

Ndikkar in the Performing Art Dimensions

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ABSTRACT

Ndikkar is a performing art originating from the Karo people and has a history that spans hundreds of years. At first, Ndikkar acted as the ancient intuition of society in dealing with nature. In the social revolution that occurred in East Sumatra, Ndikkar played a role as a tool for the Karo youth struggle against colonialism and is currently changing its function to be an opening dish in traditional events, cultural parties to welcoming regional heads. Ndikkar is performed with dance and accompanied by music. Data was collected through observation and interviews with Ndikkar activists and studio owners in Lingga district as well as literature and documentation studies. Data analysis was carried out using qualitative analysis techniques using performing arts theory from Milton Singer, challenge and response theory from Arnold J. Toynbee and ethnochoreology theory. This study describes the existence of Ndikkar today and the aspects that Ndikkar fulfills as a performing art.

Keywords: *Ndikkar, Martial Arts, Performing Arts, Karo Society.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Karo tribe is a community that inhabits the Karo highlands located in North Sumatra Province. The Karo tribe is one of the largest tribes in North Sumatra and in many literatures it is often grouped into one of the Batak or Puak Batak sub-ethnics, along with other tribes such as the Toba Batak, Simalungun, Angkola, Pak-Pak, and Mandailing. Smith in Emlita (2019) stated that the Karo people prefer to call themselves Karo people rather than Batak people. This is of course because it is related to the character and characteristics that distinguish it from other Batak sub-ethnics such as language, clan, family system, belief system, to the arts that are owned and lived by the community.

One of the arts that is still alive in the Karo community is Ndikkar. This art began as a martial art for the Karo people and has developed until now it is better known as a performing art form and is often grouped by the community including the local Tourism Office as a dance (Simpei Sinulingga interview, 2021). Ndikkar, which was originally a form of ancient intuition of the Karo people in dealing with nature, turned into an opening dish at folk parties, traditional events and welcoming heads of state. In this case, Ndikkar is more familiarly referred to as a performing art rather than a martial art because functionally it is no longer practiced as a self-defense mechanism.

Research on Ndikkar, especially in Lingga Village, has been carried out by Timotius Agi (2019) and Alben Parulian Siregar (2020). Agi's research is presented in the form of a thesis with the title "The Structure of the Mayan Drum in Accompanying Ndikkar as a performing art in the Karo Society". This study discusses the structure of the musical accompaniment of Ndikkar called Gendang Mayan. In addition, this study also attempts to transcribe Sarune's

melody as one of the main instruments in the presentation of Gendang Mayan. Agi (2019; 41) mentions that Ndikkar is also known as the Star Dances in the Karo community and the form of performance is a combination of dance and music. The intended dance is not in the form of structured and memorized movements, but the actors are more likely to exhibit their ability to dance Ndikkar.

Alben Parulian Siregar, in his research entitled "Ndikkar in Karo Ethnic Culture: Study of Local Wisdom"(2020) examines the stages in Ndikkar and the meanings contained in Ndikkar moves and forms of local wisdom contained in Ndikkar . In this study, Alben found that there are at least 2 stages that must be passed if someone wants to learn Ndikkar and 4 stages if Ndikkar is performed. There are 20 moves, each of which has the meaning of patience, taking into account the steps that will be taken by Pandikkar and always focusing on dealing with opponents. The local wisdom contained in Ndikkar's moves was also explained by Alben as divided into two parts, namely local wisdom that is peaceful and that is welfare (2020: 69).

2. METHOD

There are two sources of data acquisition in this study, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews and participating observations. Rohendi (2011: 208) describes the advantages of this in-depth interview as an interview that can explore various general topics simultaneously compared to a formally structured interview. This in-depth interview was used to find information related to the history of Ndikkar, to obtain data regarding the performers, the musicians and the instruments they used, the audience, the costumes, the time of the performance. While involved observation was carried out to obtain more

intense and in-depth information and to play a direct role with Ndikkar as the object of his research. Data were collected using a mobile phone as a voice recording medium and a camera for taking photos and videos.

