

Moral Criticism: Social Stigma About LGBT on Didik Nini Thowok's Dancing Skills in Cross-Gender Dances

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ABSTRACT

Dance functions, design patterns, and dancing skills begin to change a lot. The female-character dance that was originally performed by men (cross-gender) is now being performed by women. The emancipation of women has influenced changes in cultivation and forms of dancing skills. In the past, it was considered taboo if women followed all trends of arts. Women were not allowed to expose their bodies in public. As time goes on, women begin to pursue careers in the field of arts. Female dancers are no longer taboo, because of the development of thinking patterns and shifting norms in society. This habit seems to make the settled things in common. A dance artist from Temanggung, Didik Nini Thowok, makes a lot of art exploration while carrying out cross-gender practices in its implementation. The activities are carried out by him as one of the Indonesian art ambassadors to promote and reintroduce the traditional culture which is slowly eroded. However, many times his efforts have drawn criticism and critique because of the social stigma. It also creates pros and cons arguments because his creation is considered a form of the LGBT movement which is currently viral. This study aims to alter public perceptions of misconceptions about gender and its understanding. In practice, in the world of past traditional dance, cross-gender dance had often been performed for reasons of safety and moral and ethical laws, but nowadays it is considered uncommon because it is associated with the LGBT movements. This research is expected to be able to change the perception and social stigma about cross-gender dancers.

Keywords: Social Stigma, LGBT, Cross-Gender, Didik Nini Thowok

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian culture is a pluralistic condition that develops in a certain area and in line with historical developments and the background of the area. Culture grows and develops because of a sustainable heritage and preserved values [9]. Culture includes habits, customs, and works of art in the form of material or non-material. One of the cultural products is dance art. Each dance has a different origin and background, usually storing information about the history of the environment in which the dance developed and the conditions at which it was created. The form, variety, and uniqueness are explicit values embedded in dance and become a special attraction for the audience. The era of globalization is the biggest challenge of cultural preservation which demands the readiness of the young generation to create a bulwark against the changing times. The art of dance is not immune from

changes in an increasingly advanced era; new challenges and problems which come and go of course will affect changes in the composition and supporting aspects.

These dance changes usually occur through the performances, cultivation, function, and inheritance. These changes accompany the dynamics that occur in all sectors and will ultimately affect each other.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Cross-Gender Dances

Cross-gender mentioned in this study is dancers who play or perform characters as the opposite of their gender. Consistent with the professionalism to dance on stage, cross-gender male dancers will portray the female character as perfectly as possible,

using a bun, wearing *kebaya* or *kemben* (female dance costume), and applying makeup for women. They move like a graceful and elegant woman, but outside the stage, he is a man.

Indonesia has recognized the existence of cross-gender people for a long time and it has become a tradition in society. As time goes on, human views have always changed; traditions and cross-gender arts have disappeared due to the negative stigma of society, even though there are quite a lot of arts that involve cross-gender characters. Even, our ancestors from the Bugis ethnic group (South Sulawesi) recognized five different genders in society at that time: woman (*makunrai*), tomboy (*calalai*), man (*oroane*), and shemale (*calabai*). The last one is the Bissu group who is considered a holy person and does not belong to any of these genders. Another long-established art with cross-gender principles is the traditional drama from West Sumatra, *Randai*, where a female character was also performed by a man. This was because, according to the local customs, it was considered inappropriate or negative if women performed and were involved in *Randai*. That was why women's roles in *Randai* were played by a man.

Jathilan dance used to be performed by young and handsome men wearing men's costumes, but the movements were graceful with beautiful makeup. The origin of *jathil* is closely related to *gemblak*, a tradition passed down from generation to generation in East Java. In this tradition, boys with the ages of 12 to 17 would be "married off" by a *warok* (a man who has a chivalrous nature, good characters, and dignity in the community) and made as a *gemblak*. (a young boy kept by an older man during either a period of sexual abstinence or heterosexual marriage. This means that they are adopted as their children for two years.

One form of the cultural products is the traditional theater that develops in the scope of the Yogyakarta and Surakarta palaces, known as *Langendriyan*. This drama or theater is only performed for entertainment in the palace. Adipati Danureja VI succeeded in creating a dance drama that was different from *wayang wong* (puppet), both in terms of technique and dialogue. This new genre could be accepted by society. In the 1930s, *Langendriyan* groups were established in villages and often performed in various events in the community [10].

