

Local Wisdom and Religious Values in the *Numbak Kebau* Dance of the Serawai Tribe of Bengkulu: A Philosophical Study

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Abstract

The legacy of the Numbak Kebau Dance among the Serawai Tribe of Bengkulu is a cultural manifestation encompassing social, spiritual, and religious values. From a cultural philosophy perspective, this dance is not merely a ceremonial movement but reflects local wisdom regarding the relationship between humans and God, nature, and society. This study aims to analyze the religious values and local wisdom that form the moral and spiritual basis of the Serawai people. The study used a qualitative method with a philosophical approach, through analysis of symbols, movement meanings, and cultural narratives. Data were obtained through observation, interviews with traditional leaders and cultural practitioners, and literature review. The results reveal three main values: (1) ontological, namely the harmonious relationship between humans and nature through the symbol of the buffalo as a cosmic balance; (2) epistemological, in the form of local knowledge and rituals as a means of understanding spiritual reality; and (3) axiological, in the form of ethical values such as solidarity, cooperation, and respect for ancestors. Philosophically, the Numbak Kebau Dance reflects a religiosity that integrates sacred and mundane aspects. This finding confirms that local wisdom plays an important role as a source of moral and spiritual values in building a balance in contemporary social life.

Keywords: local wisdom, *numbak kebau* dance, philosophy, religious, Serawai.

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Introduction

Civilization functions as a reflection of the dynamics of a society's values and perspective on its existence. Through civilization, individuals express their relationship with the environment, others, and the Creator. In the framework of the archipelago's society, civilization is inseparable from religious values embedded in social life. It is this combination of culture and religion that gives local traditional heritage a deep spiritual and ethical meaning (Koentjaraningrat, 1985). One of the expressions of this religious civilization can be seen in the *Numbak Kebau* Dance of the heritage of the Serawai Tribe, Bengkulu Province. This heritage is not just a traditional ceremony, but a representation of a value system, symbols, and spiritual consciousness that affirms the harmonious relationship between humans, the environment, and the Creator.

Chronologically, the *Numbak Kebau* Dance originated from the practice of the Serawai community in presenting and expressing gratitude for the harvest and the safety of the group. This ceremony features the slaughter of buffalo as a symbol of sacrifice and respect for supernatural forces. In the view of the Serawai people, the buffalo is not just a pet, but a representation of the prosperity and fertility of the land (Suhartini, 2018). Therefore, the slaughter of buffalo is interpreted as a form of human spiritual devotion to God and a symbol of harmony with the environment. This heritage then developed into a cultural spectacle rich in religious, ethical, and social values.

The presence of the *Numbak Kebau* Dance reflects how local wisdom plays a role as an active and dynamic value system. Local wisdom is not just a relic of the past, but also a moral guideline that guides the social actions of a society (Hidayat, 2024). As explained by Koentjaraningrat (1989), Civilization includes a system of knowledge, values, and norms that form the identity of a social group. Thus, the *Numbak Kebau* Dance is a form of local wisdom that emphasizes the relationship between humans and the environment and God within the framework of religious and social ethics.

From the perspective of cultural philosophy, this heritage can be understood as a symbol of human religious consciousness. Ricoeur (1976) explains that symbols are a medium that carries a dual meaning: empirical meaning and transcendent meaning (Nashruddin et al., 2024).

Through symbols, man seeks to understand a reality that is beyond himself. In this context, the act of slaughtering buffalo can be interpreted as an existential expression that reveals human spiritual awareness of the source of life. The hermeneutical-philosophical approach allows researchers to explore the deeper meanings of cultural symbols, not just the outward aspects of the ceremony (Setiyani & Tasrif, 2023).

The religious values contained in the *Numbak Kebau* Dance also show the Islamic inclusive nature of the Bengkulu people, who adapt to the local heritage. Geertz stated that Islam in the archipelago developed through syncretism, in which Islamic teachings interacted with culture without losing their monotheistic core (Geertz, 1973). This is in line with Woodward's view that Javanese and Sumatran Islam developed through a process of cultural dialogue that gave birth to forms of local religiosity (local Islam) (Woodward, 2011). These interactions result in unique religious expressions, as seen in traditional symbols and ceremonies such as the *Numbak Kebau* Dance.

