

# Kuda Kepang: A Case Report of Javanese Cultural-Related Trance in Medan

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## Abstract

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**BACKGROUND:** One of the works of Javanese culture is the kuda kepong. None of the historical records explains the origin of this dance. Kuda kepong or also called kuda lumping or jathilan. In the kuda kepong dance, the trance process takes place through the calling of the spirit or called endang through the songs that are played. In the International Classification of Disease Edition (ICD-10), it is called trance and possession disorders and in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders five editions (DSM-5) it is included into Other Specified Dissociative Disorder.

**CASE REPORT:** This is a case of the direct interview with the kuda kepong player, SI (30 years old), and HO (54 years old) both were the Javanese tribe as the owner of the kuda kepong art group called "Kesenian Tunas Baru" in Sukaraya Village, Kutalimbaru District. He was one of the music players in the arts.

**CONCLUSION:** The traditional performance of kuda kepong is a change and innovation that characterises the traditional art world where kuda kepong performances are truly sacred events and now become extraordinary and can be performed. In this case, it appears when the magical side is in the trance condition; this trance can be performed.

## Introduction

Trance and possession disorders are disorders that indicate a temporary loss of appreciation of self-identity and awareness of the environment; in some instances, the individual behaves as if possessed by other personalities, supernatural powers, angels or other "powers". Attention and alertness are limited or focused on one or two aspects that exist in the environment and often movements, body positions and expressions of words are also limited and repeated. Only trance disorders that are involuntary or unwanted, and that appear in ordinary activities, which arise outside (or are a continuation of), religious activities or events that can be accepted by the culture, which may be included here (Code F44.3), and classified in the type of dissociative disorder [1].

In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5), dissociative disorders are placed alongside trauma, but not part of

the trauma, and disorders associated with stressors, show a close relationship between diagnosis classes. Both acute stress disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder contain dissociative symptoms, such as amnesia, flashbacks, numbness, and depersonalization/derealization [2].

Although the DSM-5 does not include trance possession as an example of Other Specified Dissociative Disorders, this term can be used as part of a dissociative trance determinant, or even as part of a diagnosis of Dissociative Identity Disorder [3].

One of the Javanese cultural arts performances is the art of *kuda kepong*. According to *Wijayanti*, *kuda kepong* dance art is a traditional art that is rich in artistic and cultural values; this dance is full of magical impression and spiritual value [4].

Where this art and culture originated from *Sunan Kalijaga*, which is in ancient times, *Sunan Kalijaga* brought Islamic religion through cultural arts that existed in Java, so that at that time there was a long dry period for several years they asked the rain to fall. *Sunan Kalijaga* went around the village playing

the *kuda kepong* art and at the same time spread the religion of Islam by reciting *sholawat* of the prophet-so that at that time the *kuda kepong* art was played, so the rain fell [4], [5], [6].

And that is where the origin of the art of *kuda kepong* began to take part. *Kuda kepong* is a type of traditional art that uses miniature horses as a means of staging, the name of the horse that is in Javanese language is *jeliteng* (black horse), *mege geni* (red horse) and *mege mendung* (grey horse) and there is a horse king who sets who will call the spirit. There is command in the performance, and each performance must have a handler as a command for the entry of trance [7].

This can be seen from the *kuda kepong* players who experience trance when the performance takes place. Trance is an altered state of consciousness that can be caused by invasive or non-invasive elements in a clinically controlled environment such as hospitals and other medical facilities that are relevant or in anthropological settings through traditional healing that may or may not involve tools or objects [1]. According to Wallace, the concept of trance is a phenomenon about spirits who control the mind feeling, intelligence (the ability to make decisions) in a person by uniting on consciousness [7].

Trance is conceded by demons or spirits; people who are possessed by spirits are not aware anymore. This experience a situation outside the consciousness of humans and then remember nothing, just as a *kuda kepong* dancer who is possessed will move out of consciousness because it has been controlled by a spirit that enters the body of *kuda kepong* dancer through the handler [7].

The combination of staging *kuda kepong* is the flat horse to be ridden by the player, music and dance. The types of musical instruments that are used are *saron*, *demung*, *gong*, and *gendang*. The four musical instruments must be present; if one of the instruments is not there then when summoning the spirit that they called *endang* respectively, the players cannot experience trance to the three types of horse. For the calling of spirits for trance, use the type of song in the first stage *Hijau-hijau*, *Warung Doyo* and *Sampak Songo* [4], [7].

Besides that, the tools for *kuda kepong* players are *frankincense*, *minyak duyung*, *telon flower*, *toy horse*, *whip*, *embers*, *barongan*, *mask*, *pentul cepek*, and coconut [7].

