

## ADAPTATION OF BETAWI TRADITIONAL MUSIC PERFORMERS TO PRESERVE THEIR EXISTENCE IN A NEW NORMAL ERA

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### ABSTRACT

*The research explored an adaptation to survive in the new normal era in the Jakarta art performers in general and the Betawi traditional music performers in particular. The implementation of social restrictions and regional quarantines in Jakarta had prevented many sectors from making economic activities, including Betawi traditional music performers. The research examined how the Betawi traditional music performers in the Betawi Cultural Village of Setu Babakan adapted to health protocols on stage performance and internet knowledge on virtual performances in the new normal era. Data are taken from in-depth interviews and classified to determine the adaptation ability carried out by Betawi traditional music performers. The Betawi traditional music performance studios were Sanggar Arrominia, Sanggar Gambang Kromong Setia Muda, and Sanggar At-Taubah with certain types of traditional music, such as Gambus, Samrah, Qasidah, Hadrah, and Gambang Kromong. It is found that during the social restriction and regional quarantine in Jakarta, the studios experience a decrease in their request to perform. They need to survive by adapting to the new normal era through the application of the health protocols on stage performance and exploring their knowledge on the internet to conduct the virtual performance. The health protocol limits the flexibility in performing traditional music through mask and face-shield wearing. The average knowledge of the internet and having limited internet devices are some other situations to be adapted by traditional music performers. The adaptation needs to be carried out sometime in the future, and this pandemic only accelerates the need.*

**Keywords:** performer adaptation, music performers, Betawi traditional music performers

### INTRODUCTION

The implementation of social restrictions and regional quarantines in Jakarta has made many Jakarta residents unable to do economic activities. Among those Jakartan residents are the Betawi traditional music performers (Nuriman et al., 2020). Jakarta and other city governments globally conduct social restrictions and regional quarantine policies by closing sports activities, restaurants, and bars, as well as performing arts activities (Roberts, 2020). Betawi traditional music performers must postpone the schedule of their performances indefinitely. With the issuance of social and regional restrictions by the government, Betawi traditional music performers

have been significantly affected. Of the many sectors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, art and culture are some of the most affected by COVID-19 (de Fretes & Listiowati, 2020).

To survive and continue their livelihood and economic activities, Betawi traditional music performers must remain productive in finding ways to carry out performing music activities in the new normal era. Betawi traditional music is one of many Betawi traditional art performances that have to be preserved to keep the city's identity. Adapting to the conditions of the new normal era in performing arts activities is one way to continue to preserve art and culture while creating economic activities (Badin, 2021). Preservation of art and culture is determined

by the role of art performers in artistic activities. Art performers must be able to adapt by developing their creativity in terms of performing arts activities (Doern, Williams, & Vorley, 2019)

Art performers have a dual role in terms of art and culture. They are cultural conservationists who carry out cultural preservation activities through the consistency of artistic activities, either hereditary or cultural education. They play an essential role in regional economic activities through ticket selling at cultural arts performances (Walensky & del Rio, 2020). Some performing arts institutions do not want to dwell on this dire situation and are trying to adapt through online services or performing arts with limited audiences.

Wayang Wong in Bali also has carried out performing arts activities by strengthening multimedia connected to the internet and packaging interesting stories for various groups of people to watch. Wayang Wong is trying to adapt by modernizing it so that it can survive in the new normal era (Ruastiti, Sudirga, & Yudarta, 2021). Art performers must ultimately evaluate their routines and make innovations and creations by utilizing virtual platforms in designing their knowledge and skills through online performances or designing onsite performing arts with strict health protocols and audience restrictions (Mubarat, 2021; Septiyan, 2020). This change will not only create limitations in terms of performing arts but will also require rapid adaptation to be able to display their artworks.

Art and culture are two things that can reconstruct the characteristics and character of a city. The journey of artistic and cultural activities from time to time in a city can also be used as a reference for how the city grows, develops, and forms civilization (Förnkrantz, 2021). Jakarta provincial government has made various efforts to preserve Betawi cultural arts; one of them is by establishing a cultural heritage preservation area named Betawi Cultural Village of Setu Babakan in Jagakarsa, South Jakarta.

