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Construction of Malayan Zapin after Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: the research reviews the recent condition of Malayan Zapin dance in various regions in Indonesia, including Palembang, Riau, Banjarmasin, Gresik, and Tarakan. These regions are places where Malayan Zapin dance are redesigned for entertainment. Although the conserver societies are not quite wealthy, their existence is not extinct despite the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic for two years. The objective of this research is therefore to understand the construction of Zapin dance from Malay ethnic in several conservation regions. **Methods:** The method of this research is using qualitative descriptive approach. Data concerning Zapin development are collected by conducting virtual interview with key informants through Whatsapp, Zoom and video call. Data analysis procedure involves collecting, sorting, and tabulating the data. Analysis technique is interpretative descriptive. **Result and discussion:** The results of this research show that (1) Zapin is constructed as the complement to local ethnic dances, (2) Zapin is constructed as the alternative dance material to be taught at school, and (3) Zapin is constructed a creative work. **Implication:** The authors find that the effort of the conserver societies to develop Zapin dance as a remarkable topic and the development of Zapin dance as a genuine art of Indonesian archipelago are barely studied.

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INTRODUCTION

Choreographers embark on their creative works by exploring as many as possible manifestations of certain art objects. This exploration is called substantial

processing which later produces the creation of moves and rhythms (Silalahi 2018). On the other hand, ethnic dancers are always influenced by their ethnicity. The moves of ethnic dances contain social genetic memories of the societies that conserve the dances (Hidajat 2020). However, one tragedy sends a huge impact on choreography works. Covid-19 pandemic has forced all choreography works to stop for more or less than two years. Even, after the pandemic, the art workers still find difficulty to make adjustments for their art activities.

The current research is fundamentally different from previous researches. By viewing reconstruction in choreography as a creative work, the research is observational in nature and assuming that creative work, including choreography, is not merely taking place at dance studio. Due to this reason, this research is equivalent to field study because the authors of this research must meet with informants and do participatory observation (Boy S. Sabarguna 2020). Dance reconstruction has been done by many Indonesian choreographers including Sardono W. Kusumo, Eko Supriyanto, Mugiyono Kasindo, or Deddy Lutan. These choreographers attain their comprehension on the substance of their creative works by participating into social activities and building active interaction with the fellow artists (Gunapriatna and Dewi 1970).

Unfortunately, creating ethnic choreography during Covid-19 pandemic is very challenging and draining the time and energy of choreographers. At least, the pandemic prevents the authors of the current research from meeting with the conservers of ethnic dances. Different strategy is needed to keep the research continued. In the end, the authors decide to use a non-direct social contact as research approach (Lexy J. Moleong 1991).

Surely, the challenge encountered by the authors of the current research is not only the obstructive event, which is, Covid-19 pandemic. The authors are also required to build social interaction to develop understandings about creative works by assuming that the works will involve the efforts of finding inspirations and exploring as many as possible manifestations of certain art objects. Making direct contact through communication technology (synchronous technology) is still creating what so called "social distance" (Pamuji 2020). Using such technology only makes the authors troubled with feeling creative sensation that is experienced by the choreographers

during their self-blending with sociocultural characteristics of the communities that become the subject of their creative works (Sulistia, Jaeni, and Listiani 2021).

Nevertheless, Covid-19 pandemic has spread on the entire corners of Indonesia and this imparts an inevitable hinderance to the development of creative works (Zaharah and Kirilova 2020). Social mobility is constrained due to the concern of getting infected through interpersonal touch and such constraint is the main obstruction (Nuriman et al. 2020). Therefore, the authors of the current research do the observation using virtual instrument. At least, such communication technique is suddenly quite popular in the world during Covid-19 pandemic (Saputri et al. 2020).

Although virtual communication is still helpful to the research efforts, but the authors of the current research are hardly ever to be able to comprehend the fruits of creative works which include body moves, dance technique and dancer intelligence (Haryono 2012). In consequence, the experience of dancers in absorbing rhythmical pattern to develop dynamics, styles and expressions in the dance is often imaginary and subjective in nature. Choreographers are also facing difficulty in understanding the substances of the dance due to their incapability to observe directly the skill and the mastery of the dancers. This hampers choreographers to start their creative works (Ratih 2001). In addition to this context, in the educative world, a review has been carried out to find out the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on learning capacity and then establish the solution to this problem (Tanuwijaya and Tambunan 2021).