Several researchers have examined the relationship between local wisdom and religiosity. examined Islamic values in the Javanese Earth Alms tradition, showing that the ceremonial symbols reflect the spirit of gratitude and respect for the environment as God's creation (Chandrasari et al., 2025). The Rambu Solo' ceremony in Toraja embodies religious ethical values that emphasize respect for ancestors and social solidarity (Suliono et al., 2024). However, philosophical research that examines the religious meaning of the *Numbak Kebau* Dance in depth is still rare. Most of the existing research focuses on anthropological and folkloristic aspects (Hidayat, 2024; Lestari et al., 2023; Suhartini, 2018), one of them is Serawai language in South Bengkulu. This study aims to determine the response and factors that influence the understanding of Serawai language in South Bengkulu society. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method conducted in 6 sub-districts namely Kota Manna, Pasar Manna, Manna, Seginim, Pino Raya, Ulu Manna. The data collection method uses semi-open questionnaires and tests that have been validated by material and media experts. The results obtained from this study are the response of the people of South Bengkulu to Serawai language, namely they are proud to use Serawai language but prefer to use slang, so that the understanding of Serawai language is inversely proportional to the average 97.78% (proudwhile the philosophical

dimension that reveals the structure of meaning, consciousness, and ethical values has not been widely explored.

Today, in the midst of modernization and cultural homogenization, many local heritages are experiencing an erosion of meaning. The younger generation often views traditional practices only as aesthetic relics, rather than a living value system (Darmansyah & Susanti, 2022). This phenomenon demands a deeper philosophical study to uncover the ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions behind local heritage, and it is important to investigate aspects of local wisdom that form the basis of the morality and spirituality of the Serawai community, so that the noble values within it are not eroded by social change. The philosophical study of the *Numbak Kebau* Dance is relevant because it offers a deeper interpretation of cultural symbols and actions as reflections of the collective consciousness of the Serawai community.

Method

This research uses an interpretive-philosophical qualitative approach with an emphasis on hermeneutic analysis to uncover the symbolic meaning and religious values contained in the cultural heritage of the *Numbak Kebau* Dance of the Serawai community in Bengkulu. This approach was chosen because it is considered capable of revealing layers of meaning that are not empirically observable, as well as of understanding the structure of ethical, moral, spiritual, and cultural values that shape the life view of the Serawai community. Through a hermeneutic approach, this study views the *Numbak Kebau* Dance as a cultural text that contains a system of symbols, rituals, and narratives that can be interpreted in depth within the framework of Islamic civilization and religiosity (Kaelan, 2005).

The research was conducted in an area where the *Numbak Kebau* Dance tradition is still actively practiced by the Serawai Tribe community in Manna City, South Bengkulu. The subjects of the study include traditional figures, traditional dancers, religious leaders, and local cultural actors who play a direct role in the ceremony. Primary data were obtained through three main techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Participant observation was carried out by participating directly in the *Numbak Kebau*

Dance ceremony to record movements, symbols, social interactions, and the religious context that surrounds it. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants—AD, 73 years old, a traditional figure, AM, 60 years old, a religious leader, and HG, 45 years old, a Head of Tourism Division of South Bengkulu—to explore their understanding of the philosophical meaning, ritual symbolism, and spiritual values they contain. Informants are purposively selected based on their capacity to hold traditional knowledge and interpret cultural symbols. These informants are expected to be able to provide philosophical insights into the relationship between cultural practices, belief systems, and religious values that exist in society. Furthermore, field documentation and literature reviews were carried out on traditional manuscripts, cultural records, and the latest academic literature relevant to the study of hermeneutics, local wisdom, and cultural philosophy in the Indonesian archipelago (Nashruddin et al., 2024).

The stage of analysis is then developed within the framework of philosophical reflection that includes three main dimensions: ontological, to understand the relationship between humans, nature, and God in a symbolic context; epistemological, to explain how societies acquire knowledge through experience and tradition; and axiological, to interpret moral and social values internalized through cultural practices (Anton Bakker, 1990). The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and methods, namely by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and literature review. Furthermore, the researcher applies the principle of reflexivity, which is critical awareness of the researcher's own position, values, and assumptions in the interpretation process, so that the research results remain objective and contextual (Sugiono, 2013).

With this methodological design, this research is expected to reveal the symbolic meaning and religious values contained in the *Numbak Kebau* Dance in depth, as well as explain the role of the tradition as a means of internalizing local wisdom and Islamic spirituality in the life of the Serawai community.

Results and Discussion

Serawai Tribe

The Serawai tribe is the second largest community in Bengkulu Prov-

ince after the Rejang tribe. The majority of the population of Serawai is spread across South Bengkulu Regency, especially in the districts of Sukaraja, Seluma, Talo, Pino, Kelutum, Manna, and Seginim. Along with socio-economic development, the people of Serawai experience significant mobility. Many migrated to various areas in Bengkulu Province, such as Rejang Lebong and North Bengkulu, in search of new livelihoods and expanding socio-economic ties between regions.

