

Transmission and Sustainability of the Kelentangan Tradition in Dayak Benuaq Ritual, East Kalimantan

Eli Irawati ^{a,1,*}, Surya Dandes ^{b,2}

^a Ethnomusicology Department, Faculty of Performing Arts, Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta, Jalan Parangtritis km 6.5, Sewon, Bantul 55188, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

^b Müzik Bilimi Doktora Programı, Müzikoloji Bölümü, Ankara Müzik ve Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi, Turan Güneş Bulvarı, Yukarı Dikmen, Neşet Ertaş Caddesi No. 4, 06550 Çankaya, Ankara, Türkiye

¹ eliirawati@isi.ac.id; ² dandessurya@gmail.com

ORCID: ¹ 0000-0003-1622-6963; ² 0009-0004-4326-8207

* Corresponding author

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ABSTRACT	KEYWORDS
The continuity of an oral musical tradition is ordinarily explained by the effectiveness of its transmission, yet transmission alone does not account for why some traditions persist while others fall silent. This article examines how kelentangan, the gong-row ensemble of the Dayak Benuaq of East Kalimantan, is transmitted, and how that transmission relates to the continuity of the tradition. The study draws on musical ethnography, which treats music both as sound and as the product of a set of social activities, and on the interaction of concept, behaviour, and sound together with the idea of participatory performance. Fieldwork was carried out in the villages of Tanjung Isuy, Mancong, and Muara Lawa in Kutai Barat Regency, and combined participant observation of the gantar dance, of the belian bawo and belian sentiu healing ceremonies, and of the kwangkay secondary mortuary rite with in-depth interviews with fifteen informants selected by snowball sampling: players of two generations, ritual specialists, dancers, and customary elders. The findings show that the tradition is inherited without any dedicated institution, curriculum, or scheduled lesson. Learning proceeds aurally and by imitation within the occasions on which the music is performed, along a graded path from the hanging gong to the drum and finally to the gong row, and it regenerates two populations at once: players and the public against which playing is judged. Continuity therefore rests less on transmission itself than on the ritual occasions that host it, and safeguarding measures addressed to transmission alone will not secure the tradition.	cultural ecosystem intergenerational learning musical ethnography oral tradition penu'ung  This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license.

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INTRODUCTION

In the *lamin*, the communal longhouse of Tanjung Isuy on the shore of Lake Jempang in Kutai Barat Regency, East Kalimantan, a row of six small bossed gongs rests horizontally on a low wooden frame. A single player, seated behind the row, strikes the bosses with a pair of beaters and weaves a melodic pattern that a cylindrical double-headed drum supports from below and a large hanging gong punctuates at fixed intervals. The ensemble, and the music it produces, is called *kelentangan*. It is heard when women of the village dance *gantar* for guests, when a *pemeliatn* (ritual healer) calls on spirit beings during the *belian bawo* and *belian sentiu* healing ceremonies, and when the bones of the dead are lifted from their first resting place during *kwangkay*, the Dayak Benuaq secondary mortuary rite. It is not heard in concert halls, and it has no repertoire that exists apart from these occasions.

That dependence on occasion is the starting point of this article. *Kelentangan* has no notation, no archive, and no school. Like most Indonesian cultural forms, it is carried orally from one person to the next (Bascom, 1965; Endraswara, 2013), which means that an interruption of a single generation can sever a chain that no written or recorded medium is available to repair (Carlson, 1998). The question of how such a chain is maintained has acquired fresh urgency under conditions of globalisation, understood as the set of processes by which the peoples of the world are drawn into a single world society (Pieterse, 2009, p. 65). Globalisation is not uniformly corrosive: it also gives local practices a platform they could not previously reach. Its most discussed consequence for musical life, however, is a levelling of distinctions, and the erosion of difference is widely experienced by the communities concerned as damage (Irawati, 2017; Balonek, 2019).