The stories taken for the *Langendriyan* performance mostly come from *Serat Damarwulan* (folktales of Damarwulan). *Serat Damarwulan* tells about the history of the Majapahit kingdom era. The performed stories include *Ranggalawe*, *Damarwulan*, *Menak Jingga*, and many more. Even though almost all the characters are male, they are played by women. The duration of the show is from 30 minutes to 2 hours.

Apart from the series of cross-gender traditional and cultural arts, there are still many other indigenous Indonesian traditional arts with the cross-gender potential, such as Mask Dance, both from Palimanan, Indramayu, and Losari, which allow the dancer (woman) to play a male character.

Cross-gender is one of the abilities an artist must have to enter the professional world of dance, to present various forms of dance. The ability to cross these boundaries is a demand for traditional dance, theatre, and drama artists as support to their skills in dancing, as a cultural figure [2]. Cross-gender mentioned is of course different from the concept of "transgenderism", which is often shown on television and mainstream media today.

Moreover, with a sissy appearance that is fully intended for humor (not comedy), the art that is meant is lost. Certainly, it is no longer an art, because talking about arts means discussing the techniques and skills.

2.2. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT)

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) are kinds of mental disorder on gender disorientation and sexual deviation. LGBT issues started to rise in the 90s; scathing comments and scorns are identical with communities as in the so-called acronym. Members of the community and LGBT people dare to show themselves after the law of human rights protection, including the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others based on what they understand.

In fact, deviant sexual behavior has existed since a long time ago. In ancient Egyptian reliefs, there are images of two men kissing each other. Since ancient times, these deviant sexual practices have been opposed by society because these activities are considered abnormal and contrary to religious norms. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) belong to mental disorders [4]. The definition of mental disorders according to experts is:

1.2.1. Lesbian

Lesbian is sexual disorientation that makes women attracted to other women or the same gender.

1.2.2. Gay

Gay is also regarded as homosexual, which is a sexual deviation that occurs and makes men attracted to other men. Usually, some men play a role as the top and bottom.

1.2.3. Bisexual

Bisexual is sexual disorientation that makes the doers interested in two genders at the same time, both male and female.

1.2.4. Transgender

Transgender is a condition where a person's gender does not show his/her identity, which is the opposite of the gender he/she actually has. This condition causes a woman to be a tomboy and a man to be a sissy.

Several things can trigger a normal person to become LGBT, including genetic factors, hormones, disadvantages, interaction, and social factors [5].

1.2.5. Genetic Factors

According to Franz Kallman in his research on homosexuals, homosexual men will also have homosexual siblings who come from the same womb, namely from the mother's genes.

1.2.6. Hormones

A man who has low androgen hormones in his body is at risk of becoming homosexual, and a woman who lacks estrogen can become a tomboy. These disorders can be triggered due to excessive stress during pregnancy which makes the child lack hormones from the mother. Therefore, the unborn child is at risk of sexual disorders.

1.2.7. Disadvantages of gender role

Gay is a man who feels that he has a woman's soul trapped in a man's body. On the other hand, a tomboy is a male soul in a female body. These sexual disoriented communities will tend to look for partners who psychologically have the opposite sex, but biologically they have the same sex. For example, gays will look for men who are athletic and macho, and tomboys will look for more feminine female partners.

1.2.8. Peer interactions

Sexual attraction in early childhood can also be a trigger for sexual disorientation. The children aged 12 who begin to recognize sexual attraction but do not dare to make contact with the opposite sex will tend to vent their sexual desires on their same-sex playmates.

1.2.9. Social

The social role in the community is also important for the mental development of children. Boys who are often bullied will end up playing with their girlfriends

because they feel more secure. They also play games and toys for girls, such as dolls, cooking utensils, and playhouse, which will make the mental growth go against his identity as a man, and vice versa.

2.3. Biography

Didik Nini Thowok is a unique figure who was born as a boy, but his charisma will emerge if he plays the role of a woman. Didik has explored femininity and cross-gender dances since he was young. He dedicated himself to the field of dance and became a dance artist as a graduate of the Indonesian Academy of Dance (ASTI) in Yogyakarta in 1977.

