

## Functionalism Perspective of Likurai Dance in Belu, East Nusa Tenggara

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**ABSTRACT:-** This paper is a descriptive analysis writing that aims to provide an explanation of one type of traditional dance originating from the Belu region, East Nusa Tenggara namely Likurai Dance. Likurai dance is one of the traditional dances originating from the Faturika Village area, Raimanuk District, Belu Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, which was born around 1800 and continues to spread widely throughout the East Nusa Tenggara region. Likurai dance is a type of traditional dance that has some unique and interesting things, especially when viewed from the perspective of functionalism. Along with the development of the times and the changing culture of the local community, this Likurai dance has developed and changed especially in terms of function. This dance experiences shifts and shifts of functions, which were originally dances which are often performed to welcome the heroes who returned from the battlefield to dance that shows the regional identity that is usually displayed at several events and cultural activities of the Belu community.

**Keywords:** Belu, Dance, Functionalism, Likurai,

### I. INTRODUCTION

Humans are tangible figures, while culture besides having material forms are also things that cannot be touched (intangible culture) such as ideology of norms, values and others (Sumaryono, 2011: 20). One type of cultural product that forms the elements of identity and character of a particular ethnic group is traditional art, include weaving, carving, painting, dance, and music. Belu, is a one of region in East Nusa Tenggara that has lot of arts and unique culture that characterize their lives. They also has lot of ceremonies and rituals which is held in high esteem by the public because of people's trust in something that is invisible or unseen. This is also closely related to the belief that developed before the entry of religion in Nusantara, both animism and dynamism. By embracing this belief, the community considers that by carrying out traditional ceremonies or rituals, the desire or expectation of a thing will be fulfilled. a member of the social community, and as one of the elements of the universe. Ritual communication confirms its commitment to family, ethnic, and religious traditions. Some forms of ritual communication include, thanksgiving ceremonies for success, marriage, and so on. The ceremony and ritual is usually contained by traditional music and dance. One type of traditional dance that become a part of ceremony and ritual is Likurai dance in Belu, Nusa Tenggara Timur (East Nusa Tenggara).

Likurai dance is a dance that is always performed on every religious events, cultural festival and traditional events in Belu. The most interesting thing from Likurai dance that is make it different with another traditional dance is the property used, which is *Genderang* or known as *Tihar*. The *Genderang/ Tihar* was beaten by playing the rhythm pattern as accompaniment music that determined the dance movements. This dance is very easy to find in Belu Regency, East Nusa Tenggara because it is often a part of various activities in the life of Belu people, so it is not surprising that this dance becomes the basic of an identity or icon of the city of Belu. Therefore, Belu Regency is often referred to as Likurai Regency. This district with the center of Atambua, located in Timor, is the largest producer of *Cendana Wood (ai-kamelin)*. Belu Regency is directly bordered by the State of Timor Leste. Although originating from Belu district, the Likurai dance is widely known and popularized throughout the Land of Timor, from West Timor to East Timor, even its existence has reached the surrounding islands in the Nusantara.

This dance has changed and evolved especially in the form of its presentation. The form of this dance is caused by the changes of its function. In the old days the Likurai dance was only performed at the time of welcoming the heroes who returned from the battlefield, but now the Likurai dance is performed every time the guest picks up who visits Faturika Village. Likurai dance's life underwent several changes due to the condition of the its owner's community. Like the current development of the current era, Likurai dance gets special attention from certain people. Thus, Belu people feel there is a development in the arts, especially Likurai dance. This is a breath of fresh air for the Belu community in particular, because it is very supportive and closely related to the effort to preserve the dance which is feared that it will start to disappear and be abandoned by the community if it experiences stagnation and there is no innovation to preserve it.

Changes in the form of Likurai dance does not occur without reason, this is also related to changes in function that occur in society. If at the beginning of the emergence of this art only functioned in a variety of traditional rituals, now this dance is not only a part of some traditional rituals but also used in a variety of senior-based activities that help as well as in various national and international based festivals. Therefore, this paper will try to explain Likurai dance using the perspective of functionalism approach.

## II. THEORY AND METHOD

### A. Theory

The functionalism as a theoretical perspective in anthropology rests on the analogy with organisms. That is, it brings us to think of the socio-cultural system as a kind of organism, the parts of which are not only interconnected but also contribute to the maintenance, stability, and survival of the "organism". Thus the basis of all functional explanations is the assumption (open or implied) that all cultural systems have certain functional requirements to enable their existence. Cultural systems have needs (which might be called "social needs" in the Radcliff-Brown style, or are expressed in Malinowski's individual biological terms) all of which must be fulfilled so that the system can survive. From this perspective it can be understood that if the functional needs are not met then the system will experience disintegration and "die" or it will turn into another system of a different type.