Three lines of scholarship bear on the problem. The first treats transmission as an act of communication. Shelemay (2008) defines musical transmission as the communication of musical materials from one person to another in oral, aural, or written form, irrespective of the age of the materials transmitted; from this definition follow the elements that any act of transmission must contain, namely a sender, a receiver, a message, and a means (Qorib, 2024). Work in developmental and cultural psychology has refined the two moments of the act, externalisation on the part of the sender and internalisation on the part of the receiver, and has shown that the relation between them is bidirectional rather than a simple transfer (Kuczynski et al., 1997, pp. 23–50; Schönplflug, 2009, p. 5). This literature establishes the anatomy of transmission with precision, but it was largely developed in settings where an identifiable teaching relationship exists, and it has correspondingly little to say about traditions in which no one teaches and no one is enrolled.

The second line takes continuity itself as its object, asking why some practices survive and others do not. Ethnomusicologists have studied the pedagogy of traditional musicians across many cultures, both systematically and as one component of wider enquiry (Campbell, 2011, p. 82), and the accumulated finding is straightforward: where transmission proceeds well, the practice persists; where it falters, the practice is lost (Irawati, 2019a; Sathotho, 2022). A complementary argument locates survival in function, holding that vulnerable practices endure because they continue to be needed and to perform work within community life (Haryono, 2008). Studies in this line tend, however, to treat the number of competent bearers as the index of health, and so to measure a tradition by counting its performers.

The third line concerns *kelentangan* and Dayak performance specifically. The symbolic organisation of *kelentangan* within *belian sentiu* has been described in detail (Irawati, 2014, 2019b), its transmission among the Benuaq has been documented (Irawati, 2017, 2019a), and the wider notion of a supporting ecosystem for traditional music has been proposed (Irawati, 2021). Observations of dance learning among Dayak groups in Central Kalimantan report a comparable informality (Hudson, 1971, pp. 134–135), and the belief structures that make

Benuaq mortuary and healing ritual necessary have been examined comparatively (Juhannis et al., 2021). The theoretical resources for reading these materials are well established: Merriam's (1964) model of the mutual conditioning of concept, behaviour, and sound, and Turino's (2008) distinction between participatory and presentational performance, which makes the audience a party to the musical event rather than its consumer. Sathotho (2023) has shown, for Javanese agrarian ceremony, that a performance of this kind is inseparable from the cosmological commitments that call it into being.

The gap lies at the junction of these three lines. Transmission has been analysed as communication, and continuity has been explained by transmission; but the conditions under which transmission itself remains possible have not been made an object of analysis. If a tradition is learned only on the occasions when it is performed, then those occasions, and not the willingness of elders to teach or of juniors to learn, are the variable on which the chain depends. Existing work on *kelentangan*, the present authors' included, has described the chain without asking what sustains it, and has attended to the regeneration of players while leaving the regeneration of the public that judges them unexamined. This article is the first to analyse *kelentangan* transmission as a dependent function of the ritual ecosystem that hosts it, and the first to treat the renewal of the Dayak Benuaq public, alongside that of the players, as a necessary condition of the tradition's continuity.

The article accordingly asks three questions. Through what relationships, and in what settings, is *kelentangan* transmitted among the Dayak Benuaq of Kutai Barat? What does that transmission produce, beyond a supply of competent players? And on what does its continued operation depend?

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

The study was designed as a qualitative musical ethnography. A musical ethnography treats music not as sound alone but as the outcome of a determinate set of human activities, and so admits into the analysis the occasions, relationships, and understandings that produce the sound as well as the sound itself (Spradley, 1997; Irawati, 2019a). The design was chosen because the research question concerns not what *kelentangan* sounds like but how it passes between persons, which is a question about conduct in context rather than about musical structure. The ethnomusicological premise that music within a society must be approached simultaneously as text and as context (Nakagawa, 2000) governed the balance of attention throughout, and the descriptive orientation of qualitative enquiry, which aims to render events, phenomena, and social conditions as they present themselves (Endraswara, 2006), governed the writing of field materials.