Taking into consideration of all explanations above, the current research will review the recent condition of Malayan Zapin dance in various regions in Indonesia, including Palembang, Riau, Banjarmasin, Gresik, and Tarakan (Hidajat, Suyono, et al. 2021). These regions are places where Malayan Zapin dance are redesigned for entertainment (Ratih 2001). Although the conserver societies are not quite wealthy, their existence is not extinct despite the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic for two years (Zaharah and Kirilova 2020).

Construction efforts done by dance artists or conserver societies to develop Zapin dance are quite challenging during Covid-19 pandemic. The authors of the current research therefore consider those efforts as a remarkable topic for research. During Covid-19 pandemic, creative works from artists and conservers involve not only the creation of art works but also the determination of strategies to materialize their art

works. Therefore, their efforts deserve a great appreciation from the communities at the post-Covid-19 pandemic period.

METHODS

Method of this research is qualitative descriptive (Lexy J. Moleong 1991). Data collection technique is utilizing Whatsapp, Zoom and video call as communication technologies that enable the authors of the current research to conduct virtual interview with key informants in the conservation regions of Zapin dance. Data analysis procedure involves collecting, sorting, and tabulating the data. Analysis technique is interpretative descriptive (Rijali 2019). In the context of this research, the data are mostly in the form of video files that contain local themes, mainly Zapin dance. To review the creative works in performance art realm, the authors feel necessary to understand and implement artistic management (Hidajat, Pujiyanto, et al. 2021).

RESULT AND DISUCSSION

Covid-19 pandemic has given a painful effect on the activities of dance artists in ethnic regions of Indonesia. To be precise, the pandemic has hindered the dance artists from presenting their learning result and exploiting their creativity. Although virtual facilities are already available and helpful, these facilities are still lack of capacity in providing good feedbacks.

The authors of the current research obtained the data concerning Zapin dance by observing four dance studios, respectively (1) Elly Dance Studio in Palembang, (2) Laksmana Dance Studio in Riau, (3) Virtual Dance Studio in Malang, and (4) Tarakan Dance Studio in Tarakan, North Kalimantan Province.

All the dance studios above must condition their members periodically as their effort to cope with the pandemic effect. The dancers were scheduled to meet and exercise once in a week. According to Datuk Nurbeck, the expert of Zapin dance from Tarakan, this conditioning is aimed to maintain the bonding among the dancers.

Interestingly, the exercise is not targeted for the shows. During Covid-19 pandemic, any shows that potentially create the crowd are restricted. Therefore, there is no schedule whatsoever to perform the dance in the show. Dealing with this restriction, the choreographers prepare some recordings to be broadcasted at social

media. Surprisingly, such recordings are found to be useful as comparative materials in the commemoration of the World Dance Day on April 29 of 2022.

The restriction against the art shows does not decrease the enthusiasm of performers to present Zapin dance. A dance group in Singosari District, Malang Regency, Al-Kawakit, has successfully organized some shows but in limited scale or at least at local area. This dance group was still able to perform Zapin dance in celebration and religious events but under the conditions that comply with health protocols. Again, this conditioning is mainly aimed to sharpen the dance skill while also working for money by entertaining audiences. Most dancers agree with this conditioning and give positive response.

Similarly, the authors of the current research found that the use of Whatsapp for communication has been positively responded. In average, the members of dance studios are met once in a week on Thursday afternoon to have an exercise for more or less than 2-3 hours. Kinship bonding among these members is already close. Despite this family-like relationship, every member compels themselves to be responsible. That is why if one member feels sick, then this member must not present in the meeting.

