

Andung, the Art of Grieving in the Toba Batak Community

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Abstract

This article examines the tradition of andung, a cultural practice in the Toba Batak community, which functions as an art form and a means of expressing emotions, especially in mourning. Andung is a ritual and reflects essential values in the Toba Batak culture, such as respect for ancestors and the importance of family relationships. This tradition helps maintain community identity, providing a sense of togetherness and solidarity among community members when facing loss.

The andung tradition, however, is subject to challenges, particularly those arising from modernization and the influence of Christianity. These factors risk diluting the tradition's significance and relevance in contemporary society. This article emphasizes the need to examine how social and religious influences affect cultural practices thoroughly. It underscores the vital importance of further research in exploring the complex relationship between the andung tradition and religious teachings, thereby highlighting the urgency and significance of this topic.

This article employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the lasting significance of andung within the Toba Batak community despite the social changes over time. The research focuses on valuable insights into the role of andung in preserving the Toba Batak people's rich cultural heritage and identity. It underscores the importance of maintaining this tradition as a living testament to the community's cultural legacy.

Keywords: Andung, Grief and loss, Toba Batak

1. Introduction

Andung is a significant tradition in the culture of the Batak Toba people, who generally live in North Sumatra, Indonesia. This tradition functions as a form of deep emotional expression, where individuals or groups convey sadness and respect for loved family members who have passed away (Manalu, 2019, 2032).

In the context of andung as a vocal tradition, the lyrics and melodies often reflect grief, fond memories, and respect for someone who has just died and is undergoing a burial ceremony. Through andung, the Batak Toba people not only feel sadness personally but also create social bonds among community members, where they together feel the loss and provide mutual support (Lumbangaol et al. 2019, 51).

The andung tradition is believed to originate from the will of a Batak Toba king who requested that his death not only be marked by tears but also a request that the family tells of his deeds during his life that marked his fame. That is why the lyrics of andung are always accompanied by stories of testimonies of

the deceased person's good deeds. Thus, andung indicates how famous and high the deceased's dignity is. The more mourners who perform andung, the higher the dignity of the mourned person (Tindaon et al. 2018, 135).

Recently, the practice of andung among the Batak Toba community has experienced a significant decline. This decline is caused by several factors, especially modernization and social changes that occur in society. Modernization changes how people interact and express emotions, including in the context of grieving. The younger generation, who are more exposed to global culture and technology, may consider the practice of andung as something old-fashioned or irrelevant to how they grieve. They tend to choose more modern and practical methods of expressing grief, which can result in neglect of the andung tradition (Lumbangaol et al. 2019, 51).

In addition, social changes that occur in the Batak Toba community also affect this practice. Shifts in values and norms and the increasing influence of religion can cause stigma against traditional practices such as andung. Some Batak people feel forced to abandon the andung tradition because it is incompatible with modern values or religious teachings (Siregar et al. 2020, 17).

The combination of these factors contributes to the decline of the andung practice, which was previously an integral part of the grieving process in the Toba Batak community. Suppose there needs to be more effort to preserve and adapt this tradition. In that case, there is a risk that andung will be increasingly marginalized and lose its meaning and relevance in the current cultural context (Simanjuntak and Sukmayadi 2023, 519).

The gap identified in the research of Manalu, Lumbangaol, Tindaon, and Siregar regarding andung indicates the need for a more in-depth analysis of how social change affects the practice of this tradition. In addition, these studies have yet to comprehensively explore the social factors contributing to the andung practice's decline. This gap creates the need for research that highlights the influence of social change, such as modernization and the influence of religion, and its impact on the andung tradition.

Therefore, this article describes how andung can be categorized as art and its potential relevance in Batak Toba culture. This writing aims to explore andung as an art form that not only functions as an expression of grief towards acceptance but also reflects the cultural and social values of the Batak Toba community. By examining andung as an art of mourning, it is hoped that a more profound understanding can be found of how this tradition contributes to cultural identity and how this practice can be preserved in the face of the challenges of modernization and harmony with religious teachings, especially Christianity.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, an appropriate method to explore social and cultural phenomena in depth. Using this approach, the author can explore the meaning and cultural context of the andung practice and understand the role and function of this tradition in the Batak Toba community.

A literature analysis review is used as the primary procedure in this study. This means the author collects data from various relevant sources, such as articles and books about andung. By reviewing these sources, the author identifies essential themes, trends, and changes in the practice of andung and how the Batak Toba community understands and practices this tradition.

The descriptive qualitative approach allows the author to collect information and analyze and interpret data by presenting a multidimensional perspective on the practice of andung. By understanding the cultural and social context behind andung, this article provides a more comprehensive picture of how this tradition functions in the lives of the Batak Toba community and the sustainability challenges it faces in the modern

era. Overall, this study aims to provide a more actual description of andung as an integral part of the Toba Batak cultural heritage and how this practice can be preserved amidst the social changes.