Two theoretical instruments were brought to bear, and both were introduced only after the field materials had been provisionally categorised, so that the categories would follow the conduct observed rather than the theory. Merriam's (1964) tripartite model of concept, behaviour, and sound was used to interpret the relation between what the community holds *kelentangan* to be and what its players do; Turino's (2008) account of participatory performance was used to interpret the position of those present at a performance who are not playing.

Site, Period, and Participants

Fieldwork was conducted in three villages of Kutai Barat Regency, East Kalimantan: Tanjung Isuy, Mancong, and Muara Lawa. Tanjung Isuy was the principal site, being the village in which the greatest number of active players reside and in which *gantar* is most frequently performed; Mancong and Muara Lawa were included because ritual specialists and players resident there are called upon to serve ceremonies across the district. Observation covered four categories of occasion: performances of the *gantar* dance, *belian barwo* and *belian sentiu* healing

ceremonies, and the *kwangkay* mortuary ceremony. [Authors: insert the months and years of fieldwork and the number of visits and of ceremonies observed in each category.]

Fifteen informants were selected by the snowball technique, beginning from two customary elders and proceeding by their referral. They fall into four categories defined by their relation to the practice rather than by acquaintance: six *penu'ung* (*kelentangan* players) of two generations, aged from 36 to 70 years, comprising the whole of the currently active complement in Tanjung Isuy and its neighbouring villages; three *pemeliatn* and ritual teachers, who direct the ceremonies in which the ensemble plays; two *gantar* dancers; and four customary elders and observers, consulted on the older state of the practice and on customary rule. The list of informants by role, age, and village is given in the Appendix.

Data Collection

Three techniques were used. Participant observation at the four categories of occasion produced field notes on the physical arrangement of the ensemble, the sequence of pieces in relation to the stages of ritual, the movement of persons in and out of the playing group, and the conduct of those present who were not playing. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with the fifteen informants produced accounts of each player's own learning history: the age at which they began, the person from whom they learned, the instrument on which they began, the sequence in which they took up further instruments, and their stated motive for learning. Audiovisual documentation, in video and still photography, recorded performances in each of the four contexts and was used afterwards to verify details of playing technique and ritual sequence that could not be settled in the field. Primary data comprise the interview transcripts and observational notes; the recordings and photographs, together with the field notes made after each occasion, constitute the secondary material.

Data Validation and Analysis

Credibility was established in three ways. Source triangulation compared the accounts of players with those of ritual specialists, dancers, and elders, so that no claim about customary rule rests on the testimony of a single category of informant. Technique triangulation checked interview statements about how learning proceeds against what was observed on the occasions themselves, a comparison that proved decisive, since informants consistently denied that any teaching takes place while being observed to correct and prompt one another during breaks. Member checking returned the account of the learning sequence and of the generational composition of the playing group to senior players for confirmation.

Analysis proceeded in four steps. First, transcripts and field notes were read and segmented, each segment being labelled with the occasion in which it arose and the category of informant from whom it came. Second, segments concerning learning were coded for the elements of the transmission act: who transmitted, who received, what was transmitted (skill, repertoire, or ritual knowledge), and by what means. Third, the codes were grouped into categories by the relationship they described, which yielded the distinction between transmission among players and transmission between players and the wider public, and by the setting in which the relationship was enacted, which yielded the distinction between profane and sacred occasions and the constraints proper to each. Fourth, these categories were read against the two theoretical instruments named above, and the resulting propositions were tested against the whole corpus for negative cases; the observation that transmission within families predominates, for instance, was tested against the question of whether descent is a requirement, and was revised accordingly.

Research Ethics and Positionality

No institutional review board has jurisdiction over research of this kind in the field sites, and consent was therefore secured on a customary basis. Permission to attend each ceremony was

obtained beforehand from the *pemeliatn* leading it and from the family holding it, and permission to record was sought separately from permission to attend. During *belian* and *kwangkay*, recording was suspended at any point at which the ritual leader indicated that it should be, and no material regarded by the *pemeliatn* as restricted, including the invocatory formulae addressed to spirit beings, is reproduced or analysed here. Informants were told the purpose of the research and the intended publication, and consented to be identified by name; the names used in this article are those they asked to be used. Consent to publish images of identifiable persons was obtained from those depicted. The first author has conducted research with the Benuaq communities of Kutai Barat over an extended period and has published previously on *kelentangan*; that sustained relationship afforded access to ceremonies otherwise closed to visitors, and carried a corresponding risk of reproducing earlier interpretations, which the negative-case testing described above was designed in part to counter. Neither author is a member of the Dayak Benuaq community or a practitioner of *kelentangan*. [Authors: insert the approval number if institutional clearance was obtained.]

