

Music: Phenomenology of the Traditional Death Ceremony Performance of *Saur Matua Batak Toba*

Monang Asi Sianturi, Yulia Kurnia Sari Sitepu

e-mail: monangjurnal@gmail.com

e-mail: yuliasitepu220782@gmail.com

Program Studi Pendidikan Musik Gereja FIPK Institut Agama Kristen Negeri (IAKN) Tarutung - Sumatera
Utara Indonesia

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Abstract:

Gondang Batak Toba music in death rituals has a central role in the traditional death ritual performances of the Batak Toba in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The arrival of Western culture to the Batak land greatly changed the main points of Toba Batak culture. Identification of the values of modernity, progress, education, and prosperity is often expressed with an affinity for what is considered modern. Interaction with new religions and Western values shook the old Batak traditional culture to its roots. Today's modern Toba Batak mourning ceremonies are no longer considered complete without Western music. On the other hand, with the conventional death and mourning ceremonies *Saur Matua*. The infiltration of replacement music from the Batak Toba *gondang* converted into Western musical instruments used in traditional death ceremonies at the social community level, born from novelty, due to the determination of changes in modernization and globalization. The musical event is called *Marmusik*, becoming a cosmopolitan aesthetic phenomenon that opposes traditional aesthetics.

Keywords: *Phenomenology, Marmusik, Death Ceremony, Batak Toba*

I. Introduction

The use of music in traditional ceremonies for the Batak Toba community now known as *marmusik*, has caused many changes at the social level of society with a cultural shift including the religious system and the art of music itself as an accompaniment to the traditional activities of the Batak Toba community. The existence of substitute music for the conversion to Western musical instruments from the Batak *gondang* used in conventional ceremonies was born from the novelty caused by the entry of modernization into the Batak land. This influence is seen as an infiltration of Western music into Batak culture, for example: the changes that shaped Batak society in the original Batak Toba belief teachings, turning into adherents of Protestant Christianity with all the changes that this brought.

The systematic approach is carried out in two main things, namely bringing the teachings of Protestant Christianity, and establishing a new social system and order according to Western methods, touching all aspects of life, including musical traditions in the community that use this tradition. Christian missionary's evangelism brought Western musical traditions, supporting the delivery of the Gospel preaching service in the Batak land. Batak parties or

ceremonies, Western musical traditions such as single keyboard groups, wind instruments, and full bands are more popular and appreciated than original Batak music in the context of the *Gondang Sabangunan* ensemble.

Aspects of the life of the Toba Batak people's artistic traditions revolve around the *margondang* tradition, which community activity that involves musical traditions and customary rules in carrying out ceremonies. In its development, it is known as *marmusik*. Analyzing the relationship of *gondang* music events, (another meaning of this word, also means showing one part of a kinship group, age level, or people in a certain social status who are dancing (*manortor*) during the ceremony (Irwansyah, 1990:12). Musical activities presented in Batak community ceremonies in the Batak-Toba traditional ceremonies today, are cross-disciplinary research between musicology and cultural anthropology/ethnology which examines the phenomenon of changes in structure, style in the presentation of music.

Referring to the opinion (1) music in the context of culture (Hood, 1969:298) and (2) music in culture (Mariam, 1977:202), this research is related to musical behavior, musical performances, and experiences of music as well as studying and analyzing the existence of the music in the community that supports it. According to Lindsay (1991:290), the main problem in traditional art is not the choice between preserving and changing the art or creating a gap between traditional and contemporary art. The problem is not about preservation and change.

A study of musical change was conducted by Jennifer Lindsay in her book (exemplified by Javanese music) entitled " Classical, Kitsch, Contemporary. A Study of Javanese Performance ". She said in his writing, that the change in the use of music is not to prove or disprove a theory, but exploration of ideas about traditional Javanese art forms, how they developed, and the position of these arts in Indonesia today. In-depth and breadth, the book presents an understanding of tradition and contemporary by Indonesian art thinkers and artists who describe the developments and shifts that occurred in *wayang wong* and *karawitan* arts.

II. Review Of Literature

Merriam (1964: 120) states the use and function of music, where it means that emphasizes the problem of the situation or the way that the music is used, while the reasons for the use or purpose of the use of music, especially the broader purpose; to what extent is music capable of meeting human needs themselves. In the communication function of the death ceremony of *saur matua*, *gondang sabangunan* has a function as an accompaniment to the *tortor* (dancing) as an intermediary medium to the creator or God (vertical), and as a medium of mediation between fellow humans or *dalihan natolu* (horizontal). The Batak Toba society believes that through *Gondang Sabangunan* all prayers and requests can be conveyed to the creator or God. He also argues that change can also be seen as the beginning of a culture caused by the existence of two factors, namely internal factors and external factors. In this case, the most influential factor in the changes that occur in the *gondang sabangunan* is external factors. Internal changes are changes that arise from within and are carried out by the actors of culture themselves. According to Tylor, culture is a complex whole formed in history and has been passed on from generation to generation through tradition. The traditional organization includes social,

economic, religious, belief, customs, legal, artistic, technical, and *gondang sabangunan* in the death ceremony of *saur matua* that has existed since the time of the ancestors has become symbolic and can be read by the supporting society groups, in various the technique and style that appears when *gondang* is played.