Traditionally, the livelihood of the Serawai community depended on agriculture, especially the plantation sector. Their main products include perennials such as cloves, coffee, coconut, and rubber, which sustain the family economy. In addition, some communities also cultivate staple food crops, *palawija*, and develop horticulture and livestock to meet daily needs. This agricultural economic pattern shows the close relationship of the Serawai people with the environment and their dependence on the production system based on local resources (Anwar et al., 2017; Hidayat, 2024).

The origin of the Serawai tribe has not been widely studied scientifically due to the lack of written evidence and a comprehensive study of academic history. The history of their origins is largely inherited through the oral traditions of the indigenous elders, mixed with elements of myth and legend, making it difficult to distinguish between historical facts and folklore. One of the artifacts that is often cited as an early indication of the existence of the Serawai tribe is an ancient inscription found in the tomb of the Ancestors of Semidang Empat Hamlet in Maras, Talo District. The inscription was carved on the bark of a tree with a script similar to ancient Arabic, but until now, no expert has been able to accurately decipher it (Darmansyah & Susanti, 2022).

Regarding the etymology of the name "Serawai", there are several versions and interpretations. Some communities interpret the word Serawai as "one family", reflecting a strong sense of brotherhood and social solidarity among its members. Another version states that the word Serawai is derived from the term Sawai, meaning "branch", referring to the confluence of two great rivers, Musi and Seluma, which are separated by Campang Hill. Others associate it with the word *Seran*, meaning "misfortune", related to the legend of a king's son from the upstream who was banished by an infectious disease and then stranded in the

estuary, where he founded a new settlement. Meanwhile, the third version states that Serawai comes from the word Selawai, which in *Lebong* means “girl” or “virgin”. This story tells the origin of the Serawai tribe as the descendants of a married couple between a Sabah Rejang man and a Lebong girl (Selawai), who later established a small kingdom known as Serawai (Suhartini, 2018).

The Serawai tribe is also known for its traditional script system called Surat Ulu, which has a phonetic structure similar to the *Ka Ga Nga* script belonging to the Rejang people. In the study of local epigraphy, the *Surat Ulu* and *Ka Ga Nga* scripts belong to the *Rencong* script family, which is widespread in southern Sumatra. The similarity of this script system shows the existence of cultural interaction and communication between the Serawai and Rejang peoples in the past, especially in the social, religious, and traditional governance contexts (Hidayat, 2024)

In the current context, the wave of modernization and information technology advances have had a significant impact on the lifestyle of the Serawai community. Traditional cultural values began to interact with new social norms and practices that came from outside the group. Nevertheless, the Serawai people still uphold local cultural values such as solidarity, cooperation, and respect for ancestors in daily life.

Furthermore, the social dynamics of the Serawai community are also influenced by the assimilation and acculturation process with immigrant groups from various regions. This process of cultural mixing creates new nuances in social practices, including communication patterns, value systems, and family life. In some ways, there has also been a shift in perspective and attitude towards tradition, which has an impact on the social character of the group.

In terms of social characteristics, the Serawai people are known for their firm and open personalities in interaction, in contrast to the stereotypes of Javanese people who tend to be subtle and diplomatic. This firmness and honesty reflect the distinctive identity of the Sumatran people, who uphold honesty, courage, and openness in social relationships.

Numbak Kebau Dance

The Numbak Kebau Dance is a form of cultural expression that has a deep meaning in the life of the Serawai people in Bengkulu Province. This tradition not only functions as an art or entertainment performance, but also as a sacred and obligatory ritual that occupies a central position in the series of *Bimbang Adat*, the traditional wedding ceremony of the Serawai community (Anwar et al., 2017;). As explained by the head of tourism for South Bengkulu (HG, 45 years old).

*“In the Serawai language, the term worry is used to refer to a wedding procession. Etymologically, the word *bimbang* means “doubt” or “fear”, but in the context of Serawai culture, this meaning has changed to “feast” or “celebration” held as a form of respect for the wedding procession.”*



Figure 1. Numbak Kerbau Dance

Photo Source: Anggi Noverdo

Accessed on <https://rbtv.disway.id/bengkulu-selatan/read/4072/adat-numbak-kerbau-pada-perayaan-hut-bengkulu-selatan>, 02nd October 2025

The tradition of *Bimbang Adat* has been inherited from generation to generation since the time of the ancestors of the Serawai people. Every wedding is always accompanied by the implementation of this ritual. According to traditional elders, the use of the term worry in the context of marriage is related to the feelings of anxiety and doubt experienced by the bride's family, especially regarding the readiness and smoothness of the entire ceremonial procession (P. K. B. Selatan, 2024). The following are the results of the interview with AD, 73 years old, a traditional figure.