When mobility restriction in several regions of Indonesia is loosened on March of 2022, the crowd is starting to emerge, or possibly be allowed, at land, sea and air transportations. Tourist destinations are opened for visitors. The authors of the current research carried out an observation in Bali, precisely at Ganesa University (UNDIKSA) and Indonesia Art Institute of Denpasar. Guest reception activities in these two colleges were done with less restrictive health protocols, which means that the guests are required to wear mask and always use personal hygiene facilities provided in several corners of the buildings.

Lecturers in both colleges start to teach their students in regular schedule. Meanwhile, students start to be involved in the reception of guests and also be allowed to manage campus-related activities. Most importantly, academic activities in both colleges have been going well. Art festivals are even held in both colleges on months of June and July.

In Sumatra, the re-opening of tourist objects is followed by the re-activation of Medan State University. Students start to be allowed to come to the campus where

lecturers have waited for them. Guests from other colleges are visiting and received in the guest hall.

Covid-19 pandemic is confirmed as subsiding after the Great Day of Idul Fitri in 2022. The dance exercise in Tarakan Dance Studio is done more frequently to twice in a week. Zapin dance has been prepared to be presented in two events, respectively 1) National Sport Contest (PORNAS), which is held in Palembang on the early of July 2022 and 2) the celebration of anniversary of Tarakan City, which is planned to be held on October 8 of 2022 and be entertained by a colossal dance involving 200 dancers. Despite the subside of Covid-19 pandemic trend, health protocols are still used in which the dancers must wear mask and wash their hands (Irawan et al. 2020).

Producing art shows at the post-pandemic period is more difficult than the production at the pre-pandemic period. Caution measures must be taken into consideration to reduce the potential relapse. Actually, the dancers and also choreographers are not in vacuum or totally stopped from their art activities. These art workers are still doing exercise, preparing for small events, and even planning what to do after Covid-19 pandemic ends.

Referring to the opinions of Elly and Robert Budi Laksana, the informants from Palembang, Covid-19 pandemic is like giving a sudden shock to everyone. Dance studios and higher educations where these informants teach dance must suddenly implement online learning system. This situation compels them to eliminate provisionally the lecture materials concerning dance technique and art show production. Following the college policies, few lecture materials must be delivered in the form of assignments for the students. Video files are quickly popular to be used as the medium to convey the materials. However, lecturers consider this online system as heavy and wearisome and also like putting them in difficulty to achieve the learning target. Somehow, these restless lecturers can manage to reach the target but only at 60-70%.

Quite similar description is also given by Muslim, a lecturer in Riau Islam University. Being a lecturer, Muslim feels that conditioning the students to master dance technique is quite challenging during Covid-19 pandemic. The lecture must be delivered through tutorial video which involves the use of model. And yet, lecturers still find difficulty to attain their target of knowing the quality of dance mastery among their students. Indeed, the video instrument enables them to give technical advices but this

only gives the students the needed knowledge about dance and not about the required quality for dance presentation.

Tourist destinations and shopping centers in Bali have been opened with less restrictive health protocols. Visitors come to these places passionately and thus create a crowd. Tourists and buyers even do not care about this crowd before satisfying their needs and desire. New items, including t-shirt and foods, are arranged neatly in the display shelf and wrapped in the fancy packages. Souvenir merchants begin to sell their merchandises vigorously.

In comparison with Bali, visitor destinations in Sumatra have been opened and going normally. However, Zapin dance is not yet presented in the sites where this dance was usually performed for the visitors. One of these sites is Maimun Palace. Moreover, Annual Festival of Zapin Dance, which is often held in Riau, is not yet organized. This is conversely related with the active practicing and exercise of Malay dances in many dance studios.

The authors of the current research discovered that in Malang, Zapin dance starts to be performed in various events. Guests are entertained with Zapin dance in the celebration of the Great Day of Idul Fitri and also for the merrymaking of the halal bi halal event. New choreographies have been introduced in academic realm. For instance, Zapin Selawat is a new choreography of Zapin dance that was presented at the event of halal bi halal in Malang State University. There is also Zapin Rampak Empat-Empat as a new choreography of Zapin dance presented at the event of seminar and discussion on research product in the Art Council of Malang. Another new choreography of Zapin dance is Zapin Pesta Ria Musim Panen which was presented at the seminar and discussion event held in the Art School of Wilwatikta Surabaya. All the participants of these seminar and discussion events were mostly lecturers and college students who consider that moments as a revival because there was no such events for almost two years due to Covid-19 pandemic.