In line with the functionalism theory, changes in functions that occur in Likurai dance in more detail can also be seen with the help of the theory of Recent Theories of Social Change 1966 initiated by Alvin Toffler (1964) which divides change into two parts, namely the theory of external and internal change. External theory considers that the essence of cultural change is caused by the interaction between different cultures. For example the entry of technology and science into the community, so that the cultural values that exist in the community began to fade little by little, and there was a change in function and change in the shape of that culture. While internal change is caused by the urge to change from the community itself. The people's desire for something new and starting to saturate with cultures that are monotonous and standard, so they slowly began to leave it. (Toffler, 1964: 143-147).

### B. Method

This research is a qualitative research which priority in open interviews to examine and understand attitudes, feelings, views and behavior of individuals or groups of people, to understand the phenomena about what is experienced by research subjects. In addition, this study also uses the descriptive method by Sutopo (2006: 28), which says that qualitative research is a research procedure that analyzes descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from people and observable behavior. Qualitative research here will be used to study the natural context in which the type of data that will be generated is data based on phenomena that occur naturally and are interrelated in the social life of the Belu community. Ethnographic approach is used to obtain data and facts based on direct observation from researchers of the object to be studied or described (Heriyawati, 2016: 76). Ethnographic approach is used to make it easier for researchers to understand the behavior that occurs naturally in the surrounding Belu's people that affected Likurai dance phenomenon.

This study using 3 ways in collecting data (1) Observation (2) Interview (3) Literature Study. After the data is collected, then all the data are analyzed using abstractions. As for what is meant by analysis according to Lindlof (1995: 243) analysis is the activity of listening to the voices of others, in this connection includes all data, both obtained through primary and secondary sources, which are then combined with the theory and explanation of researchers, as a process of interpretation. After being analyzed then the results of the study are arranged based on discussion points that describe the problem comprehensively.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In Tetun tribe and Belu language, Likurai comes from two words: *Haliku* and *Rai*. *Haliku* means watching, guarding, protecting, caring, taking, controlling. *Rai* means land, earth, land or island. *Haliku Rai* or later integrated into Likurai, may be interpreted as an act of supervising, protecting, preserving and taking away land or earth, whether the land is basically ours, or that of others. Taking care of our own land and taking, in the

sense of controlling the land of others, is certainly not easy. Everything needs a struggle, a fight, a battle on the battlefield. Based on the history in long time ago, this dance is performed when welcoming a hero or a guest visiting the Belu area. This dance is performed by women who flank the small drum (*tihar*) on their left armpit and beat the drum while dancing in a circle. Various foot movements and beat rhythms determine this type of dance. While men dance in the middle of a circle of female dancers called dancer, *peronggeng* (*haksoke*). But among these rows of small drummers there are also women or men who play the role of small *gong* or tuners and drums, thereby adding to the reverberation the thunderous sounds that shake the hearts of every listener.

The traditional ceremony or ritual in question is the custom of cutting the head. Based on the results of an interview with Leonardus who said that; in ancient times there was a tradition that often happened in Belu, namely the tradition of beheading. Where if there is a group of foreigners who want to come to take control of one of the regions in Belu then war will occur. The traditional ceremony or ritual is carried out if the local community or Belu community wins the war. The decapitated head of the enemy will be brought during a traditional ritual, and the ritual always presents one of the existing arts, the Likurai dance (interview, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017). This dance is a form of welcoming heroes for the victory of war.

Every kind of punch that is played and followed by the beat of the foot to the beat of the punch, actually tells something they don't just express in words. But they expressed feelings of happiness through the beat of the movement of the return of the hero returning from the battlefield. Now the Likurai dance is performed to welcome visits from other governments to the Belu region. Not infrequently Likurai dance is also performed for entertainment which in the form has been created as the preservation of art in the midst of changing society that has developed.

The Likurai dance (*heuk*) is one type of dance that exists and is still maintained until nowadays in Belu Regency. This dance is a kind of dance from Belu which was inherited by the ancestors. In the days of the ancients, the Belu people had to take the good care of their land not to be controlled by other tribes. Not infrequently the Belu ancestors must fight against other tribes who disturb the peace of life of the residents; or had to seize new territory because of the addition of tribal members. Belu's ancestors won many battles. The enemy is often defeated, beheaded. As proof, the fragment of the enemy's head was brought to Tanah Belu, and when the trumpet (*Bobik*) and flute (*Fui*) victory was blown and the thanksgiving party began. Heroes who returned fighting with the heads of the enemy, would be welcomed by thousands of other citizens, men and women, who did not go directly into battle, but guarded the village (*Mahein, Makbalin, Makedakan Knua Dato, Kota Dato*). Customary poets (*Mako'an*), usually selected and prepared by three best people, one as a spokesperson and two others cheating on them, will give customary greetings (*Hase-Hawaka*) to the War Commander (*Meo Ulun*) and a new heroes group (*Meo*) returning from the battlefield with brilliant results. The women will soon beat *Tihar*, salute the heroes three times, then simultaneously and aggressively, they make it more alive while twisting the body symbolizing joy over the victory of the war and moving towards the Great Palace (*Ksadan*, or complete *Ksadan Dato Molin Dato*) Kingdom (*Fohobot-Raibot*), accompanying the *Meo* who won the war by bringing the enemy's head along.