“Similar feelings are also felt by newlyweds, who are often overwhelmed with anxiety about the future of their marriage—whether they have made the right decision and whether or not the marriage will bring happiness.”

Andun dance is a general term for various forms of traditional dance, which are the main and mandatory art forms in the implementation of *Bimbang Adat*, because they contain sacred values. Among the series of dances, the *Numbak Kebau* Dance (TNK) occupies the central position as the second of the three main dances of the Andun Dance. TNK was staged in the morning, around 07.00–08.00, after the Gegerit Night procession. Followed by the Andun Lelawanan Dance and ended with the Palak Tanggau Dance, before the bride and groom entered the house.

Although it is called *Numbak Kebau*, this term is symbolic, not a literal depiction of spearing a buffalo (South, 2024). This naming serves as a marker of the collective memory of the meaning of qurbani, an important part of the Serawai tradition, which is now presented in symbolic form. The timing of the ceremony in the morning also has a deep ritual meaning, symbolizing the transition from the night, which symbolizes spirituality, to the day, which symbolizes the social order. Thus, the TNK ceremony at this time is intended to actualize the spiritual value of qurbani while maintaining social harmony through the joint party that accompanies the ceremony.

Morphology of Buffalo Numbak Dance Movement

The Numbak Kebau Dance performance venue specifically places a male buffalo tied in the middle of the field. Based on Figure 1, this buffalo is the center of attention, surrounded by the dancers and the bride and groom. During the dance, the bride and groom have the ritual task of holding a twig (stalk broom) tucked into the dancers' fingers.

The most important element of this ritual morphology is the symbolic interaction with the buffalo. At the end of the dance, the twigs held by the bride and groom are thrown towards the buffalo. This throwing of twigs serves as an official sign that the ritual dance is over, and the surrounding buffaloes are ready for slaughter (Armanuddin, 2025). The atmosphere of the dance is reinforced by a slightly minor musical rhythm, which is deliberately created to emphasize the atmosphere of gratitude and sacredness in the ceremony.

Sacral-profane transition

The throwing of the baton by the bride and groom has an important significance as a marker of boundaries and transitions from sacred to profane or functional activities. The staff serves as a liminal symbol, which ritually affirms the spiritual permission and blessing to carry out the slaughter process. This act also marked a shift in orientation from the ritual dance of gratitude to the slaughter and preparation of the feast together. After the buffalo slaughter is complete, the bride and groom will sit in the *atar-atar*, a special area guarded by the traditional chief and family members as a sign of respect for traditional ordinances (Armanuddin, 2025).

While waiting for the slaughter meat to cook, the Andun Resistance Dance continues, which serves to fill the time and maintain the continuity of the ritual atmosphere. The implementation of this ceremony reflects strict structural control, particularly through Daso's role as the event organizer. Daso is in charge of signaling to the organizers that the food is ready to be served, which then becomes an official sign for the participants to end the dance and continue the Palak Tanggau Dance (South, 2024).

The presence of symbolic elements such as a buffalo in the middle of the ceremony, a dancing bride and groom, and a minor musical accompaniment forms a ritual dramaturgy that aims to achieve collective emotional catharsis. Through this dynamic, people collectively experience and express deep gratitude before the qurbani procession begins.

Symbolic Buffalo Spear Dance *Bujang Seriang (Male Buffalo)*

In an interview, an informant, AD, 73 years old, is a traditional figure.

“The male buffalo used as an offering in this ceremony has a special name in the Serawai language, namely Bujang Seriang. This name has a deep anthropological and theological meaning. The term “single” indicates that the chosen animal must be male, while “seriang” refers to a state of joy or happiness. Thus, this name confirms that the buffalo is symbolically depicted as a figure who is open-hearted and happy in fulfilling his nature to be slaughtered and consumed by humans”.

This personification, in the context of rituals, serves to eliminate the moral conflict or guilt associated with the act of sacrificing large animals. With the granting of the title “Bujang Seriang”, the buffalo is elevated to the status of a willing participant in marriage, who seeks blessings and welfare, rather than just a material object to be utilized. The role of the buffalo can be understood as a manifestation of hidden heroic values.