His full name is Didik Hadiprayitno, born in Temanggung, November 13, 1954, with the real name Kwee Tjoen Lian. His father is a Chinese-Temanggung descent named Kwee Yoe Tiang. Her mother, Suminah, is a Javanese woman from Cilacap, Central Java. When he was a student at ASTI, he was also known as Didik Nini Thowok. This name originated from a story when a senior student asked Didik to play for the Nini Thowok performance in 1974. Because of his good character and appreciation, Didik deserved the name Nini Thowok. Until now, people also have known Didik Nini Thowok as a stage name attached to him [8].

Many achievements have been reached by Didik at the national and international levels. The Yogyakarta and Surakarta palaces also appreciated some of his works and invited him to participate in events in the palaces. Writing books and being a speaker in seminars have become a routine agenda for Didik Nini Thowok as one of the steps to preserve traditional arts, especially dance at the national and international levels.

2.4. Femininity in Indonesian Traditional Arts

Feminine means being womanlike; anything that becomes a sign or characteristic of femininity and activities that are often carried out by women are called feminine. The characteristic of the work by Didik Nini Thowok is comical and cross-gender dances that contain feminine elements. Most of his works are amusing and entertaining dances with movements and roles as women. Some of the dances he has performed are also cross-gender dances, namely the women's roles danced by men, including:

2.4.1. Lengger Dance

Lengger is a type of folk dance that is performed as an entertainment dance in non-religious traditional events, which functions as amusement in the Banyumas region. In ancient times, the *Lengger* dance was performed in a religious ceremony after the rice harvest as a form of respect for the Goddess

Sri. This dance serves as a rite for the abundance of agricultural products and fertility in their land. According to the history that developed in the community, *Lengger lanang* has existed since the Majapahit era. This dance was previously performed by many men with feminine movements as entertainment for society. Nowadays, this dance begins to be executed by women. The *Lengger lanang* dancers dress up and wear the attributes of a shawl when they perform a dance with Banyumasan style body movements.



Figure 1 The remaining portrait of the *Lengger lanang* dancer from Banyumas, Dariah (85 years old) on the left side and Didik Nini Thowok on the right side

2.4.2. Gandrung Dance

Gandrung dance comes from the Banyuwangi region in East Java. This dance is a type of folk dance that develops outside the palace wall. The movement tempo is fast and energetic to make the audience excited. In ancient times, it functioned as a religious ritual dance. However, in the pre-independence era, this folk entertainment dance was used as a means of mass gathering and guerrilla struggle from village to village as spies for independence fighters. Its role is very important as a messenger and it is considered dangerous; therefore, the dancers must do cross-gender practices. The movements in the feminine *Gandrung* dance are accompanied by a typical Banyuwangi *gamelan* instrument, as the origin of the dance. *Gandrung* dance, which is performed by men, is now threatened with extinction, due to the diminishing interest of male dancers. Also, nowadays, modern dances that expose body curves are more erotic than the performance with traditional values.

2.4.3. Margapati Dance (*Bebancihan/a male dance performed by female*)

If the previous dances above are performed by men with feminine movements, the *Margapati* Dance is the opposite. It is a kind of fine male dance, usually danced by women but the movements are less masculine even though it is not a kind of dashing dance. The variety of movements also takes from the diversity of female dances whose volume of movement is widened, so that this dance is positioned

between the female dance and the dashing dance. The movements are graceful and flowy; the dance employs more assertiveness and energy which creates a mix between feminine and masculine impressions. The costumes and make-up are also a combination of dashing and feminine looks, which make this dance seem less appropriate if it is performed by men. In practice, Bali still upholds the customs and rules of cross-gender dancers to preserve tradition.



Figure 2 Didik Nini Thowok dancing a *Margapati* dance.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The research employed a descriptive method as a strategy of exploring and clarifying cases to raise actual facts with rational interpretations. The descriptive research method was applied to solve problems by presenting a complete image of the social setting to explain social phenomena by describing a number of intersecting variables.

The researchers conducted literature study or library research to solve the problems by observing various kinds of literature related to the subject matter in the form of books, papers, or writings used as guidelines in the research process. Furthermore, the data and information were collected to study problems that occur in the field so that the analysis could be accounted for its validity and reliability.