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Three Senses of Kelentangan: Instrument, Ensemble, and Practice

Among the Dayak Benuaq the word *kelentangan* carries three ranges of reference, and the analysis that follows depends on holding them apart. In the narrowest sense it names an instrument: six bossed gongs laid horizontally in a row on a wooden stand and played by one person with a pair of beaters. In a wider sense it names an ensemble consisting of that instrument together with *gimar*, a cylindrical double-headed drum played by one person with two beaters; *genikng*, a vertically suspended gong larger than those of the row and comparable in function to the *kempul* of Javanese gamelan; and *sulikng dewa*, an end-blown bamboo flute. Naming an ensemble after its most prominent instrument is a common Indonesian convention, as in the *gambus* ensemble, which contains *gambus*, *marawis*, and other instruments, or the *calung* ensemble, which contains *calung*, *dhendhem*, gong, and *kendhang*.

In its widest sense *kelentangan* names a practice: the instruments and the ensemble together with a repertoire, the contexts in which that repertoire is presented, and the rules governing presentation, which jointly produce an aesthetic intelligible to the community that owns it. The three senses are not separable in use, and the widest is the one that matters for transmission. What passes from a senior player to a junior is not the capacity to strike six gongs, which can be acquired in an afternoon, but the capacity to strike them at the right moment in a ritual whose stages the player must be able to recognise. This is why an account of *kelentangan* transmission cannot be confined to the instrument or even to the ensemble: what is transmitted is a practice with a conceptual level, and the conceptual level is not carried by the sound.

The Occasion as Classroom: The Graded Path from Genikng to Kelentangan

Tanjung Isuy has no institution for teaching *kelentangan*. There is nothing corresponding to the *sanggar* or studio found throughout Java and Bali, and the Benuaq community does not employ that model of learning (Irawati, 2014, pp. 60–73). Neither is there a time set aside for learning. The moment at which a person may engage with the music is the moment at which it is being performed, whether the occasion is profane or sacred, and a beginner typically imitates during a break the playing they have just heard. Transfer is almost entirely aural; verbal instruction from a player to a learner occurs, but occasionally and briefly.

Entertainment occasions are the most open. *Gantar* is a social dance of the Benuaq of Tanjung Isuy, performed in groups by women and accompanied by *kelentangan*, ordinarily in the reduced formation of gong row, *gimar*, and *genikng*. The accompaniment does not mark the dancers' movements with the kind of accentuation that the solo *kendhang* supplies in Javanese

dance; the *gimar* supports rather than leads the melodic line carried by the gong row. A prospective *penu'ung* may watch, observe closely, or listen (*bekajiq*) to senior players accompanying the dance, and it is not unusual for a candidate to join in directly, imitating (*kintau*) what has been seen. Participation almost always begins with *genikng*, the instrument easiest to remember and to imitate, which need only be sounded at a fixed point in each cycle to accent the melodic interweaving carried by the gong row.

From there a graded path opens. A beginner judged sufficiently capable on *genikng* by senior players is encouraged to try *gimar*, whether at a senior's suggestion or on their own initiative, but always with the seniors' permission; one considered to have mastered *gimar* in accompanying *gantar* may then move to the gong row itself, which carries the most complex playing pattern in the ensemble. No rule prescribes this sequence and no one administers it, yet it is the path learners in fact follow, and it has a pedagogical logic: each step is more demanding than the last in technique, and each affords the learner a further period of exposure to the repertoire from inside the ensemble rather than outside it. By the time a player reaches the gong row, the compositions are already familiar from two prior positions within them.