Figure 2: Bujang Seriang

Photo Source: Perda Kab. Bengkulu Selatan (P. K. B. Selatan, 2024)

As a ritual “hero”, *Bujang Seriang* is considered willing to sacrifice to ensure the welfare and blessings of the bride and groom, as well as to strengthen the cosmic covenant between humans and the spiritual realm. The value of this heroism is reflected in the final result of the ritual, which is the creation of social welfare and pious offspring, which are considered the fruit of this sincere sacrifice.

Skewers and Mats or Cloths

The use of ritual equipment and attributes reinforces the sacredness and respect associated with traditional processions. The throwing of the cane by the bride and groom serves ritually as an affirmation of the spiritual blessing over the slaughter, as well as marking the transition from the stage of reverence (through dance) to the stage of sacrifice. Furthermore, mats and cloths were placed on Bujang Seriang’s back as ceremonial equipment.

Based on Figure 2, the meaning of all the ritual equipment is explained as explained by the traditional figure AD, 73 years old.

“These attributes serve symbolically as a form of respect, emphasizing the noble status of the buffalo as a ritual entity, not just livestock. This symbolism emphasizes that the act of sacrifice is carried out with dignity and respect, and reinforces this.”

Symbolic Representation

The Numbak Kebau Dance is a symbolic representation of the cultural expression of the Serawai community in Bengkulu, which contains deep historical, religious, and social values. This tradition is generally displayed in various traditional ceremonies, such as harvest thanksgiving rituals, welcoming guests of honor, and certain religious celebrations. Symbolically, the “Numbak Kebau” movement reflects the mutual relationship between humans and nature, as well as sacrifice as a form of devotion to God and the social community (Suhartini, 2018). From a hermeneutic perspective, each element of this dance can be interpreted as a cultural text that contains various layers of meaning, ranging from literal to transcendental meanings (Sutrisno & Putranto, 2005).

The denotative meaning of the buffalo skewer movement describes efforts to control human lust and ego, while its connotative or symbolic meaning shifts to the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) in the Islamic tradition. The dancers, who act as spears, represent individuals struggling to conquer their own self-esteem, while the accompaniment of traditional music in the form of drums and gongs creates a spiritual atmosphere that leads to a transcendental ritual experience (Armanuddin, 2025). The movements and structure of this dance have similarities to Minangkabau ritual dances, such as the Piring Dance, which also expresses collective gratitude and communal spiritual values.

Through a philosophical approach, the symbolism in the Numbak Kebau Dance is interpreted not only as an aesthetic movement but also as a meaningful medium of communication between humans, nature, and God. Gadamer calls this process the fusion of horizons, or the unification of the horizon of understanding between cultural actors and their interpreters (Kholiq et al., 2021). Thus, this dance not only functions as a cultural heritage but also as a space for reflective dialogue between local wisdom and religious values that live in the

spiritual consciousness of the Serawai people. This interpretive process shows that symbolic movements in dance have a transformative function, transforming physical activity into a collective spiritual experience (Fauzi & Nur, 2020).

Furthermore, ritual paraphernalia such as spears, traditional clothing, and the symbolic position of the buffalo convey a significant moral and ethical message. In the Serawai society, the spear is not considered a tool of violence, but a symbol of responsibility, courage, and moral integrity. Meanwhile, the buffalo is interpreted as a symbol of human prosperity, persistence, and loyalty to nature. This symbolic combination reflects the concept of trust in Islamic teachings, where humans are seen as caliphs who are obliged to maintain the balance of nature (Armanuddin, 2025; South, 2024). Thus, the Numbak Kebau Dance serves as a medium to express the philosophy of life of the Serawai community, which is based on the principles of balance, gratitude, and spiritual surrender to the Creator.

Philosophical Analysis of the Numbak Kebau Dance

The Ontological Dimension: God-Nature-Man

Ontologically, the Numbak Kebau Dance represents a reconstruction of the Serawai people's worldview of the essence of existence. From this perspective, human beings are not understood as separate entities, but rather as an integral part of the network of relationships between man, nature (land and agriculture), and God. The symbol of the buffalo—as described in the narratives of indigenous leaders—has two dimensions of meaning: first, material meaning, where the animal is seen as a source of energy and economic resources; and second, symbolic meaning, which represents fertility, sacrifice, and cosmic balance. This symbolic interpretation is in line with the results of studies of other archipelago rituals that emphasize harmony between nature and culture as the core of the existence of indigenous peoples (Putri et al., 2023).