4. FINDINGS

Stigma is a negative image aimed at a person or group and by the time it becomes an innate attitude that sticks to the person due to community influences. Stigma can be interpreted as the view of people who judge others negatively, in terms of behavior and thinking and ultimately affects other thoughts. The main problem is when television, the media for disseminating information and preserving the arts, is strict due to a regulation on the broadcast of entertainment content. Several rules of the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission related to male with cross-gender behavior are the main concern to public figures:

- a. Men wearing feminine style clothing
- b. Men applying feminine make-up

- c. Men behaving in a feminine manner that includes how to walk, how to sit, and gestures like women
- d. Man with the feminine style of speech
- e. Justifying men to behave like women
- f. Using female address for males
- g. Using the language often used by Shemale

These decisions are taken in accordance with the regulation and norms applied in society. It is hoped that some of the habits of public figures that are considered inappropriate will no longer be shown in public. Broadcasts with cross-gender contents are prohibited to avoid unusual habits as activities that can be imitated by early childhood.

The regulation issued by the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission is certainly a concern for Didik Nini Thowok as an art activist, who dresses like a woman, applies makeup, and often performs female dances. It is feared that this kind of decision-making will also affect the mindset of the people; eventually, it will make people antipathy with cross-gender arts. Most of the cross-gender dancers get unpleasant treatment in society because they are considered lawbreakers and disgrace to the family. They are often underestimated, and their existence is never counted in social life even though they are actually hiding their true identity in front of the public [7].

KPI cites some articles in P3-SPS, such as Article 9 stating that "broadcast programs must pay attention to the norms of decency and morality that are upheld by the diversity of audiences, related to religion, ethnicity, culture, age, and/or economic background." The concept of "decency and morality" in the article above is considered in the context of "diversity". Therefore, there is no single interpretation that can dominate. The ambiguity that arises is that the art of acting is concluded as immodesty or contrary to the norms of decency. The point of view and decision-making that are considered the most representative are not based on the majority's opinions.

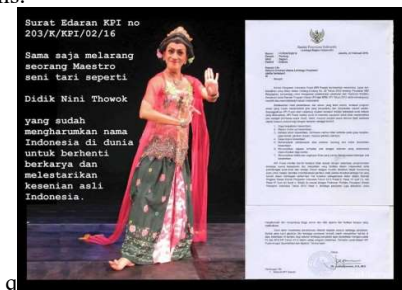


Figure 3 A post of a Senior Artist Butet Kertarajasa on Facebook regarding KPI regulation and cross-gender artists

Even though this article does not take into account the majority and the minority issues, the context is about where and who the audience is. An example of the comparison is the documentary feature program

about ethnic groups living in inland areas in Africa or the South Pacific, produced by overseas production. Many parts of the body are not self-censored (blurred or edited) by the producer. This standard does not apply to other tribes, as if the audience is not interested in a certain ethnic group (therefore, censorship is not necessary).

Thus, when such programs appear on our family-room television, what needs to be respected is the diversity of the audience. Some of our audiences do not discriminate skin colors in seeing what is taboo and what is not, a view that cannot be racist in one particular perspective. This is what is meant by Article 9 in which television broadcasts are mandatory to uphold the norms of decency and morality by raising the theme of diversity and educating the nation's life with educational TV programs.

Using articles of decency and morality in LGBT issues is not only subjective but also convicting that someone with sexual orientation is considered impolite and immoral. However, it is not always certain that something normal is definitely polite and upholds moral norms.

There are many complaints about some of the regulations that are too strict and off-target. Indonesian Broadcasting Commission is considered to exaggerate the censorship of television shows. For the cross-gender issue, unfortunately, there is no clear boundary among cross-gender artworks, which contain traditional values and cross-gender issues sexually as the personal identity to increase the program rating only.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Gender Identity, Not Sexual Orientation

Gender exists in the socio-cultural dimensions of a man and a woman. Meanwhile, sex or gender refers to the biological dimensions and physiological forms of a person. It is different from sex (gender) which tends to refer to the biological dimensions of a man and a woman. Differences between men and women are often associated with differences that refer to social characteristics, not gender. Defining gender is an interpretation activity from the cultural and social traditions of society about how to be a man in common and become a complete woman.

Society often finds it confusing in defining gender identity and sexual orientation, because both are the differences of the definition between men and women. Gender identity is an acceptance of him/herself as a man or a woman including his/her knowledge and appreciation of gender. Children aged 2.5 years begin to recognize and be able to differentiate their gender, which is important for their gender identity [3]. Gender identity also means the

way a person sees him/herself as male, female, or transgender. Transgender is the behavior of imitating or adopting roles, habits, and values in different genders. For example, women like to wear men's clothing and do men's activities, or men become feminine and often do things that are commonly carried out by women.