This finding qualifies the psychological literature on transmission in a specific way. Kuczynski et al. (1997) and Schönplflug (2009) describe transmission as paired acts of externalisation and internalisation, and the pairing holds here; but in *kelentangan* both acts are largely unconscious, because the process does not occur in a formal or exclusive setting that either party would recognise as teaching or learning. Senior players do not consider themselves to be instructing, and the community has no term for junior or senior *penu'ung*; the English terms are used in this article solely to distinguish those who have recently begun from those who have played longer (Irawati, 2017). The graded path is thus a structure without an author. It is worth noting that Hudson (1971, pp. 134–135) reported a comparable informality in dance learning among Dayak groups in Central Kalimantan, which suggests that what is described here is a regional pattern of learning rather than a local peculiarity of Tanjung Isuy.

Sacred Constraint: Learning at the Margin of Belian and Kwangkay

The ritual occasions impose a different regime. Benuaq communities recognise many kinds of *belian*, among them *belian sentiu*, *belian sipung*, *belian bawo*, *belian kenyong dewa*, *belian nalith tautn*, *belian ngeragag*, *belian banyukng*, and *belian melas anak*. These are employed for beneficent purposes, principally healing, and in principle also for harm, such as the injuring of a person at a distance known as *parangmaya* (Irawati, 2019b). *Belian* is understood as a means of connecting the human world with the rulers of the other worlds, above and below. Two forms were observed here. *Belian bawo* and *belian sentiu* are both curative, addressed to illness believed to arise from the disturbance of spirit beings; *bawo* is held to be effective against ailments that cannot be treated medically, while *sentiu* is used both to cure and to avert outbreaks attributed to curses or to the malevolent spirits called *uwokng*.

In these ceremonies the ensemble is subordinated to the ritual. Unlike its role in *gantar*, *kelentangan* in *belian* follows the instructions of the *pemeliatn*, its tempo and dynamics governed by the stage of the procession. The players who accompany a *belian* are those judged appropriate, which means those with sound technique and with knowledge of the rules and course of the ritual, although no fixed standard determines fitness. A person still learning is not permitted to take part in a ceremony the community regards as sacred, and a prospective player generally cannot imitate during the ritual what is being played, because error in accompaniment is believed to displease the spirits being summoned.

The constraint is real but narrow, and its narrowness is the significant finding. Anyone interested may listen freely and at close range: no customary boundary separates participants in the ceremony from those attending it. Younger players present at a *belian* observe their seniors and take in both the compositions and the ritual that surrounds them, and may try the

instruments during a break, at a rest, or after the ceremony has ended. Seniority itself rests on recognition by fellow players and by the wider community, measured by the length of consistent service in the ensemble, command of the instrument, and knowledge of ritual; no mystical qualification is required to become a *penu'ung*. The sacred occasion, in other words, suspends participation but not observation, and it is observation that does the pedagogical work.

Kwangkay, the largest of the occasions, confirms the pattern while extending it. Its central act is the removal of the bones of the deceased from their earlier burial for placement in the *lamin* where the ceremony is held, in order to deliver the spirit to the realm of *Lamut*; the remains are afterwards kept in a wooden coffin called *lungun* and placed about the *lamin*, which is why the rite is described in the literature as a secondary mortuary ceremony (Juhannis et al., 2021). Here too the ensemble follows the flow of the ceremony, notably in the dance called *ngerangkau*. But participation in *ngerangkau* is open to anyone, from children to elders, women and men, typically relatives of the deceased and fellow villagers, even though the dancers who lead it must have command of the dance and knowledge of the ceremony. A single occasion thus combines the strictest constraint on the playing group with the widest invitation to the assembly, and it is precisely in that combination that the tradition reproduces both of the populations it needs.