From a hermeneutic perspective, the act of spearing (spear) serves as a performative act that embodies this ontological relationship. In this context, the ritual does not simply represent a concept, but actualizes and concretely embodies the experience of cosmic unity. This ontological meaning shows that the spirituality of the Serawai people is immanent as well as transcendent. The sacred and the profane dimen-

sions meet through collective action that gives existential meaning to the sustainability of community life.

Epistemological Dimension: Traditional knowledge

Field interviews reveal the existence of local knowledge embedded in ritual discourse, including timing, rituals for ritual participants, the use of traditional prayers and mantras, and symbolic rules inherited through social practice. From an epistemological perspective, this form of knowledge is not only proportional (knowledge of something) but also practical and contextual (knowledge of how something is done). This pattern bears a striking resemblance to the ritual knowledge formation structure found in recent studies on the rituals of coastal and agrarian communities, which highlight the function of rituals as a means of transmitting local knowledge and values (Sulastri & Rahayu, 2021).

Philosophically, the analysis suggests that ritual symbols—such as the sequence of movements, the attributes of the buffalo, and the use of food in ceremonies—serve as epistemic devices that help organize collective experiences and affirm norms of community knowledge. Using a hermeneutic approach, this study found that the Serawai people acquired and maintained an understanding of the relationship between humans, God, and nature through symbolic practices that could be read and interpreted sustainably. Thus, rituals serve as cultural texts that are constantly reinterpreted, ensuring that traditional knowledge remains dynamic, relevant, and adaptive to changing times.

Axiological Dimensions: Social Ethics, Solidarity, and Moral Conservation

From an axiological perspective, the *Numbak Kebau* Dance reflects a set of collective moral values that play a crucial role in shaping the social ethics of the Serawai community, such as the spirit of cooperation, shared responsibility, respect for ancestors, and expressions of gratitude. The results of the observations show that the ritual preparation stages involving the active participation of all elements of society—including fundraising, the creation of ceremonial supplies, and the sharing of roles and responsibilities—significantly reproduce and strengthen the value of social solidarity. These values are not only normative but also operational, as they are manifested through concrete practices in which ritual participants apply social ethics through collective action (Oktavianus et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the moral dimension is also reflected in the community's attitude towards the management and preservation of the surrounding environment, for example, through land use planning and agricultural practices based on religious gratitude. These findings are in line with the results of previous research that confirmed that traditional rituals function as an instrument to regulate human-environmental relations, as well as a medium for learning ecological values and ecological spirituality (Prasetyo, 2023). Thus, the *Numbak Kebau* Dance not only serves as a means of cultural and spiritual expression but also as a practical mechanism to strengthen social cohesion and internalize norms of sustainable behavior in community life.

Socio-Religious Values: Local Wisdom and Islamic Spirituality of the Serawai Tribe

Within the framework of critical hermeneutics, the Numbak Kebau Dance not only represents a ritualistic aspect but also functions as a social text that reflects the value structure and meaning system of the *Serawai* community. These values include social solidarity (*ukhuwah insaniyah*), adherence to customary norms, and religiosity manifested through gratitude and spiritual devotion (Sulastri & Rahayu, 2021). The ceremonies that accompany these dances involve community participation, significantly strengthening social cohesion and a sense of shared ownership of ancestral cultural heritage.

From Ricoeur's hermeneutic perspective, the symbols and rituals present in this tradition can be understood as "narratives of action", forms of symbolic expression that allow society to reinterpret its identity and existential values constantly (Nashruddin et al., 2024). In this context, the *Numbak Kebau* Dance serves as a "living text" that contains moral and spiritual narratives. The religious dimension of this dance is rooted in the meaning of sacrifice, which is not taken literally, but rather as a spiritual transformation—ego control, greed, and pride. Meanwhile, its social values are evident through the practice of cooperation and communal solidarity in preparing rituals, showing a balance between vertical (spiritual) and horizontal (social) dimensions (Sutarno et al., 2023)

Recent research shows that local traditions in Sumatra, including Bengkulu, function as a medium for internalizing religious identity

without negating the character of local culture (Wibowo, 2020). In the context of the Serawai community, religious values are not only articulated through prayer or verbal symbols, but are also implemented in cultural practices, such as dances and traditional ceremonies. This finding is in line with the concept of “cultural Islam” put forward by Nurcholish Madjid, namely a form of religiosity experienced through everyday cultural practices, not solely through normative texts (Albab, 2023; Majid et al., 2022). Thus, the *Numbak Kebau* Dance embodies a syncretic relationship between Islamic teachings and local wisdom, which live harmoniously and contextually in the culture of the Bengkulu people.