In some cases, a person feels that he is a woman even though he is biologically male, which is then known as a transgender. It is important to know that transsexual and transgender are two different things. Transsexual people change her/his genital into a vital organ based on the gender he/she accepts as true. Meanwhile, transgender individuals do not change or do surgery or treatments on their bodies and hormones because they are not disturbed by their biological conditions. Meanwhile, sexual orientation is an attraction that arises in terms of sexual or emotional aspects to a certain gender. Sexual orientation can also be defined as a person's happy feelings which refer to personal and social identities based on their interests and expressing behavior.

In conclusion, cross-gender does not always have sexual disorientation. Some cross-gender people do it only due to the demands of the profession, but many cross-gender actors are personally and completely transgender because of the habits they do as a form of seriousness in pursuing their roles. A long time ago, this was a common practice and became a positive value in dancing skills if it could be performed by cross-gender dancers. However, as time goes on, cross-gender phenomena are considered a disgrace. It is not sure that a cross-gender person will also experience a change in a sexual orientation; thus, he/she does not belong to LGBT activists.

5.2. Didik Nini Thowok as a Cross-Gender Dancer

Didik Nini Thowok is a traditional arts activist who always performs cross-gender dances; he beautifully performs traditional dances and distinctive designs with her gentle and graceful movements. Cross-gender dances have become his main focus for preserving cultural heritage from the ancestors. This type of dance requires the dancer to portray a character that is opposite to their gender. In practice, the dancers and actors in cross-gender arts are often associated with LGBT propaganda. However, regarding the history of arts development, there are several reasons behind the cross-gender existence.

The reason behind the cross-gender dance performance was to comply with the prevailing social norms at that time. Rules were assuming that women were prohibited from dressing up excessively. Also, religious norms existed to protect the desire of the opposite sex, so that a female dancer was substituted by a male. Another reason was to maintain the safety

of female dancers from men or guests when there was a visit from the VOC (Netherlands).

This logical reason is needed for the cross-gender dancers. Most of them are transgenders because they identify themselves as an individual of the opposite sex. This cross-gender acting also sometimes influences the gender identity of the individuals to become transgender even though they are not transsexual.

The negative stigma addressed to someone will indirectly shape that person's personality, thus; a change is triggered by the society he lives in [6]. In fact, transgender and transsexual people still live side by side in society, although in practice, the perpetrators of sexual disorders are excluded and do not get involved in activities like normal people in the community, but their existence is still recognized. In other words, most people in the community reject the existence of transgender people and do not accept that they do exist. This dominating argument is a sample that sexual deviations such as LGBT create a big controversy in Indonesia and will certainly obtain negative responses from society. However, society should be smarter in selecting the transgender practices and reflecting on the history that our ancestors still tolerated the ways as long as the people could respect each other. Gender is intangible and uncertain; gender identity is formed through expressions that describe a person's personality[1].

Butler's statement implies that physical appearance forms an identity [1]. Gender and sexual orientation are social indicators that serve as a means of self-assessment which will later be attached to a person. In the medical world, LGBT is not a disease but a psychological disorder that requires mental treatment and therapy. LGBT is not a threat if the individual does not impose his/her will on others and harm people in public places.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The practice of cross-gender arts has existed since many years ago. In the colonial and royal eras, cross-gender dancers were employed for various reasons, such as safety, desire, and self-esteem of women, which do not allow them to expose their bodies in public. Female dancers were replaced with male dancers who dressed up femininely.

Performers of cross-gender arts, who hone their roles and characters, usually bring these characters into their lives, which can indirectly affect their psychological conditions. Some cross-gender dancers experience sexual disorientation and become transgender even though they are not transsexual. They become woman-like or more feminine, but it does not affect their sexual orientation like conducting a genital reconstruction surgery.

Cross-gender arts provide their levels of skill and difficulty that must be learned. However, most Indonesians still have the same stereotype about cross-gender arts and gender identities of the actors; this is different from the way people view other arts. The lack of knowledge about art history and fanaticism on religious norms without considering the realities have provided people with the wrong information. The government should educate the public that in social norms there are no cross-gender and transgender issues. As long as it does not disrupt the peace and convenience of other people in the public space, the practice is not a threat. Art performers must also learn to totally explore cross-gender characters, so they will always be professional in performing the roles on the shows.

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