## Case Report

A man named SI, 30 years old, a Javanese tribe, married, for 15 years he had played the role of a

braid horse dance player in this dance group. The process of entering trance begins with playing the first music, *saron* music and accompanied by a musical instrument *Demung*, *Gong* and *Gendang* by playing the song *Warung Doyo*, followed by the song *Hijau-Hijau* and finally *Sampak Songo*, the process of *kuda kepong* dance, where each performance each horse is played, namely two black horses called *Endang Jeliteng*, two red horses called *Mego Geni* and finally two grey horses called *Mego Mendung* and guided by the King of Horses, here the trance start. So when the music is played to three pairs of horses walking around for three times with *Hijau-hijau* music, to call the *endang* and the *endang* surrounds them, so that the *kuda kepong* player looks up to wait for the entry or possession of the *endang*, and followed by *warung doyo* music while dancing, after that the king of the horse enters by ringing the whip with one-on-one *gamelan* music (it sounds like *ning-ning-ning*), here is the process of getting drunk on the horseman. Then continue to dance until the spirit or *endang* enters the body of the *kuda kepong*. The dancing process takes about 15 minutes. Here the king of horse wants to enter the *endang* to which body, for example, *Endang Pig*, *Endang Monkey* or *Endang Crocodile* and many more types of *endang* which king of horse wants to call.

Another person, HO, 54 years old, was married, has played music instruments for 40 years at the *kuda kepong* dance. He played the musical instrument *Saron*, and he was the music coordinator. When playing the instrument, he can also communicate with the King on the horseman or *endang*, regarding the type of music that was being played.

## Discussion

Based on the International Classification of Disease and Related Health Problems 10th edition (ICD-10) this trance status is included in the Trance Disorder (F44.3) which is part of the Dissociative / Conversion Disorder (F44). For the exact diagnosis of dissociative disorders according to ICD-10, there must be the following: clinical features determined for each disorder listed in F44, no evidence of a physical disorder can explain these symptoms, evidence of psychological causes, in the form of a definite time relationship with problems and events that are "stressful" or disturbed interpersonal relationships (even though this is denied by the patient) [7].

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition includes trance disorders in the Other Specified Dissociative Disorder group. This category applies to presentations where the characteristic symptoms of dissociative disorders that cause clinically significant disorders or disorders

in the social, occupational, or other important areas of function dominate but do not meet the complete criteria for each disorder in the dissociative disorder diagnostic class. The specified dissociative disorder category is used in situations where doctors choose to communicate specific reasons that the presentation does not meet the criteria for specific dissociative disorder. This is done by recording "specified dissociative disorder" followed by specific reasons (for example, "dissociative trance") [3].

The difference between the ICD and DSM in the classification of the Dissociative Trance Disorder DTD is then only mentioned as part of Dissociative Disorder Not Otherwise Specified / Dissociative Disorder, and all definitions are only listed in Appendix B. According to the DSM, this disorder requires further research to determine its usefulness (collection of criteria and provision of axis for further research) [5].

Besides these differences, both classifications use similar criteria and view DTD as a temporary picture of altered states of consciousness (ASC), which are shaped by one's culture. According to the DSM-IV-TR, individuals with images that meet the research criteria will be diagnosed as Dissociative Disorder Not Otherwise Specified. The diagnosis should not be enforced if the trance condition is assessed as a result of the direct physiological effects of a general medical condition, where the case will be diagnosed as Mental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified Due to a General Medical Condition (293.9) or because a substance is diagnosed as Substance-Related Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (292.9) [6].

Symptoms of a trance (such as hearing or seeing a spiritual being and feeling influenced or controlled by another being) may be confused with hallucinations and delusions of Schizophrenia, Mood Disorders with Psychotic Characteristics, or Short Psychotic Disorders. The trance state may be distinguished from cultural conformity, where the duration is shorter, and there are no typical symptoms of other disorders [1], [6]. Antropolis and ethnological have provided many explanations and explanatory frameworks that might be useful for this cultural phenomenon. Apart from an explanation of the general forms of behaviour for pathological and non-pathological conditions, two items of ASC episode classification from DTD cannot be accepted as a regular part of religious practice or culture [5].

The diagnosis must be considered if a person enters an unconscious state and suffers from distress and a real disorder, which limits this disorder from ASC, which is aimed at and full of awareness. According to these criteria, some syndromes related

to culture can be understood within the boundaries of the DTD [5].

Six cultural-related syndromes have the potential to meet criteria as DTD: *amok and bebainan* (Indonesian), *latah* (Malaysian), *pibloktog* (Arctic), *Ataque de nervios* (nerve attacks from Latin America), and possession (India). Finally, the guidelines note that the prevalence of DTD is decreasing in line with industrialisation but remains high among traditional ethnic minorities in industrial societies [1].

Overall, the traditional performance of the *kuda kepang* is a change and innovation that characterises the universe of traditional art where *kuda kepang* performances are truly sacred events and now become extraordinary and can be performed. In this case, it appears when the magical side is in the trance condition; this trance can be performed. Changes that occur in the tradition of performing arts seem to be an effort to reach out to the audience as well as the increasingly practical community. Further research is needed to understand the culture and trance better.

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