In Habermas’ critical hermeneutic paradigm as stated by Kholiq et al (2021), this tradition can be read as a form of cultural emancipation, in which local communities maintain interpretive autonomy over religious meaning in the midst of the dynamics of modernity. Through this dance, the Serawai people negotiate and reinterpret their own spiritual meaning, not passively accepting formal religious dogma, but realizing Islamic interpretations through cultural practices of social, aesthetic, and theological value. This perspective affirms that local wisdom is not a deviation from orthodoxy, but rather a creative expression of contextual and reflective religious consciousness (Syamsuri, 2024; Setiyani & Tasrif, 2023).

Furthermore, this tradition shows that the Serawai community has a system of knowledge and ethics that is firmly rooted in spiritual awareness and Islamic values. As conveyed by a religious figure from South Bengkulu (AM, 60 years old, a religious leader).

“In every Numbak Kebau Dance performance, the community not only displays movement art, but also represents spiritual cosmology, which is the relationship between humans, God, fellow humans, and the universe. Values such as sacrifice, gratitude, and social responsibility are concrete manifestations of Islamic teachings that are firmly rooted in local culture.”

Therefore, the *Numbak Kebau* Dance should be seen not only as an intangible cultural heritage but also as a philosophical text that articulates Islamic social ethics and spirituality in the context of Serawai culture.

The symbolic meaning of the *Numbak Kebau* Dance, therefore, cannot be reduced to a mere aesthetic or performative expression, but rather a manifestation of philosophical and theological values rooted in the way of life of the Serawai people. The critical hermeneutic approach opens up the possibility of uncovering these layers of meaning through the reading of symbols that operate in religious and social dimensions. In Islamic philosophy, symbols are understood not as empty markers but rather as representations of spiritual reality that bridge the relationship between man, God, and the universe. Based on this understanding, the *Numbak Kebau* Dance can be interpreted as a “cultural theological text” that represents the orientation of monotheism, purity of soul, and ethical balance, which are the core of Islamic teachings.

Tauhid and Cosmic Consciousness

The value of monotheism, as the main principle in Islamic philosophy, becomes the ontological and epistemological foundation for the entire system of meaning that shapes the Muslim view of life. In the context of the *Numbak Kebau* Dance, the value of God’s oneness is manifested through cosmic consciousness that unites the relationship between humans, animals, and the universe in a ritual structure. The movement of spearing the Bau cannot be interpreted as a form of violence, but rather as a representation of man’s total surrender to the Divine will—an expression of *taslim* and *tawakkal* that is at the core of Islamic spirituality. In Gadamer’s hermeneutic perspective, these symbolic actions form a “hermeneutic circle” that integrates religious and cultural experiences, so that each ritual element functions as a transcendental reminder of the existential connection of all beings with the Creator (Hasyim Hasanah, 2017).

The buffalo symbol has a central position in the cosmology of the Serawai community. It is not only understood as a source of life, strength, and prosperity, but also as a spiritual metaphor that marks man’s awareness of his limitations and mortality before God. In the context of the *nombak* rite, the symbol undergoes a transformation of meaning—from a symbol of materiality to a sign of surrender and ontological awareness of human dependence on the Almighty.

Viewed from the framework of Islamic ontology, this symbolism is in line with the concept of *wahdat al-wujūd*, i.e., the existential

unity between beings and Khalik, as formulated by Ibn 'Arabi, and further developed by Mulla Şadra through his idea of substantial motion (al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah), which explains that every entity of existence is always moving towards Divine perfection (Fery, 2025; Halimatuzzuhro, 2022). Thus, the *Numbak Kebau* Dance is not just an aesthetic expression or traditional ritual, but a medium of existential awareness, which reminds humans that earthly life is only one stage of the spiritual journey to God (Munir, 2025).

Purification of the Soul

The symbolic “sword” movement in the *Numbak Kebau* Dance can be interpreted as the process of *tazkiyah an-nafs* (purification of nafs), which is the purification of oneself from reprehensible traits such as greed, arrogance, and other vices. Within the framework of critical hermeneutics, these acts are not just formal rituals, but spiritual practices that are lived and experienced collectively by society. When the dancers pierce the buffalo, they are actually reinterpreting the inner struggle of man to control his passions and draw closer to God. The *Numbak Kebau* Dance represents the cultural dimension of Sufism, where spiritual experiences are manifested through symbols that have social legitimacy. This dance functions as a space for personal and communal transformation, because through movement and rhythm, people learn to internalize the values of patience, sincerity, and moral awareness.