Two Generations of Penu'ung: Family Intensity Rather Than Descent

The Benuaq community of Tanjung Isuy and its neighbouring villages presently supports two generations of players, distinguished here by age. The senior generation comprises Nawan, sixty years old, who plays the gong row and *sulikng dewa*; Pesan, fifty-five, who plays *gimar*; and Moder, seventy, who plays *genikng*. The junior generation comprises Ayeng, thirty-seven, who plays the gong row and *sulikng dewa*; Katuk, thirty-six, who plays *gimar*; and Murji, forty-five, who plays *genikng*. Six active players in three villages is a small complement, and the gap of some fifteen years between the youngest of them and the age at which the seniors began is the most concrete measure of vulnerability the study yields.

Their learning histories are consistent in form. Nawan began at the age of three, taught by his grandfather Kakah Dangut, whom he regards as a leader within the ensemble; his interest grew from being brought along to Benuaq ceremonies, particularly *belian* and *kwangkay*, and learning the music gave him access to ritual practice and to his grandfather's knowledge of *belian*. He is now known as *guruq pemeliatn sentiu*. Pesan began at five with his father, Daman, drawn by the prospect of accompanying *belian sentiu* and *belian bawo*, and is now known as *guruq* of *sentiu* and *bawo*. Moder began at five with his grandfather, Kakah Itaq. Ayeng began at ten, learning from his friend Moder in order to accompany social dances. Katuk began at three with his father, Nawan, wishing to follow him in accompanying ceremonies and, as he puts it, to keep the tradition from disappearing. Murji began at five with his father, Sardi.

Two features of these histories bear on the argument. The first is motive. Alongside the wish to accompany ritual, three of the six name the wish to be noticed at ceremonies, and specifically by the women who dance; Moder is now married to Ainah, a *gantar* dancer, and Ayeng to Bimba, whom he met through dancing. The motive is easy to treat as anecdotal, but it is structurally important: it is a reward internal to the occasion, available only to those who attend, and it explains why learners persist through a sequence that offers no certificate and no fee.

The second is the line along which competence descends. Five of the six learned from a father or grandfather, and transmission across generations therefore runs, in this community, largely within the family. The community nonetheless holds no belief that a *penu'ung* must be descended from a *penu'ung*, and the case of Ayeng, who learned from a friend, is not regarded as irregular. The concentration is explained by intensity of contact rather than by rule:

interaction within a household is more frequent and more sustained than interaction outside it, and sustained contact between the holder of knowledge and its recipient is what allows the knowledge to pass (Irawati, 2017). The distinction matters for any safeguarding measure, because a tradition transmitted within families by custom would require the recruitment of those families, whereas a tradition transmitted within families by accident of exposure can in principle be transmitted to anyone whose exposure is made equally intense.

Regenerating the Audience: Transmission as the Formation of a Shared Concept

When *kelentangan* is performed in ritual, interaction takes place not only among the players but between the players and those present. Turino's (2008) account of participatory performance, in which the distinction between performer and audience is weak and the value of the event lies in the taking part, describes the Benuaq occasion closely, and *ngerangkau* is its clearest instance. Whether or not they are aware of it, those present absorb knowledge about the music: what it is, how its sounds are produced, who plays it, where it falls within the ritual, and what customs attach to it. What passes between players and public is therefore knowledge rather than skill, and it is no less consequential for that.

The consequence is that the community acquires a standard. The knowledge held by the Benuaq as owners of the tradition becomes the measure against which practice is judged, a shared reference for what *kelentangan* is and how it ought to appear in a given context (Irawati, 2017). This is the mechanism Merriam (1964, p. 33) identified when he observed that there is constant feedback from the musical product to the concepts held about the music, and that this feedback accounts for both change and stability within a musical system. Concept shapes the behaviour that produces sound; the sound returns to modify concept; and the system is able to change without ceasing to be itself. The judgement by which a senior player decides that a learner is ready for *gimar* is an application of this shared concept, and so is the community's recognition of seniority, which rests on no formal test.