The new normal is not created to return to normal life as before the pandemic but to live in new situations based on social restrictions and health protocols (Simanjuntak & Fitriana, 2020). Each change will create a new adaptation process, which is not only specific to the COVID-19 pandemic that must be carried out after emerging crises, such as a global economic crisis, a shift in the political order, revolution or war, or natural disasters, terrible plague, and so on (Mei, 2020). The social restrictions and regional quarantines in Jakarta, which must be obeyed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, are the toughest challenges for Betawi traditional music performers. Their activities always create a group of spectators who can become a cluster for the spread of COVID-19 (Mursalim, 2020). On the other hand, they must continue to create traditional musical performance activities to earn income directly from the music performance or the ecosystems.

## METHODS

Based on the description, the research examines how the Betawi traditional music performers in the Betawi Cultural Village of Setu Babakan adapt to health protocols on stage performance and internet knowledge on virtual performances in the new normal era. The research also analyzes how the adaptation of Betawi traditional music performers in the Betawi Cultural Village of Setu Babakan can be in line with SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) Number 8 regarding decent work and economic growth and SDGs Number 11 regarding sustainable cities and settlements (Trisnawati & Sulistyani, 2021).

Data are taken from in-depth interviews and classified to determine the adaptation ability carried out by Betawi traditional music performers. Betawi traditional music performers are members of Betawi traditional music performance studios that regularly perform in the Betawi Cultural Village of Setu Babakan. The Betawi traditional music performance studios are Sanggar Arrominia, Sanggar *Gambang Kromong* Setia Muda, and Sanggar At-Taubah.

Spradley (1980) has recommended how observations should be made and on what objectives this observation method should be chosen. Spradley's (1980) great interest in this observation seems to belong to cognitive anthropology. This observation builds a classification of culture into three parts, namely cultural behavior, cultural knowledge, and cultural artifacts. However, Spradley argues that cultural knowledge should be emphasized more. Although hidden from view, cultural knowledge is an important part of explaining culture. That is why Spradley describes culture as the knowledge that a person needs to understand an experience and create new habits.

Ethnography is a written representation of culture to express the importance of representations of production and consumption of everyday life, which ultimately becomes ethnographic writing. Ethnography is a description or writing of an ethnic group written by an anthropologist based on the results of field research within a certain time. Ethnography is carried out in the research to explore the Betawi traditional music performers' ability to adapt to the new normal era in performing music on stage and virtually using the social media platform. The application of participatory experience is beneficial in research because inscriptions in the form of notes or reports of all knowledge and experience gained during the research field are the basic ingredients for doing ethnographic work. In ethnographic research, the data collection method used is qualitative, namely in the form of interviews and participatory observations. The interview in the research aims to collect data about all actions, experiences, expectations, and other information about the person's life and position.

An important part of ethnography is that the main technique of the research uses participant observation; this is an integral part of ethnography.

In addition, ethnography is an important part of anthropology, so it can be said that ethnography is direct observation, and anthropology is a part of it. Even Spradley (1980) has explained that ethnography is an activity to describe a culture. Ethnography has the main goal of understanding the way of life of other people from the perspective of the other person.

The research used Spradley's 12 steps of developing ethnographic research. They are the steps for developing ethnographic research, according to Spradley. The steps are (1) assigning informants, (2) conducting interviews with informants, (3) taking ethnographic notes, (4) asking descriptive questions, (5) conducting ethnographic interview analysis, (6) making a domain analysis, (7) ask structural questions, (8) making taxonomic analysis, (9) creating contrasting questions, (10) making component analysis, (11) finding cultural themes, and (12) writing ethnography. Informants are assigned by the researchers based on the most active studio in making performances in the Betawi Cultural Village of Setu Babakan.

Data collection is done by conducting in-depth interviews through a list of questions that have been prepared previously, which can develop according to the needs of the ethnographer in collecting information. The three selected studios are Sanggar Arrominia, Sanggar Setia Muda Foundation, and Sanggar At-Taubah at Betawi Cultural Village of Setu Babakan. The research is conducted in two months by following the activities.