From Ricoeur's perspective, symbols can “relive the experience of meaning”, that is, symbols not only point to a concept, but also build ethical awareness within the subject. Therefore, the *Numbak Kebau* Dance not only serves as an aesthetic artifact or cultural expression but also as an ethical practice that guides the community towards the process of purifying the soul and forming spiritual morals (Ricoeur, 2016).

Trust and Social Ethics

The spear symbol used in the *Numbak Kebau* Dance contains a deep philosophical meaning, representing the mandate, which is the moral responsibility of humans to maintain social and ecological balance. From the perspective of Islamic ethics, trust is understood as a moral principle that connects the relationship between individuals, society,

and God. The spear in this dance is not interpreted as a tool of violence, but a symbol of awareness of spiritual and social responsibility that must be upheld by humans. The Serawai community interprets the spear as a manifestation of moral courage in upholding truth and justice, values that are the foundation of social ethics in Islamic teachings.

Through the perspective of Habermas's critical hermeneutics (Kholiq et al., 2021), this symbol can be understood as a form of ethical communication between individuals and society. In the context of the *Numbak Kebau* Dance, this communication is not expressed verbally, but is manifested through collective movement and rhythm. When the Serawai people dance together, they are actually expressing a shared awareness of the responsibility to maintain social and spiritual harmony. Therefore, this tradition has a significant social function as a mechanism for reproducing moral and spiritual values in the life of the Serawai community.

Balance (Tawazzun)

The principle of *tawazzun* or balance is the core of the philosophical values contained in the *Numbak Kebau* Dance. At every stage of ritual implementation, harmony between the material and spiritual dimensions, as well as between the interests of the individual and the community, is always carefully maintained. This principle is in line with the teachings of Islamic ethics, which rejects all forms of extremism, both in the fulfillment of worldly pleasures and excessive asceticism, and places man as a caliph who has the responsibility to maintain balance on earth (Abdullah et al., 2025). Through the rhythm of the drums and rhythmic movements, this dance presents a symbolic harmony that reflects the cosmic order as understood in classical Islamic philosophy.

From the perspective of contemporary Islamic philosophy, the concept of balance has not only a moral dimension but also an epistemological dimension. Rahman (2023) explained that local traditions such as the *Numbak Kebau* Dance show the epistemology of a balance between revelation and culture, as well as between rationality and spirituality. Thus, the people of Serawai do not understand reality dichotomically, but integratively, where reason and sense work synergistically in recognizing the essence of life. Within the framework of Gadamer's hermeneutics, this process is referred to as "understanding

as participation”, i.e., understanding that is realized through existential involvement (Atabik, 2013). Through this dance practice, people not only remember religious teachings but also live them embodied, so that spiritual and moral values become part of their social body and collective consciousness (Mayasari & Winata, 2024).

Conclusion

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the philosophical meaning of the *Numbak Kebau Dance* is ontologically, this dance represents the Serawai people's view of the integration and balance of the relationship between humans, nature, and God. The movement of spearing the buffalo symbolizes sacrifice and self-purification, which is the embodiment of spiritual teachings about surrender and surrender to God's will. Epistemologically, the meaning of this dance comes from collective experience and symbolic knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation, reflecting that people's knowledge does not solely come from rationality, but also from spiritual experience, intuition, and local traditions. Meanwhile, in the axiological dimension, the *Numbak Kebau Dance* embodies ethical and social values such as cooperation, solidarity, sincerity, and gratitude, which serve to strengthen social cohesion and strengthen religious ethics in community life.

The *Numbak Kebau Dance* represents the local wisdom of the Serawai people, integrating cultural traditions with Islamic spiritual values. This dance serves not merely as an artistic performance but also contains philosophical meanings that reflect religious awareness and human relationships with God, fellow humans, and the universe. Through symbols such as the buffalo, sword, and spear, this tradition conveys messages about monotheism, self-purification, moral responsibility, and the importance of balance in life. These values are collectively passed down through cultural practices that continue to live within the community. Thus, the *Numbak Kebau Dance* serves as a means of transmitting social and spiritual ethics that strengthen cultural identity while demonstrating the harmony between Islamic teachings and the local wisdom of the *Serawai* people.

This study emphasizes that the *Numbak Kebau Dance* of the people of Serawai, Bengkulu, is not only a form of artistic expression

or cultural performance, but also a reflection of social, moral, and religious values that are firmly rooted in community life.

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