III. Reserch Methodology

This study used a descriptive analytical method with a qualitative approach, aimed at describing the position and function of the *Gondang Sabangunan* ensemble's existence in the Saur Matua death ceremony. Research data was obtained from observations and interviews, from the available library sources. The nature of qualitative data is rich, multi-dimensional, and complex. This study did not question the population sample as in quantitative research. In collecting data that can later be used to answer all problems using fieldwork. In the field research, the author directly interacted with musicians, traditional elders, and Batak Toba people, and sought references to the literature related to this research.

IV. Result And Discussion

1. Changes in Toba Batak *Gondang* Music

The arrival of Christianity in Batak land changed the basic elements of Batak culture greatly. Interaction with new religions and Western values shook the indigenous Batak traditional culture to its roots. Initially, according to Christian church teachings, *gondang* music was related to trance, the worship of ancestral spirits in the native Batak religion of *parhudamdandam* and *ugamo malim*. Missionaries argued that the Batak *gondang* music cultural event was too dangerous to be played. In the early twentieth century, Christian missionaries asked the Dutch colonial government as the legal control authority in Batak lands to *Raja bius* ceremonies and *gondang* music. This resulted in a forced end to the Toba Batak tradition and the *gondang* music associated with the religion. The Toba Batak people in pre-Christian times did not know religions like those of today.

Activity musical in various acara Batak Toba, experience sublimation process since Native Batak people at that time believed in *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon* and also to the spirits of their ancestors, they adhere to paganism, a teaching that is a mixture of religious beliefs in the gods, animistic worship of deceased spirits and dynamism. *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon* according to Batak Toba beliefs is the highest god as the creator of humans and the universe.

“Belief in ancestral spirits is also part of the Batak people’s religion. These ancestral spirits are *sumangot ni ompu* (ancestral spirits that must be worshipped). Basically, for the Batak people, the spirits (*tondi*) are considered to have an independent existence (life) and the ability to exert their influence over present and future events. The *tondi* of the living, the dead and those who will be born are with the highest God in the upper world and are united with him in such a way that through the *tondi* the highest God himself is in all humans and creatures.”

At the cultural level, this situation is an important momentum to be studied and criticized, especially because of the acculturation of the two cultures (Batak and Western) in this study, it can be seen that there is a form of connection between two different cultures, namely religion and music. Starting from the activities of Western wind instruments in the church, then leaving the religious activities towards other ceremonial activities outside the church context with the

reason, it can be used as an accompaniment to traditional ceremonies or other ceremonies for the congregation in the church community which contains elements of religious activities that can be accompanied by music from the West. This wind music is played to accompany church songs that are sung together.

In the understanding of Western music, the social phenomenon of Batak music arises when looking at the issue of music used in Batak traditional ceremonies. In big cities, the answer is almost always related to the accompaniment used in Batak traditional ceremonies. For example, the influence of Western music is physically visible in the reality in the field, such as the use of single-keyboard Western music, *sulim* keyboard, mixed brass band music ensembles combined with solo singers, duets, or vocal trios. These music groups are now used massively by the Batak people in almost all Batak communities in Indonesia.

Western music originally accompanied church services, but in the end this culture was used in traditional customs events that are the same as *gondang*. Currently used in wedding parties, *saur matua*, digging bones known as mangongkal holi is the local wisdom of the Batak Toba community. With this phenomenon, brass or organ music used in the church is not known as the identity of church music alone but has left the church, eroding the role and activities of the Batak *gondang* which was deliberately abandoned due to globalization, accepted by the Batak Toba community as an act of stability in responding to new cultures.

2. Batak Music Accompanying Traditional Ceremonies as a Cultural Anomaly

This descriptive qualitative research, approach is carried out by researchers in the realm of postmodern culture, namely there must be an interpretation by researchers who have 4 empirical requirements (sensual-real goods, logic-reason, ethics-living norms, and transcendental-divinity), the author tries to examine the existing problems based on emic and ethical considerations. The dimension considers a phenomenon based on the understanding or perception of individuals or communities that own culture, and the ethic dimension will consider the existing phenomenon based on the perception of the Batak Toba cultural study itself. Thus, the phenomenon of changes in the *gondang* musical instrument caused the disappearance of the *gondang* instrument in Batak land, which will be seen holistically with the phenomenon of change in the socio-cultural scope of the Toba Batak community.