Over time the tradition of beheadings was eliminated and it is not known the certain time when the tradition was last performed. but the Likurai dance is still maintained and developed in the life of Belu people. And in its development, this dance has become one of the most popular traditional dances in Belu. This dance is often performed various celebrations, cultural events, and other events. Besides being a form of cultural heritage this dance has also become an attraction for tourists visiting Belu.

The lost of the beheaded tradition which is very closely related to the Likurai dance, does not make the art just disappear because of the enculturation process. In this case enculturation can be seen as an effort to pass down or to inherit something (values, knowledge, beliefs, norms, attitudes, behavior, and skills) in order to become a habit or customs (culture) to be owned and passed on from one generation to the next so that stay afloat and sustainable. So that the culture remains, survives and is sustainable (Triyanto, 2015).

There is a shift in the function that occurs in the Likurai dance makes the emergence of several new meanings and functions of the Likurai dance in various cultural events and activities in the Belu community by fighting for and achieving a more dignified life: 1. Likurai dance when performed in religious ceremonies (usually in the worship of the Catholic Church) want to show that as believers, we must appear as heroes who always try to defeat evil by always choosing to do good according to God's will, for the sake of our happiness. 2. Likurai dance when performed in welcoming the visit of government figures, community leaders or honored guests, wants to show that mutual respect is the basic attitude of civilized human beings. The elders deserve respect and this also inspires them to appear as heroes who are ready to defend and strive for the progress and independence of all the people. 3. Likurai dance when performed in various thanksgiving events actually wants to show us that we should be grateful to God who always blesses us, at the same time we thank our fellow humans and the universe who always help and support our hard work to achieve the ideal of life, in accordance what we desire together: a life that is safe, peaceful, friendly, just, and prosperous in the integration of hearts as



fellow human beings, with the universe and with a deep awareness that we are limited creatures who depend entirely on God's power.

The enculturation process indirectly keeps the Likurai dance alive even though it has a form and function that experiences a shift. The new functions and meanings of Likurai dance in Belu society include:

1. The Function of the Likurai dance at the ceremonial construction of a traditional house

The Tetun tribe community in Raimanuk sub-district still believes in the supernatural, they believe that the traditional house is a house that has strength and sacred so that the swords of the *Meo* are stored in it, it will be safe because the ancestors will protect. According to Osse Manek (interview, Wednesday June 17<sup>th</sup> 2020) said that the Likurai dance is always presented in the construction of traditional houses actually as a sign of joy or euphoria of the community to welcome *matakmalirin* or blessings from the ancestors when some men want to go to take *we fohon* and head or chieftain chants a *mantra* that reads "*kolo-kolo no ibun ma bui muk no lian*" as a greeting or sign asking permission to the ancestors and creatures created by God so that everything runs smoothly, thus the tribal chief and the old custom take *tihar* and dance to accompany how many men have been determined and others to take *we fohon*. In addition to taking *we fohon* Likurai dance is also used as a form of "*saspek shame or innuendo*" this can usually be applied as time goes by in daily life of course there are misunderstandings between one and the other and this misunderstanding raises problems besides there is social jealousy that they immersed, because of the feeling to silence them with words, therefore to show all the odds at this moment because they can show by dancing not like dancing normally and it's their right to describe their feelings so no one has the right to reprimand.



Picture 1. Likurai Dance at ceremonial construction of a traditional house



Picture 2. The crowd in ceremonies of the construction of traditional houses



**Picture 3. all women are dancing likurai while striking the tihar around the traditional house**

From the picture above, we can realize that Timorese women, young and old, large and small, whether highly educated or illiterate, both wealthy and modest people, all combined flanking the shaggy (*tihar*) under their armpits and then forming a line or circle, among them sometimes dozens of women, sometimes dozens, sometimes even hundreds of women, beating or sounding dynamically, rhythmically, with a variety of sounds or blows, but still maintaining cohesiveness, tempo, also combined with body movements, the body swerves regularly here and there as sounds are produced from the drum punch. This drum in Tetun Belu is called *tihar*. *Tihar* is definitely owned by every house in Belu District. Timorese women naturally keep *Tihar* in their homes. Beating *Tihar* is called *Basa-Tihar* or *He'uk*.