The three studios of Betawi traditional music performers are chosen by selecting through the same types of traditional performance, which is Betawi traditional music performers. Betawi traditional music performers gain their most income by performing on stage instead of recordings. These studios need to continue performing to gain income and preserve the Betawi traditional music. The options are to keep performing on stage by applying health protocols and social distancing and try a new way to perform on a virtual stage through social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook.

Ethnographers participate as observers, from studio rehearsals to studio performances. Interviews are conducted during casual conversations with the informants, so they do not feel they are being interviewed. Information obtained from observations and interviews is recorded using an audio receiver, photos, and video recording. After completing the research, ethnographic report notes are made. The results of these notes are then used as material for analysis. In the next discussion, the results of the research and analysis are described.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The adaptation of Betawi traditional music performers in the Betawi Cultural Village of Setu Babakan is observed using participatory observation over some time. In carrying out participatory

observation, researchers refer to Spradley's ethnographic research, which consists of 12 stages for the members of three Betawi traditional music performers' studios.

Sanggar Arrominia has two types of Betawi traditional music performers: Gambus and Samrah. Gambus and Samrah are Betawi traditional music performances based on Islamic culture. Betawi people are formed by three major ethnic communities: Chinese, Arabic, and Sundanese. Gambus and Samrah originally come from Arabic ethnicity, and today not only Arabic ethnic plays Gambus and Samrah. This studio is widely known as a professional Betawi traditional performing art in Gambus and Samrah.

The studio is led by Haji Hendi, with 63 artists and musicians as members of Sanggar Arrominia. The number of performers on the stage is always adjusted to the needs of the performance. During the pandemic, none of the studio members leave the studio since they still have the request to perform during the pandemic. Most of the members also already have daily jobs besides performing studio activities.

Sanggar Arrominia holds regular rehearsals every Thursday to prepare the requests to perform received. Sanggar Arrominia receives requests to perform even from outside of Jakarta, such as Tangerang, Bekasi, Cirebon, Bandung, Yogyakarta, and others. This studio has also received requests to perform in foreign countries such as the Netherlands, France, Belgium, England, Egypt, Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, and others. During the fasting month of Ramadan, for instance, Sanggar Arrominia receives requests to perform approximately 400 performances per month. When the pandemic hits and the social restrictions and regional quarantines are issued in Jakarta, the request to perform is drastically reduced to only 60 requests per month.

However, during this pandemic, the studio only rehearses when there is a request to perform in strict health protocols. This studio usually has two to three rehearsals before performing. The rehearsals take place at Haji Hendi's house, which is also the location of Sanggar Arrominia at Jalan Mampang Prapatan XV. Sanggar Arrominia has social media accounts, such as Instagram with the username of @gambus\_arrominia, and YouTube with the personal accounts of its members who frequently update the activities.

On September 23, 2021, the Arrominia studio held a Gambus music rehearsal at Haji Hendi's house. The rehearsal was carried out in preparation for performing on Irama Gambus, a television program on state-owned television broadcasting. Around 20 performers participating in the program came to rehearse at Pak Hendi's house. From observations during the rehearsal, the studio members did not apply health protocols, such as wearing masks and keeping a distance.

Sanggar Arrominia had their performance on the Irama Gambus television program at the state-owned television broadcasting Auditorium on September 28, 2021. Based on observations, when the studio

members were carrying out rehearsal in the dressing room, they did not implement health protocols such as wearing masks or keeping a distance. When the program started, the members were asked to wear masks except for the flute player and singer, and they were all following the request. This shows that the studio members do not have the initiative to adapt to the new normal era, but they have willingness when they are asked.

Sanggar Arrominia members who perform traditional Betawi music performances of Gambus and Samrah have a close relationship with others. The close relationship may come from the same ethnicity or the same neighborhood. This closed relationship leads to a bit of openness in applying health protocols between them in rehearsal. This shows their inability and unwillingness to adapt to the new normal era in the closed-relationship community. However, in performing their Gambus and Samrah, the artists apply the health protocols well by wearing masks and keeping a distance between them. This shows the ability and willingness to adapt to the new normal era.

The closed relationship among Sanggar Arrominia performers creates a culture of trust between them and leads to a bit of openness in applying health protocols in rehearsal. However, the artists follow the health protocol in their performance, which means they can adapt to the new normal era. Sanggar Arrominia also has social media accounts to promote and disseminate its performance to the audience. It shows that Sanggar Arrominia has already used the internet to perform their virtual performance on social media.