It follows that the regeneration of the public is as necessary to continuity as the regeneration of the players, and this is where the present findings depart from the prevailing account. Studies that treat transmission as the condition of survival (Campbell, 2011; Irawati, 2019a; Sathotho, 2022) measure a tradition by the supply of competent bearers. But a supply of players without a public that can tell competent playing from incompetent playing would leave the standard with nothing to rest on, and the feedback loop Merriam describes would be broken on the conceptual side while remaining intact on the behavioural one. Conversely, a knowledgeable public without players has nothing to judge. The two populations are regenerated by the same occasions, which is why the occasion, rather than either population, is the unit that safeguarding must address. Not every member of the community, it should be said, holds this knowledge to the same degree; the standard is unevenly distributed, and its distribution is itself a function of how often a person attends.

Transmission Within a Cultural Ecosystem: Why Continuity Is Not Secured by Transmission Alone

The three preceding findings converge on a single conclusion about dependence. Transmission among players is the passage of skill and of knowledge concerning the music and the activities that surround its presentation (Irawati, 2021); transmission between players and the public is the passage of the concept against which the music is measured. Neither can occur without an occasion to host it, and *kelentangan* supplies no occasion of its own. It is not an autonomous musical offering and is not performed for its own sake; it appears when something else is happening. The occasions are therefore the community's institutions of musical learning, standing in the place occupied elsewhere in Indonesia by the studio, and they are ritual institutions before they are pedagogical ones.

The relation is quantitative as well as logical. The more often ceremonies are held, the more often *kelentangan* is performed, and the wider the space available for the transfer of knowledge and skill among those present (Irawati, 2017, pp. 1–18); the converse holds equally. And the ceremonies continue to be held because the community continues to practise its culture, the inherited knowledge and belief of Benuaq ancestors giving it reason to perform the rites in which the ensemble takes part. Continuity thus runs backwards along a chain of dependence: the music depends on the occasion, the occasion depends on the belief, and the belief depends on a community that continues to hold it.

This is the sense in which the literature reviewed at the outset requires qualification. The functional explanation of survival (Haryono, 2008), which holds that vulnerable practices endure because they remain needed, is confirmed here but should be read one step further back: what is needed is the ritual, and the music is needed only because the ritual is. The transmission-centred explanation of continuity is likewise confirmed and likewise displaced, since transmission turns out to be a dependent rather than an independent variable. And the concern of the globalisation literature (Balonek, 2019; Pieterse, 2009) is sharpened rather than contradicted: the threat to *kelentangan* does not lie in a loss of interest in gongs. It lies in anything that reduces the frequency of *belian* and *kwangkay*, whether religious change, migration for work, or the cost of mounting a ceremony that may run for days. A measure of the practice's health would accordingly count ceremonies before it counted players.

The practical implication is a reordering of priorities. Efforts to sustain *kelentangan* by intensifying transmission, through workshops, recordings, notation, or the insertion of the repertoire into school curricula, address a dependent variable while leaving its condition untouched, and would at best produce players competent in the instrument and unpractised in the occasion, which is to say players who have acquired the narrowest of the three senses of *kelentangan* and not the widest. What such efforts cannot supply is the ritual context that gives the music its point, the graded path that runs through it, and the knowledgeable public it assembles. A healthy cultural ecosystem for a music practice of this kind comprises, at minimum, its players, the community that owns it, and that community's understanding of and commitment to continuing its own cultural practices (Irawati, 2021). Where the ecosystem holds, transmission requires no assistance; where it fails, no amount of transmission will compensate.

CONCLUSION

Kelentangan is transmitted among the Dayak Benuaq without any institution, curriculum, or appointed teacher, and it is transmitted well. Learning takes place inside the occasions on which the music is performed, aurally and by imitation, along a graded path that carries a learner from the hanging gong through the drum to the gong row and, in doing so, gives each stage of technical advance a further period of exposure to the repertoire from within the ensemble. Sacred occasions restrict participation but not observation, and it is observation that does the work. Competence descends largely within families, not because descent confers the status of player but because households afford the sustained contact that the passage of tacit knowledge requires.