In field research, the author found several interesting facts about the Toba Batak cultural phenomenon. Single keyboard variant and wind music used in traditional ceremonies by Batak people, has been a very familiar musical instrument for the majority of Batak Toba society because almost all age groups from children to the elderly, really enjoy and like it. Keyboard and wind music are used in traditional ceremonies, such as marriage, and sometimes show paradoxical symptoms. On the one hand, The Western musical traditions used have not been recognized as part of Batak musical culture, the other hand Western music is used to play Batak songs and also accompany traditional Toba Batak dances.

Commercial music groups like this are now invited to accompany wedding ceremonies, while the church is considered unable to fund the formation of a church-owned wind music group. This has gained ground due to the understanding that the *gondang*, which was previously sacred as part of cultural activities, can be replaced by the role of Western music as a new commodity to hold the position of the *gondang*. The Batak *Gondang* itself as a whole, in the context of an ensemble playing at a ceremony or performance has shown a downward trend, even in one area the Batak culture has disappeared completely.

Certain groups, especially parents, say that traditional Batak Toba music (*Gondang Sabangunan*) is no longer used, and keyboards have the potential to damage the journey of Batak customs. It is an anomaly/oddity when someone is dancing (*manortor*) accompanied by a keyboard or wind band, and enjoys the rhythm of the music that appears. With this reality, there is a process of enculturation from the past to the current era of globalization, there is a culture that is transformed. As a result of the existence of several opinions above, in the past, there was also strict supervision by the church which "did not" allow the use of *gondang* in worship events (Sianipar: 1988:12). Or the traditional ceremonies carried out by Christians, according to them, seem to give the impression of returning to the traditional values of the Toba Batak.

To replace the *gondang* in the intended activity, currently, there is a tendency among some Toba Batak ethnic groups who live in Batak community centers to use a full musical ensemble band in accompanying traditional ceremonies, church ceremonies, and other important ceremonies. The repertoire of songs performed by this ensemble has also changed terms of the function of the role party performing the ceremony. Many responses emerged among the Batak Toba community, each from their own perspective. All of the views and assumptions mentioned are part of the emic approach which is one of the important elements in qualitative research.

3. The socio-cultural phenomenon of *Gondang* Batak users

The implementation of the custom, wind music, and keyboard are played to accompany the *tortor* (dances) during the ceremony. Thus, this music is a tool for the *panortor* (dancers) to depict worship and respect for God Almighty, the elements of *dalihan natolu* and also for the entire community present at the ceremony. Before the elements of the relatives, *dalihan natolu* gives words of comfort to the bereaved family, they are greeted with wind music and *tortor* first. At the funeral, wind music and the keyboard is also used to accompany the songs during the funeral.

There was a kind of transformation of the tradition of the European nation at that time applied in Tanah Batak, where the church's wind music group at Christmas and New Year's visited people's homes and played some songs to be heard. This tradition lasted for several years, so without realizing it, there was a close relationship between the user community and the music activities of Western culture, named as *martambor* activities. From here, people tried to start using this Western music. outside as musical accompaniment in liturgical worship in church, namely in the activities of traditional ceremonies of the Batak community. Finally, the use of

this Western musical instrument has developed so that it is used in various traditional ceremonies such as the *Saur matua* traditional ceremony, traditional wedding ceremonies, birthday celebrations, *mangongkal holi*, repairing ponds (monuments), and other events.

Western music used in *Saurmatua* traditional ceremonies is the result of deliberations by church members because they feel united with Western music presented during worship services and at Christmas and New Year. They consider that wind music can have a dual function or dual role in its presentation, namely in worship services and traditional ceremonies. Wind and keyboard music was used in *Saurmatua* traditional ceremonies around the 1950s and combined with the use of *gondang sabangunan* music. The use of this Western musical instrument is used to accompany songs in worship services and also in the implementation of customs as a whole.

As in the *Saurmatua* traditional ceremony, use of band music and the keyboard is also used to accompany the traditional Toba Batak wedding ceremony. In the traditional wedding ceremony, Western band music is played at certain times, namely when the bride and groom enter the traditional building when receiving donations from guests (*spoiled tumpak*), and when giving a traditional scarf (*mangulosi*). After the wedding blessing ceremony in the church is finished, the bride and groom along with their families and other guests will leave the church and prepare to enter the building where the traditional ceremony will be held. The entry of the bride and groom and the entire family into the traditional house is greeted with songs played by Western music. This Western music will continue to be played until all the guests enter the building, according to their respective positions in the tradition.