3. Theoretical Framework

Andung can be understood as an art form because it involves emotional depth and strong meaning in Batak Toba culture. As an art, andung functions not as an entertainment show but as a medium to express deep feelings, namely sadness and, at the same time, respect for the deceased (Manalu, 2019, 2040). In the Batak Toba tradition, andung is sung during funeral ceremonies or mourning, where the lyrics and melodies used reflect feelings of grief and loss. The activity of singing andung is called mangandung. Through poetic lyrics, singers can convey longing, sadness, and respect for the deceased, creating a deep emotional experience for listeners that allows individuals and communities to deal with loss (Lumbangaol et al. 2019, 52).

Andung plays a role in reminiscing about beautiful memories with the deceased. In this context, andung helps families and communities celebrate the deceased's life. By remembering these precious moments, the social bonds between those who are grieving are increasingly woven together. Thus, andung becomes integral to mourning rituals, providing emotional support and creating space for individuals to express their feelings freely (Tambunan 2023, 64).

Andung lyrics and melodies have rich meanings and reflect deep cultural values in the Toba Batak community. Andung lyrics generally use refined Batak language, consisting of unique vocabulary that is not used in everyday language because the series of words functions only to convey important messages related to life, death, and relationships between individuals in the community (Lumbangaol et al. 2019, 51). Andung lyrics often include themes such as hopes for descendants (Hagabeon), respect (Hasangapon), and wealth (Hamoraon). These values reflect aspirations and norms upheld in the Toba Batak community. For example, hopes for descendants show the importance of family and the continuation of generations. At the same time, respect acknowledges the excellent reputation of the deceased and the memorable relationships established during their lives (Manalu, 2019, 2033).

Through lyrics and melody, andung acts as a means to transmit the local wisdom of the culture and identity of the Batak Toba community. When andung is sung in a ritual context, the song conveys feelings of grief and reminds community members of the values and traditions passed down from generation to generation. This practice helps maintain the sustainability of Batak Toba culture, especially amidst the influence of modernization that can erode traditional cultural practices (Tambunan et al. 2023, 66). Through the practice of andung, individuals also convey their prayers to the Divine (Mulajadi Na and Bolon). With the presence of the Divine spirit (tondi), people who sing andung during a grieving community are guided to express all the sadness and suffering they feel to be healed. This creates a sense of togetherness and solidarity, especially in dealing with communal loss (Simanjuntak and Sudirana 2024, 9). Thus, Andung reflects the Toba Batak cultural values of interpersonal relationships, respect for ancestors, and giving time for personal and communal grieving. As an art, andung expresses feelings creatively, touching the soul and strengthening social bonds communally in the face of loss.

4. Discussion

In this section, the author describes how the andung tradition can be categorized as art and its potential of andung so that it is still relevant in today's Batak Toba society. Andung can be considered an art form because it contains elements of deep emotional expression. Through lyrics and melody, andung allows

grieving individuals to express their feelings of loss and sadness. Thus, andung is a cultural ritual and an art form with aesthetic and emotional value (Simanjuntak and Sudirana 2024, 11). In the context of mourning, the lyrics sung in andung reflect a complex emotional experience, allowing the singer and listener to feel and process the sadness together simultaneously. This provides space for individuals to process spiritually when dealing with loss, namely feeling the presence of the Divine, which is an integral part of the mourning ritual. In addition to expressing individual faith, andung creates socio-spiritual bonds among community members. When andung is sung in mourning, community members gather to feel similar sadness and support one another. This creates a sense of solidarity and togetherness, which is vital in grieving. Thus, andung is a social bridge connecting individuals with their communities (Simanjuntak 2024, 242).

The decline in the practice of the andung tradition is an impact of the influence of religion, especially Christianity. The author sees the importance of a more thorough study to see the meeting point or separation between the practice of andung, a Toba Batak cultural tradition, and Christian teachings to find a deeper spiritual meaning.

The common point of separation that emerges is the use of the Bible as a dominant instrument, including the andung tradition, which is considered inconsistent with the teachings of the Bible. For example, the assumption that the andung ritual focuses too much on sadness and remembrance of the deceased seems to ignore or even contradict the teachings about life after death in the Bible. Christianity has indeed changed how people grieve and carry out funeral rituals. For example, today's Batak Christian families prefer singing church songs rather than practicing andung, which is part of the Toba Batak tradition. This situation significantly reduces the frequency of andung practices in burial rituals. At the same time, the practice of andung is gradually seen as old-fashioned and no longer following modern values. This can potentially cause social stigma against the Batak Toba people who still practice andung, so there is social pressure to abandon this tradition (Siregar et al. 2020, 17).