The selection of informants was based on the grouping of Ndikkar activists where the key informants of this study were an Ndikkar trainer who was very active in showing Ndikkar in many events, both held by the community or from the government; Ndikkar musicians to determine the position of musicians in Ndikkar performances; the audience of Ndikkar to know the impressions and expectations of the performance of Ndikkar and the Karo youth to find out the perspective of the younger generation in responding to the art. The number of informants will not be limited as long as it still supports the information needed in the information.

Secondary data was obtained from reading sources such as books, supporting documents such as studio archive videos. These data were analyzed through qualitative analysis techniques and using Milton Singer's theory of performing arts which was used to determine aspects of the performing arts which included: the presence of players, spectators, places and opportunities for performances, beginning and end, limited and organized time (Murgiyanto, 2003).

Culture is born from challenges that exist in the midst of people's lives, including the presence of Ndikkar which also arises due to challenges in society. Challenge and Responses theory from Arnold. J. Toynbee is used to examine the emergence of Ndikkar who was born in response to these challenges and to read how the growth and development of the culture includes ideas, discourses and movements (Hall, 2011: 393).

Ethnochoreological theory is used to see the extent to which the involvement of the art owner community in the existence of Ndikkar. There are four notions of ethnochoreology, namely; dance is a product of a society, it contains values that are embraced by the community, there are differences in values between one community and another, to appreciate an ethnic dance it must refer to the values held by the community that owns it (Narawati, 2013).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Challenge and Responses

As one of the art forms that is still alive in the midst of its people, Ndikkar has a very long history, hundreds of years since the Karo people began to settle. Ndikkar was born from an agrarian society who knows rice fields and fields and is familiar with the principles of land ownership. According to Simpei Sinulingga (interview, June 26, 2021), the principle of land ownership from the Karo people results in the distance between houses in an area being quite far because each family has a place to live and fields are in one area which usually only consists of 5 families. With the condition of the fields that still looks like a

forest, the Karo people feel anxious about the threat that might come from wild animals hiding in their fields, whether they can harm themselves or disturb the plants in their fields. Learning from nature, the Karo people develop their ancient intuition, namely Ndikkar as a defense mechanism against wild animals and facing the environment. At this level, Ndikkar is not functioned to fight with humans and is purely present as a response to challenges from the environment.

The next challenge that Ndikkar answered was that during the Dutch occupation in East Sumatra, Ndikkar became one of the defensive weapons for the Aron movement. Aron in the Karo community is a farmer group consisting of about 10 people and cultivates the land together. Juara R. Ginting, an anthropologist from the University of North Sumatra, mentioned Silat Karo as a means of struggle for young people to fight against the invaders. This opinion was quoted by Ginting from the book *The Blood of People* written by an Indonesianist Anthony Reid. Ginting continued that Karo youths established the Ndikkar arena through the *mantek gelanggang* ceremony or opening the arena. The opening of the arena began with a demonstration by teachers witnessed by the community and prospective students who would swear an oath before studying. Aron's group is targeting the seizure of illegally cultivated land. This movement indirectly changed Ndikkar's image into a deadly martial art rather than an ability to face nature.

As time progressed, the existence of Ndikkar began to disappear in the Karo herd. Simpei Sinulingga, who is one of the Ndikkar artist, said that the interest of the young Karo generation to study Ndikkar tends to be low. Since establishing the Nggara Simbelin studio, there are only 15 students that Ndikkar has taught. The reduced interest and knowledge of the younger generation towards Ndikkar is also related to the reluctance of Ndikkar teachers to teach Ndikkar. Yahmin (interview, July 2021) stated that the reluctance was related to the severity of the oath that must be borne by the teachers if the students being taught deviated from the good intentions of Ndikkar. Herlina Ginting (Adriati, 2016: 43), mentions the fear of the Karo people to study Ndikkar today is the fear of being thought of as shirk. In addition, ritual values carried out before studying are seen as contrary to religion, such as slaughtering a red rooster, blooding the *gelanggang* where Ndikkar learns and prohibiting swearing.

