tana (مولى) tanakalo
(مولى) fasirita (مولى) liafi (مولى)
(مولى) .. Butuni (مولى) raafa
(مولى) Tibi liha (مولى) alla (مولى) (مولى)
(مولى) Umuri moa moaufalu
(مولى) .. Linkau (مولى)
(مولى) E antafi him faminai faminimumu
(مولى) lainkamba (مولى) lainkamba tarumbi
(مولى)
(مولى) musarubalu lele ...

Conclusion

The Lariangi classical dance remains to this day as a tradition of Bharata Kaledupa, one of the four principalities of Wolio-Buton, and retains the notion of a “place” within the indefinite boundaries of the Wolio-Buton kingdom. Within the two periods of existence, pre-1960s and post-1960s, Lariangi remained as an emplaced

memory of the Wolio-Buton kingdom and its court tradition when Kaledupa was a one of the four ramparts of Wolio-Butonese kingdom. Although located far from the central court of Wolio-Buton in Bau Bau, the court of Kaledupa in the Southeastern archipelago of the Tukangbesi, and the dance of Lariangi signified a triumvirate of power, governance and spirituality leveraging royal courts, dancing maidens, and patriarchal rulers as entities of a “place” that once stood. Lariangi emplaces a structured movement system that is classical in origin and spiritual in substance. The mystical presence of the “spiritual other” of the Wolio-Buton court in Southeast Sulawesi continues to endure as long as it takes.

Endnotes

¹The oldest known Wolio-Buton epical text known as Hikayat Sipajonga, had assumed that the Wolio-Buton kingdom was established by four nobles commonly referred to Mia Pata Miana established the Malay Kingdom (Zahari, 1974; Zaenu, 1984). The four Malay nobles or Mia Pata Miana, namely Sipajonga, Simalui, Sitanamajo and Sijawangkati were said to have originated from the Malay Peninsula, when they established the the Wolio settlement in what is now known as the province of Southeast Sulawesi. The four Malay nobles divided themselves into two groups to set up the Wolio-Buton kingdom; the first two nobles, Sipajonga and Simalui went to Kalampa, while the other two nobles, Sitanamajo and Sijawangkati went to Walalogusi. Both groups had resided along the coastal areas to develop new territories. The word Wolio was believed to have originated from the clearing of the forest of Welia woods. It was the word Welia and the clearing of the forest that gave the kingdom its name (Susanto Zuhdi, 2010, p. 36).

² The mythic origin of Wolio-Buton kingdom was based on the Wa Kaa Kaa myth. The myth, which has largely been accepted by scholars and historians, details the birth of Wa Kaa Kaa and tells of her origins from a bamboo. Wa Kaa Kaa was adopted by Mia Patamiana, the four noble Malay men from the Malay Peninsula, to help her rule Buton. She married Sibarata, a noble of the Majapahit, a thalassocratic archipelagic empire in the island of Java, which ruled much of the Malay Archipelago from 1293 to 1500. WaKaa Kaa was succeeded by the next female ruler, Bulawambona.

³ The Ganda ensemble accompanying Lariangi is made up of several musical instruments such as the ganda (drum), mbololo (large gong), tawatawa (small gong), and ndengu-dengu (kettle gong).

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