Sanggar At Taubah has two types of traditional Betawi musical performers of *Qasidah* and *Hadroh*. *Qasidah* and *Hadroh* are traditional music performances based on Islamic culture. *Qasidah* and *Hadroh* originally come from Arabic ethnic, and today not only Arabic ethnic play *Qasidah* and *Hadroh*. The members of Sanggar At Taubah, established in 2013, are residents of the Betawi Cultural Village of Setu Babakan. The performers of the *Qasidah* are 12 housewives, and *Hadroh* is about 15 teenagers.

This studio organizes routine rehearsals every Monday for *Qasidah* and Wednesdays for *Hadroh*. The rehearsal is held in a government-owned hall near the house of Haji Mat Roji, who is also the chairperson of the neighborhood. At each rehearsal meeting, members are charged Rp. 20.000 to pay the trainer, who is also a teacher at the local public school.

Before the pandemic, Sanggar At Taubah often received a request to perform in celebrations and festivals in the Greater Jakarta area. In addition, this studio also participated in several *Qasidah* and *Hadroh* competitions in the Greater Jakarta area. In their performances, this studio also often collaborated with other studios to create new compositions, such as dance groups, beksi, and others. This studio has not received a request to perform in almost two years of the pandemic. However, this studio once participated in a virtual competition held by a political

party by sending a *Qasidah* and *Hadroh* video that also followed the health protocols at the recording time. Some *Qasidah* art performers are housewives, and some are teachers at the Nurul Amanah Islamic boarding school. Meanwhile, *Hadroh* art performers are schoolchildren.

During the pandemic, *Hadroh* performers continued to carry out routine rehearsals with the implementation of health protocols. Meanwhile, *Qasidah* performers have decided not to practice for a while. On September 23, 2021, they decided to resume regular rehearsal due to the lowering level of restriction in Jakarta. Since they had not practiced for a long time, they forgot the beat pattern on musical instruments, so they needed to practice from the basics for a little while. During the pandemic, some *Qasidah* and *Hadroh* performers who do not have permanent jobs begin to earn a living to increase family income by selling Betawi traditional foods and drinks, such as *Bir Pletok*, *Nasi Kebuli*, *Nasi Uduk*, and many others.

On September 23, 2021, Sanggar At Taubah studio carried out a *Qasidah* performance rehearsal for the first time. The rehearsal was carried out to prepare for a performance at Mat Roji's daughter's wedding reception. Mat Roji is the leader of Sanggar At Taubah, and about 10 *Qasidah* performers and one trainer came to rehearse. Based on observations, some kept their distance from others and wore masks, even though they were not properly worn, while others did not wear masks at all. This is reasonable since they were not only playing a musical instrument but also sang *Qasidah* songs. At the wedding reception on October 3, 2021, they wore masks during *Qasidah* and *Hadroh* performance, except for those who sang *Qasidah* and *Hadroh* songs. However, they did not keep their distance from each other.

The *Qasidah* and *Hadroh* performers of Sanggar At Taubah realize the situation of the new normal era and try to adapt well based on the regulation. They wore masks and kept their distance from others while rehearsing. They also wore masks during their performance at the wedding reception. Unfortunately, they did not keep their distance at the wedding reception, and it may be the narrow stage that made them sit closely. It means that Sanggar At Taubah has the willingness to follow all the regulations and health protocols in rehearsing and performing *Qasidah* and *Hadroh* on site. Sanggar At Taubah has the experience of participating in a virtual competition by sending their video on *Qasidah* and *Hadroh*. It means that Sanggar At Taubah knows about starting their virtual performance on their social media account. They need to be informed about how to create social media and upload their video or picture content on their social media.

Sanggar *Gambang Kromong* Setia Muda has three types of traditional Betawi performing art. They are *Gambang Kromong*, Betawi traditional dances, and Betawi traditional martial art. *Gambang Kromong* is a traditional orchestra of Betawi people, which is a blend of Sundanese gamelan, Dutch music,

and Chinese-style pentatonic base tones. *Gambang Kromong* is closely associated with the Chinese Betawi community, especially the Chinese Peranakan.