## 2. Function of Likurai Dance for Welcoming

Ancestor Belu has inherited mutual respect towards others. Which has been preserved by the Belu community until now. If there are guests who visit, will be given respect by all residents welcomed, and when guests have arrived at their destination, the traditional artists (*Mako'an*), are usually selected and prepared by three best people, namely one as a spokesman and two others flanking him, will give a custom greeting (*Hase-Hawaka*) to visiting guests who have just arrived, then the Likurai dancers parade guests to the place they want to visit. Then given the betel nut as a symbol of introduction between the local community and visiting guests. In the Likurai dance the welcoming function has two options, namely the Likurai dance function to welcome the knights or meos returning from the battlefield and the second option is for the reception of great guests such as those from the government and external guests. This is also supported by the opinion of Kornelis Salan (interview, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020) which revealed that the Likurai dance became part of the ritual of welcoming guests aimed at showing guests the visit that Likurai dance is an identity and cultural art that is owned and maintained by the Belu community until nowadays..



**Picture 4. Likurai Dance at Welcoming Ceremonies**





**Picture 5. Likurai Dance when Welcoming Guests Out of Town**



**Picture 6. Likurai Dance when Welcoming Guests Out of Town**

### 3. Likurai Dance at Festival and Special Event

Along with the increase in the existence of Likurai dance which is also caused by internal and external factors, it has made many people from the Belu and East Nusa Tenggara environment, National and International become aware of even more interest in the art of Likurai dance. Even the increasing interest of the community, about the Likurai dance, this has made the Likurai dance involved in various local and national festivals and even became part of several state activities such as the Commemoration Ceremony of Indonesian Independence Day. So as to compensate for the community's anomaly, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism Belu increasingly aggressively promotes the Likurai dance in various activities, especially art festivals which are very attractive to people from all over the world.

The Likurai Festival, also known as the Fulan Fehan Festival, is one of the local Belu festivals that has caught the public's attention for the past few years. As a colossal dance cultural party, it makes its own attraction from the festival. Because the Likurai dance can be performed by thousands of dancers from Belu Regency, Malacca Regency, and neighboring Timor Leste.

Likurai dance festival is usually performed by male dancers who carry swords and female dancers with their small drums or tihar. The popularity of Likurai dance has soared after successfully breaking MURI's record in October 2017 for the largest number of traditional dancers, which is 6,000 dancers. After that, the Likurai festival or Fulan Fehan became the long-awaited annual agenda. So that in the following year, 2018 Fulan Fehan

Festival will be held again on the 27<sup>th</sup> , and 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2018 in collaboration with the Art institution namely Indonesian Institute of Art, Surakarta. Then in 2019, the Fulan Fehan festival was held again with 1,500 dancers at the event of the 2019 Fulan Fehan Festival. This festival became a hope for Belu Regency to be able to increase NTT's tourism potential to the world because the Likurai dance presents cultural splendor and special public charm so it is expected can introduce to all corners and corners of the world.



Picture 7. Likurai at Fulan Fehan Festival 2017

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Likurai dance is a traditional dance comes from Belu, East Nusa Tenggara. This dance has changed and evolved especially in of its forms and functions. In the old days the Likurai dance was only performed at the time of welcoming the heroes who returned from the battlefield, but now the Likurai dance is performed every time the guest picks up who visits Belu Village. Likurai dance's life is strongly influenced by internal and external factors. This dance is also underwent several changes due to the condition of the its owner's community. Like the current development of the current era, Likurai dance gets special attention from certain people. Thus, Belu people feel there is a development in the arts, especially Likurai dance. This is a breath of fresh air for the Belu community in particular, because it is very supportive and closely related to the effort to preserve the dance which is feared that it will start to disappear and be abandoned by the community if it experiences stagnation and there is no innovation to preserve it.

From the explanation above, by using functionalism as a theoretical perspective it brings us to think of the socio-cultural system as a kind of organism, the parts of which are not only interconnected but also contribute to the maintenance, stability, and survival of the "organism" . Thus the basis of all functional explanations is the assumption (open or implied) that all cultural systems have certain functional requirements to enable their existence. Cultural systems have needs (which might be called "social needs" in the Radcliff-Brown style, or are expressed in Malinowski's individual biological terms) all of which must be fulfilled so that the system can survive. From this perspective it can be understood that if the functional needs are not met then the system will experience disintegration and "die" or it will turn into another system of a different type. And it also happened to Likurai dance as a kind of traditional art that still alive until nowadays.

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