Ndikkar Today

Ndikkar in this decade is more often called dance than silat as the Karo Regency Government on its website also states Ndikkar as a cultural dance. As a form of performing arts, Ndikkar has been patterned with 4 main plots, namely: (1) Sembah empat desa, (2) *Tare-tare Bintang*, (3) *Ermayan*, (4) Perang. *Sembah empat desa* is a tribute given to the four winds where the first prayer is addressed to the spirit of the teacher

Ndikkar or Ndikkar's ancestors, the second prayer is given to the founder of the village, the third prayer is to the musicians and the last one is to the opponent. In the star dance section, Pandikkar will perform beautiful movements as well as introduce and measure the abilities of the opponent, the star dance movement in the form of hand movements and star gazing. At *Ermayan*, Pandikkar will show off the many moves he has mastered. The war scene is a closing plot where basically no Pandikkar should lose so the war will end in a draw.



Figure 1. Closing Scene after the war is over (Sinulingga, 2018)

The plot is fixed but the movements presented by the performers tend to be improvised, meaning that there are no movements that are patterned and memorized. Broadly speaking, the plot presented in the show is closely related to the values held by the Karo people themselves. The values adopted by the Ndikkar movement also depend on where the Ndikkar area lives, for example, Ndikkar that develops in the downstream Karo will adopt the movement of eagles preying on snakes because the area is dominated by rice fields, while in Lingga Village, their movements resemble tiger movements because there are many the fields where the tigers stay. There are approximately 20 moves that Pandikkar learned in Lingga Village and these moves became the basis of the Pandikkar movement when performing Ndikkar.

Hawkins and Soedarsono (Narawati, 2013) mention that there are three categories of motion that are often used in dance, namely locomotion movement, pure motion and gesture movement. Of the 20 moves studied by Pandikkar in Lingga Village, there are several distinctive movements that can be categorized through an ethnochoreological approach. The locomotion movement that is often used in Ndikkar performances is: (1) *Langkah sipitu-pitu*, is a movement that has seven directed steps that are useful for protecting oneself and avoiding opponents, (2) *Langkah meteruk*, this movement when a squatting position and the body gradually to approach the opponent, (3) *Jurus katak melompat*, jump movement when an attack from the opponent.

The pure movements in the Ndikkar show are: (1) *Kepit-kepit belo*, the movement of bringing down the

opponent slowly. This movement is done standing and legs crossed, (2) *Pancur-pancur*, this movement is done by swinging the right and left hands up and down which is intended to attack as well as defend, (3) *Buang lepas*, this movement is done by throwing attacks from the opponent in a straight line. directed and the body position flattened. As for the gesture movement, *Tare-tare bintang* is a movement that tends to be improvisational, but is bound by the shape of a hand that always accommodates. The movement is a symbol of the hope of the Karo people over the sky. Broadly speaking, the context of the movements carried out by Pandikkar is the moral and social values adopted by the Karo people.

3.2 Performance Elements in Ndikkar

Performer

The Ndikkar performers show are still referred to as Pandikkar. The term Pandikkar refers to people who fully master the science of Ndikkar. The word "Pandikkar" consists of the word Ndikkar which refers to his expertise while the word "Pa" is a designation for the person. This means that the word Pa-Ndikkar is a term attached by other people who recognize one's expertise in playing Ndikkar. In the Ndikkar show, the number of players or Pandikkar is only 2 people.



Figure 2. Simpei Sinulingga with his student (Sinulingga, 2018)

Musicians and Musical Instruments

Gendang lima sendalenen is music commonly used for Ndikkar performances in the form of five musical ensembles played simultaneously. The musicians are also named after the musical instruments they play, namely; *Panarune* is the name for *Sarune* players, *Simalu Gong* for those who play *Gong*, *Simalu Penganak* for those who play *Penganak*, *Penggual Singindung* for *Gendang Singindung* players, *Penggual Singanaki* for *Singanaki Gendang* players. The repertoire played is *Gendang Mayan* and *Perang Alas*.

Music plays a very big role in Ndikkar's performance because music plays a role in determining the plot shift and ending the show. A Pandikkar will usually give a signal to the musician if he sees his opponent is tired or has the opportunity to

lose. This was done so that there was no disappointment from the audience towards Pandikkar who performed the show. This is what causes the importance of musicians in the Ndikkar show.