Traditional Betawi dances include *Topeng Betawi*, *Sembah Nyai*, etc. Betawi traditional martial called Pencak Silat Betawi is still under planning to organize. The traditional dances and Pencak Silat performances usually have a musical background played by *Gambang Kromong* performers. This studio is well-known for well-organized Betawi traditional music performers who always prioritize preserving Betawi culture, especially the *Gambang Kromong*.

The studio, established in 1995, rarely participates in Betawi cultural performing arts competitions. This is because Sanggar *Gambang Kromong* Setia Muda focuses on preserving Betawi culture and prioritizes its members to focus on their respective education. Sanggar *Gambang Kromong* Setia Muda has the request to perform three times a day in various cultural arts events and celebrations. The training ground is at Hamdani's house, which is also the location of Sanggar *Gambang Kromong* Setia Muda.

The studio continues to carry out routine rehearsals with health protocols every Tuesday and Friday for *Gambang Kromong*, with about 25 musicians. However, at the beginning of the pandemic, the training was canceled, and then the studio's leader asked the head of the community association for permission to have a regular rehearsal again. Meanwhile, for Betawi traditional dance, *Gambang Kromong*'s vocals, and Tehyan player, during the implementation of social restrictions and regional quarantines in Jakarta, the rehearsals are canceled due to the age of the art performers needing permission from their parents.

During the pandemic, there are no performers of Sanggar *Gambang Kromong* Setia Muda who resign or are dismissed from the studio since the intention to join the studio is to preserve Betawi culture. This studio has quite active social media, namely Instagram (@yayasansetiamuda), YouTube (Yayasan Setia Muda), Facebook (Yayasan Setia Muda), and Twitter (@setiamudagroup).

On October 8, 2021, Sanggar *Gambang Kromong* carried out a regular rehearsal in the studio. Fifteen art performers of *Gambang Kromong* musicians came to the studio. Based on observations, they did not apply health protocols such as wearing masks during training and gathering. On October 1, 2021, *Gambang Kromong* Setia Muda art performers enlivened its 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Based on observations during performances, some performers wore masks, and others did not. However, they still kept their distance. The audience or guests continued to apply health protocols such as wearing masks and keeping a distance.

Sanggar *Gambang Kromong* Setia Muda has an excellent realization of health protocols and social distancing. Early on in the pandemic, the leader of the studio canceled all of the schedules of rehearsal due

to the government social restriction regulation. Due to the need to rehearse, the studio's leader then asked the community association's chief for permission to have a special routine rehearsal with health protocols that only let the adult practice the instruments of *Gambang Kromong*. It means that they have a full understanding of the new normal era and the health protocols. This studio also has four active social media account that publishes the activities of Sanggar *Gambang Kromong* Setia Muda. It means that they know how to use social media and publish pictures and videos on their social media.

Two kinds of adaptation in the new normal era must be applied by all of these three Betawi traditional music performers. Firstly, the adaptation to the regulation of wearing the mask and applying health protocols. Secondly, the adaptation to using the social media platform on the internet.

For wearing the mask and applying health protocols, all of the studios have the willingness to do so. It is shown at their performance on stage; they all follow the organizer's request to wear masks and make a distance. The close relationship between them creates comfort, leading to feeling safe by not wearing the mask and making a distance during their rehearsal. The willingness is there between them, and all they need is just a mild reminder.

## CONCLUSIONS

The in-depth interview with the informants unveils the character of each studio in applying health protocol and social distancing in their stage performance. The casual approach of the informants even reveals their ability to make virtual performances in the New Era. Every studio has its characteristics in applying social distancing and health protocols. Their characteristics are formed by their cultural background in their neighborhood. This cultural background creates a value that would be unusual if contrasted with social distancing and health protocols. In general, all the studios already have an awareness of social distancing and health protocols and want to apply them to their daily activities. At a certain point, due to the close relationship and narrow stage of performances, they do not apply social distancing and health protocols. It is considered situational and needs to be improved with a mild reminder.

For using the social media platform to create a virtual performance, all studios already know how to use social media or make a good video production. It is shown how they create video content to participate in a video competition. The main problem must be in their internet token, which they have to buy for a certain amount of money.

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