4. *Marmusik* as a Representation of Traditional Death Ceremonies

The sacred values of the Toba Batak tradition have partly begun to disappear. Until now, it is still used permanently as a marker of symbolic concepts that use *Gondang* Batak Toba music in traditional ceremonies in the Christian Toba Batak community (Siburian, 2012: 237). This condition is the essence of Batak tradition which believes that nothing should change, except death. Thus, it can be said that the variable of the death phase of the Saur Matua death ceremony has not changed until now.

The identity of the Christian Batak represents both the identities of the Toba Batak and the Christian. The identity of the Christian Batak is formed from a process of interaction and integration into a change in concepts and ideas that are real and visual, occurring because there are symptoms of an attitude of reduction (reducing) what is considered important. The simplification of monosemy by sending led to the realization of the use of accompanying music for the *Gondang* Batak Toba during the death ceremony of Saur Matua. The *Gondang Sabangunan* Batak Toba music is a tradition of the Toba Batak community that is still used today as an orientation of community freedom for the Toba Batak community.

Initially, traditional music had an important element in every Batak ceremony, it was part of the genealogical structure that is still used today (Purba, 2005: 9). The Toba Batak *gondang* music is now a representation of the term for the *Gondang Sabangunan* activity and the changes

experienced by the Batak people in general. The use of the word *gondang* in different contexts provides an overview of the Toba Batak people's concept of thinking about their music, namely distinguishing between a) traditional ceremonies/festivals, b) non-traditional ceremonies, and c) 'religious' ceremonies (original beliefs) with the grouping of *gondang* and *tortor* from their kinship elements. (Emmy, 2013: 14).

Gondang Sabangunan Batak is related to the ceremony that follows the customary protocol. The custom of *Gondang Sabangunan* contains the rules of the structure of *gondang* and the traditional dance (*tortor*) attached to it. In the development of the use of *Gondang Sabangunan* in the traditional ceremony of the death of Saur Matua, it can be used according to the form of ceremonial activity, respondent group (ceremonial participants), purpose, and musical structure. The traditional ensemble of *Gondang Sabangunan* itself has undergone a process of change in multiple diversifications through the application of Western musical instruments to accompany the traditional ceremonies of the Batak Toba community. Modernization that influenced Batak culture in the early 20th century, was the basis for the arrival of missionaries in the context of Western culture who introduced Western musical instruments used in ritual and religious ceremonies for the Batak people, this standardization process occurred when two cultures met and influenced each other.

The Toba Batak people are a society that is strong in their cultural values and their own identity regarding traditional *Gondang* music. The author sees that this extraordinary legacy can be left behind in the era of globalization. Why is Javanese and Balinese traditional music still alive, while Batak *gondang* is on the verge of extinction? Whether Balinese and Javanese culture is superior to Batak culture is a question that must be questioned. What can be done with the commodification of this musical event is as an effort to maintain the cultural values of the Batak Toba. Due to the pressure of modernization, globalization, mass media, and the appeal of the Western world, traditional culture and specifically *gondang* music may be threatened with loss. The loss of *gondang* music which is said to have happened a lot, of course, is very tragic.

Ceremonies and parties that used to be a place for traditional music performances are increasingly lacking because people prefer keyboard or wind music groups, vocal trios that reflect more modernity, and outside of all that is called *kampung*. Western music has nothing to do with Batak society, except occasionally as an example of culture in the process of change, but it is tragic if this influenced Batak music replaces *gondang* music as the heritage of the Batak people. Over time, many *gondang* players die and younger players are driven by aesthetic and economic factors to play more popular music.

Gondang music will be lost in large part or whole. There is a big possibility that *gondang* will only survive in the context of the *Parmalim* religious belief which still uses this *gondang* music in its original context. They use Batak music to honor their ancestors' delivering prayers to *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*. Concerns may arise that in life the Batak heritage in the form of

valuable and unique music will become extinct because the community that gave birth to it no longer cares enough.

V. Conclusion

The existence of Batak people in the diaspora partially, the author suspects is one of the causes of the shifting of understanding and feeling, as a social phenomenon that cannot be touched or seen. There are Batak people who have become prosperous and can finance ceremonies with great costs, they bring cosmopolitan aesthetics that sometimes oppose the aesthetics of tradition. Identification of the values of modernity, progress, education, and prosperity is often expressed with an affinity for what is considered modern. For example, now at parties or traditional ceremonies, it seems as if keyboard group music, wind music, and brass bands are more popular and appreciated than original *gondang* music. Modern wedding receptions are no longer considered complete without a keyboard or brass band music (which tends to be a band ensemble) playing pop songs. On the other hand, *gondang* music ensembles are considered 'village' by Batak people who live in urban areas, the tendency to identify music outside of *gondang* with modernity is considered legitimate or not wrong.

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