Results of Research

In this section, the construction of Zapin Dance in Indonesia in three different periods will be elaborated. These periods are respectively (1) normal period, (2) Covid-19 pandemic period, and (3) new normal period.

When all things are normal, the construction of Zapin dance is done by dance artists or choreographers in various regions of Indonesia, particularly at dance studios in Sumatra, Kalimantan and Java (Hidajat, Sayono, et al. 2021). The production of Zapin dance has been aimed for entertainment and contest. Even, the higher educations in Sumatra and Kalimantan have prioritized Zapin dance as a lecture. Lecturers construct Zapin dance to be performed at dance contests, for comparative study in other campuses, and in Zapin dance festival.



Figure 1. In normal period, Zapin dance groups are available for various events
(Source: Robby, 2022).

Before Covid-19 pandemic, art activities in Indonesia are very promising and profitable to dance artists or choreographers. The growth of tourism sector has given a great opportunity to these art workers to produce many dances, including Zapin dance, to be presented in tourist destinations. Government policy on the development of creative industry also supports the development of Zapin dance (Pujiyanto 2018).

During Covid-19 pandemic period, the construction of Zapin dance is only for building solidarity across the members of dance groups. This construction is merely a repetition of few dance lessons, mainly its collaboration with gambus music (Mizan 2012). Therefore, there is no efforts oriented toward production. Later, the leader of dance studios and also the lecturers of art colleges feel necessary to conduct few limited meetings to discuss Zapin dance as well as to strengthen social bonding across the conserver societies of Zapin dance.

The construction of Zapin dance in Covid-19 pandemic period must be conducted online (Daryanti, Jazuli, and Sumaryanto 2019). In consequence, the

construction of Zapin dance as a lesson to be learned or as a material for dance contest becomes difficult or quite limited. Dance artists are only active in their localities or in their own groups. These art workers feel that art activities need to be maintained at least to relieve them from their life burden and difficulties.

Pursuant to the opinion of a researcher (Diwyarthi 2021), new normal period has enabled art workers to reclaim their gainful days back then. Several celebration events start to be organized and Zapin dance becomes one of the requested dances that needs to be presented at those events. In addition, the learning of Zapin dance has been conducted offline. The happy news is that Zapin dance will be presented as a colossal dance involving 200 dancers for the celebration of Tarakan City anniversary on October 8 of 2022. Dance artists and also choreographers never give up their dream during Covid-19 pandemic. These art workers keep their communities intact and even prepare themselves for any opportunities coming up at the post-Covid-19 pandemic period.



Figure 2. In new normal period, Zapin dance is presented in the celebration parties.

(Source: Robby, 2022).

More specifically, the writing about the construction of Zapin dance after Covid-19 pandemic is focused on three functions, respectively (1) reflecting the effort and enthusiasm of dance artists, including choreographers, in the development of Zapin dance, (2) providing new ideas to make Zapin dance more progressive with more unique character, and (3) strengthening the social bonding across dance artists in order to maintain their motivation in the construction of Zapin dance. Based on these

functions, the authors of the current research regard Zapin dance as new opportunity that supposes not to be ignored.

CONCLUSION

In several cases, Zapin dance construction in Indonesia during Covid-19 pandemic is quite challenging because art activities are extremely restricted. Social distancing has been enforced with a great deal of discipline. The presentation of art activities, including Zapin dance, needs to be stopped for the safety of everyone. This stoppage greatly affects dance studios and art colleges that learn and conserve Zapin dance. Fortunately, after Covid-19 pandemic period, the restriction is loosened and dance artists are starting to work again with their Zapin dance. The construction of Zapin dance in Indonesia is differentiated in this research into three periods, respectively (1) normal period, (2) Covid-19 pandemic period, and (3) new normal period.

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