The transmission that occurs on these occasions regenerates two populations rather than one. It supplies players, and it supplies a public that knows what the music is and how it should sound in a given context, and it is this shared knowledge, rather than any formal test, that certifies a player as ready to advance or as senior. Continuity requires both. A tradition with players whose competence no one can any longer assess would have lost its standard, and a tradition whose public retains the standard but has no one to apply it to would have lost its practice. Since both are produced by the same events, the ritual occasion, and not the player and not the audience, is the unit on which the tradition's continuity actually rests.

The contribution of this study is therefore to displace transmission from the position of explanation to the position of thing to be explained. Transmission is a necessary condition of continuity and not a sufficient one; its own condition is the ritual ecosystem that hosts it, and the frequency with which that ecosystem convenes is the variable that governs everything downstream of it. For the communities concerned, and for those who would support them, the practical consequence is that measures directed at the music, whether documentation, teaching, or performance outside its context, cannot substitute for the conditions that allow ceremonies to continue to be held. Safeguarding intangible heritage of this kind means safeguarding occasions.

The study is limited in site, in scale, and in perspective. It rests on three villages of Kutai Barat and on the six players currently active there, which is the whole of that population but a very small one, and its account of decline is inferential rather than measured, since no systematic record exists of how often ceremonies were held in earlier decades. It examines Benuaq practice alone, and cannot say how far its findings extend to other Dayak communities in Kalimantan whose musical life is differently organised. Three lines of further research follow directly. A longitudinal count of *belian* and *kwangkay* ceremonies held annually in the district would convert the central claim of this article into a testable proposition. A comparative study of a Benuaq community in which ritual frequency has already declined would establish whether transmission fails in the manner predicted here. And a study of those who have attended ceremonies without ever playing would allow the regeneration of the public, which this article has inferred from the conduct of performances, to be examined directly.

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DECLARATIONS

Author contributions. E.I. — conceptualisation, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing (original draft); S.D. — formal analysis, validation, writing (review and editing), visualisation. Both authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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Ethical approval and informed consent. No institutional review board holds jurisdiction over ethnographic research at the field sites. Consent was obtained on a customary basis: permission to attend and to record each ceremony was granted by the *pemeliatn* leading it and by the family holding it, and informed consent to be interviewed and identified by name was obtained from all fifteen informants. Consent to publish images and recordings was obtained from those depicted.

Data availability. Interview transcripts, field notes, and audiovisual documentation are held by the first author at Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta and may be consulted on reasonable request. Recordings made during *belian* and *kwangkay* are restricted: material the *pemeliatn* identified as sacred, including invocatory formulae, is not released, and access to the remainder requires the consent of the custodian community.

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APPENDIX. LIST OF INFORMANTS

Interviews conducted by the authors are cited in the text as personal communications and are not listed among the references. The fifteen informants are given below by name, age at interview, role, and village of residence, in the form in which they consented to be identified.

- Dangut, 83, elder of the Dayak Benuaq, Muara Lawa Village.
- Daman, 80, *bawo* practitioner, Muara Lawa Village.
- Riyab, 78, *pemeliatn belian bawo* and *pemeliatn belian sentiu*, Mancong Village.
- Moder, 70, *penu'ung* (*genikng*) and teacher, Tanjung Isuy Village.
- Baslan, 65, customary chairman for *sentiu* and observer of custom, Tanjung Isuy Village.
- Mundur, 63, customary elder of the Dayak Benuaq, Tanjung Isuy Village.
- Jumran, 60, observer of custom, Mancong Village.
- Nawan, 60, *penu'ung* (*kelentangan, sulikng dewa*) and *guruq pemeliatn sentiu*, Tanjung Isuy Village.
- Pesan, 55, *guruq penu'ung* (*gimar*), Mancong Village.
- Mah, 50, teacher, Tanjung Isuy Village.
- Murji, 45, *penu'ung* (*genikng*), Tanjung Isuy Village.
- Ayeng, 37, *penu'ung* (*kelentangan, sulikng dewa*), Muara Lawa Village.
- Katuk, 36, *penu'ung* (*gimar*), Mancong Village.
- Datang, 35, *gantar* dancer, Tanjung Isuy Village.
- Bimba, 25, *gantar* dancer, Mancong Village.