One of Ndikkar's problems today is that there are very few traditional musicians who master the *Gendang Ermayan* today due to the large number of players and must be played in an ensemble. In addition, the budget given from those who provide jobs tends to be limited so that Ndikkar activists must be pragmatic in choosing to use recorded music which of course cannot help Pandikkar adjust the tempo of the game.

Audiences

The audience in a show has become a necessity. There is no show if there is no audience to see it. In addition, with its various uniqueness, the audience also has variations depending on the place where the show is held. Ndikkar as a show positions itself according to the event or event so that the position of the audience is also positioned depending on the event. Usually when the party *Guro-guro aron* Ndikkar will be displayed on stage and the audience will be in front of the stage provided by the committee and there is a distance between the audience and the spectacle. In terms of involvement, there was no participation whatsoever from the audience in the Ndikkar show.

Ndikkar's audience usually comes to see who wins and who loses. The audience will be disappointed if Pandikkar from his village loses. An experienced Pandikkar will usually stop the show if he sees his opponent will lose and will try to end the war before defeat occurs. This is done so that there is no disappointment from the audience (Simpei Sinulingga, 2021)



Figure 3. the position of the audience is always far from the stage (Sinulingga, 2017)

Costumes

The clothes used in the Ndikkar show are basically not determined by standard, there is no mandatory dress for the Pandikkar. However, there is usually a request from government agencies to wear uniform and neat clothes so that the Pandikkar must wear black clothes like silat outfits in general. Only two things related to clothing that must be worn in performing

Ndikkar are a sarong called *kampuh* and a headband called *bulang-bulang* in black or red. The installation of the *bulang-bulang* in the Ndikkar show is made not too tight to make it easier for Pandikkar to remove them when they are about to perform the *jurus bulang-bulang*.



Figure 4. The form of use of Bulang-bulang

Performance Schedule

There is no regular schedule for showing Ndikkar in the traditional Karo people's spectacle. Ndikkar will be shown if there is an event or job given to the studio. In this case, the Nggara Simbelin studio led by Simpei received many jobs from the government to make opening performances. But for the past two years since the Covid-19 pandemic there has been no request from the service. Usually these requests come from the government or the Tourism Office in welcoming regional heads or certain tourist events.

Ndikkar is also always featured in *Guro-guro Aron*. *Guro-guro aron* is a harvest party held by the Karo people to show gratitude for an abundant harvest. Ndikkar is also always performed at fruit and flower parties and independence celebrations. In every event where Ndikkar is performed, it is certain that Ndikkar will be shown at the beginning as the opening act.

The duration of the show tends to be flexible depending on the strength of Pandikkar in performing star dances and the end of the show is determined by the code of the musicians. The musicians will increase the tempo of the music for the war scene so that Pandikkar is ready to end the Ndikkar show.

4. CONCLUSION

Ndikkar has a long history of transforming into performing arts. From the form of ancient intuition of the Karo elders since living in the Karo Land to being the opening dish at people's parties. It started as a self-defense mechanism from the fierceness of nature to become entertainment that is still awkward in positioning itself. The process of switching functions is an answer or response to the challenges that arise for the Karo people from time to time. Ndikkar's history series presents various responses depending on the era, although today Ndikkar is faced with an awkward position between being called martial arts or performing arts.

The decline of Ndikkar's existence in the Karo community occurred due to internal and external causes. Internally or from the perspective of the Ndikkar activists themselves, there has been a reluctance to pass down Ndikkar's knowledge which requires discipline, responsibility, courtesy and high commitment. While this trust is not obtained from the younger generation today. Externally, the younger generation is not passionate about studying Ndikkar because they are afraid of being considered contrary to religious values. This complexity resulted in the stagnation of Ndikkar's development as both a martial art and a performing art.

As a performing art, Ndikkar is brought to life by invitations from the community, jobs from the government and cultural parties. Ndikkar also managed to defend himself by moving the basic steps of Ndikkar into the main plot in every show. The lack of interest among Karo youth has also led to the lack of Pandikkar in Karo. Gradually, Ndikkar's efforts to continue to survive will be eroded by the people themselves.

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