This phenomenon is part of the prevalence of remnants of colonialism when the Bible was once interpreted to be used as a tool to dominate and colonize every non-Western culture and thought. The Bible, in many cases in Asia and other continents, has been misused to justify the colonization of non-Western nations. The colonizers claimed that local cultures were inferior and needed "civilization" from the West. As a result, biblical teachings were often imposed without considering the local cultural context, thus eliminating pre-existing traditions and values to strengthen existing power structures and oppress residents as marginal groups. The old interpretation must be replaced with a post-colonial interpretive framework oriented towards dialogical imagination, a creative interpretation sensitive to culture (Kwok 1995, 12-13). The harsh criticism of the biblical dominant view prompted various post-colonial studies that reviewed local cultural practices and carefully compared them with the practices and values of the Christian faith based on the Bible. From these studies, it turns out that there are significant intersections between the practice of andung and the teachings of the Bible. In the book of Lamentations, for example, there is a focus on expressing grief and comfort through personal and collective words. This means that the expression of grief does not stop there and binds the bereaved to be bound in their grief (Sihombing 2020, 174).

It turns out that lamenting is not just an expression of sadness but is an integral part of accepting grief. Lamenting allows one to express complex emotions such as sadness, anger, rejection, and fear. By releasing these emotions, individuals feel more relieved and can begin to process the loss as a reality of life that needs to be accepted. So lamenting becomes a means for the body and mind to heal emotional

wounds. Through this process, individuals slowly accept that loss is an inevitable part of life (Kubler-Ross and Kessler 2000, 113-115).

Mourning also strengthens relationships with others around us. When people around us are grieving, they often feel the urge to provide support and empathy. This creates a more connected atmosphere, and the bereaved person does not feel alone when facing grief. The bereaved person obtains relief, solidarity support, and hope from those around them, especially the Divine. Not only Christian teachings but also current professional accompaniment practices for the bereaved greatly emphasize the importance of the presence of community and social support during times of grief (Rogers 2007, 9-10). In addition, through lamentation, a dialectical relationship is formed along with hope (Ferber and Schwebel, 2014, xvi). Thus, the need to create space for individuals and collectives to express grief and strengthen each other shows the meeting point of Christian teachings that recognize and appreciate the human capacity to grieve (Baumgartner et al., 1987:98) with how *andung* functions in the context of Batak Toba culture.

Christian teachings (especially those found in the books of Lamentations and Isaiah regarding grief and hope) have great potential to be integrated with the lyrics and meanings contained in *andung*. The function of mourning in the Old Testament is to voice suffering, express obedience, and surrender to the Divine through prayer, which is also contained in the practice of *andung* (Sihombing 2020, 175). Lamentations in the book of Isaiah are marked by the use of metaphors to describe the destruction of feelings. Still, at the same time, they also contain statements that hope that God will restore the suffering of God's people, individually and collectively, who once inhabited Jerusalem before it was destroyed (Heskett 2011, 154). The implementation of the above points of contact has the potential to create a bridge between cultural traditions and religious beliefs so that both can complement each other in expressing feelings of grief. Linking the practice of *andung* in the Batak Toba community with religion, specifically Christian teachings, promises the opportunity to open up a richer spiritual dimension. This allows individuals to not only feel grief emotionally but also link it to spiritual beliefs, the certainty of faith that provides hope and comfort, and the belief that the All-loving God is the caretaker of both the living and the deceased. Thus, *andung* is an expression of grief and a means to strengthen faith and spiritual connection with God.

In the modern context, where many cultural traditions face challenges from the influence of globalization and social change, linking *andung* with Christian teachings can help maintain the relevance of this tradition. Communities who may feel alienated from their cultural practices can find new meaning in *andung* that aligns with their religious beliefs. This can encourage every generation of both old and young Toba Batak to appreciate and preserve the *andung* tradition more because they see it as part of their spiritual identity (Simanjuntak 2024, 245).

Despite the influence of modernization that affects how *andung* is delivered and its lyrics, the core of the *andung* tradition as a means of expressing sadness in the public sphere remains intact. *Andung* encapsulates the human side since ancient times, namely crying and shedding tears. Crying has evolved as a mechanism to strengthen social bonds and increase the chances of survival. In addition, crying is a sign of the ability to feel empathy and respond to the suffering of others (Vingerhoets, 2013:257). This fact shows that despite changes in practice and form, the essence of *andung* as a means of expressing humanity always remains relevant and essential in the Batak Toba community.

By finding spiritual meaning in the practice of *andung*, the Batak Toba community can strengthen the sustainability of this tradition. This helps keep the practice of *andung* alive and provides a broader context for the next generation of Batak Toba to understand and appreciate their cultural heritage. When tradition

is integrated with religious values, the Batak Toba community can feel more connected to both aspects, thus creating a stronger sense of identity.

5. Conclusion

Andung is a rich and meaningful tradition within the Batak Toba community, embodying expressions of grief and respect. Although it faces challenges due to modernization, andung remains relevant in cultural and social contexts. This study illustrates that andung is an artistic practice and an art form that reflects the values and identity of the Batak Toba people. By enhancing our understanding of andung, we hope to ensure that this tradition is preserved and appreciated by future generations.

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