

**THE SHIFTING FUNCTION OF ABDUL MULUK'S TRADITIONAL  
THEATER: FOLK PERFORMANCE TO AN EXCLUSIVE  
PERFORMANCE**

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**ABSTRAK**

*Perkembangan zaman membuat keberlangsungan teater tradisi Abdul Muluk di Kabupaten Muaro Jambi, mengalami pergeseran. Pergeseran pola konsumsi seni mengakibatkan terjadinya pergeseran fungsi teater tradisi Abdul Muluk dari hiburan rakyat ke tontonan eksklusif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor penyebab dan dampak dari pergeseran fungsi teater tradisi Abdul Muluk di Desa Muaro Jambi, Kabupaten Muaro Jambi, Provinsi Jambi. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan sosiologi seni berdasarkan teori produksi sosial seni Janet Wolff. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan studi kepustakaan, observasi, wawancara dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pergeseran ini terjadi akibat faktor internal, seperti kurangnya pengelolaan pada kelompok teater serta minimnya regenerasi. Sementara, faktor eksternal meliputi perubahan selera masyarakat, masuknya hiburan modern, dan melemahnya dukungan institusional serta patronasi. Pergeseran ini berdampak pada berbagai aspek, termasuk durasi pertunjukan, perubahan cerita, yang paling menonjol aksesibilitas yang kini terbatas. Studi ini memberikan wawasan mengenai bagaimana seni tradisi beradaptasi di era globalisasi, serta menyoroti pentingnya dukungan pihak lain.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Pergeseran Fungsi, Teater Abdul Muluk, Hiburan Rakyat, Tontonan Eksklusif, Janet Wolff*

**ABSTRACT**

The development of the times made the continuity of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater in Muaro Jambi Regency experience a shift. The shift in art consumption patterns resulted in a shift in the function of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater from folk entertainment to exclusive spectacle. This study aims to analyze the factors causing and the impact of the shift in the function of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater in Muaro Jambi Village, Muaro Jambi Regency, Jambi Province. The research method used is a qualitative method with an art sociology approach based on Janet Wolff's

social production theory of art. Data collection techniques used literature study, observation, interviews and documentation. The results showed that this shift occurred due to internal factors, such as the lack of management in theater groups and the lack of regeneration. Meanwhile, external factors include changes in public tastes, the influx of modern entertainment, and the weakening of institutional support and patronage. This shift has had an impact on various aspects, including the duration of performances, changes in stories, and most prominently accessibility, which is now limited. This study provides insights into how traditional arts are adapting to globalization and highlights the importance of support from others.

**Keywords:** *Function Shift, Abdul Muluk Theater, Folk Performance, Exclusive Performance, Janet Wolff*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Abdul Muluk is one of the traditional theaters that developed in Muaro Jambi Regency, Jambi Province. It is called traditional theater because it has the style and cultural elements of a particular region, and performances are formed by the habits of the community that are carried out continuously so that they are embedded in local culture (Juliastuty, 2014:38; Lase et al., 2021). Local culture in Abdul Muluk's traditional theater gives it a free character, without being bound by rigid performance rules, spontaneous and improvisational (Sahrul N, 2015:3). Improvisation is an important factor in the creation of theatre, part of experimentation and exploration; formally, improvisation as an acting technique; acting is understood as being oneself, not pretending to be someone else on stage with the aim of discovering and expressing emotions from within, which is often achieved through improvisation (Szuster, 2019:376-378). This condition allows actors to act freely in response to dialog by other characters, considering the context of the dialog and the conditions of the audience. In this

case, actors express themselves and develop an awareness of themselves and others based on the current situation (Romanelli et al., 2017:19).

Abdul Muluk is not just a traditional theater, but a legacy that lives and dies repeatedly. As a traditional theater, it cannot be separated from its audience (Huang et al., 2022:200). The audience is an essential element of theater. The process of spreading Abdul Muluk was carried out orally in the 1930s-1931s in Muaro Jambi Regency (Mulyani et al., 2020). In line with Wati's opinion about the spread of a culture by oral means is the function of tradition itself (Wati, 2023). Tradition in Greek times was theater used to honor their gods (Asante, 2016:14). The activity was passed down from generation to generation by the ancestors and preserved by the community (Kora & Daryusti, 2024:64). In addition, its existence had experienced a heyday in 1968-1970, but it was eroded by the times, so it experienced suspended animation in 1971-1982.

Along with the times, Abdul Muluk traditional theater is difficult to survive during its community, but the existence

of Abdul Muluk traditional theater groups can still be found in Muaro Jambi Regency, Jambi Province. This is influenced by several factors, such as the lack of performance space, the influx of popular arts that are more attractive to the public and the lack of interest from young people in the neighborhood who want to continue it. Therefore, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater will be damaged and destroyed if there are no heirs who perform it, staging it because only by practicing it will the tradition continue to live to this day (Simatupang, 2013: 13).

In addition, some efforts will or have been made by theater groups inside or outside of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater group, to maintain its existence, but apparently this has resulted in a shift in function. For example, the Pancarona Theater group developed in Jambi City, Jambi Province. This group is led by Bonarti Lubis. They adapted Abdul Muluk's traditional theater form into a more modern one with a shorter duration. In the original version, the old people said the show could last all night. Meanwhile, Pancarona presents a more contemporary performance, which is said not to lose its traditional essence. The show is staged at Jambi Cultural Park, with ticket rates that are considered less affordable for ordinary people, let alone students, thus limiting its accessibility.

Meanwhile, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater group in Muaro Jambi Regency currently only performs when there is an invitation, such as from the government, art festivals, or certain art

events for a relatively high fee. Unlike in the past, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater as entertainment is performed at night to entertain and overcome the boredom of farmers because they work all day in the fields. Of course, this can be enjoyed for free by the wider community because it is performed in an open space without charge. In the past, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater was often performed at celebrations, but it is very rare that anyone even wants to invite them anymore. This is especially true with the current trend of modern weddings. This can be referred to as a social change in society that also affects the function of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater in the community. This change reflects a shift in the function of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater from entertainment that is inclusive and accessible to all, to a more exclusive performance.

The phenomenon of the shift in the function of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater cannot be separated from the social, economic and cultural conditions that shape art practices in society. In the past, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater relied on spontaneity and improvisation by actors to make performances more interesting, but in recent decades, this has begun to erode because the performance format is exclusive. Today, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater performances are mostly performed at official events that limit public access and eliminate the element of public participation that characterized the theater in the past. This shift also has an impact on the pattern of art consumption and reflects the changing

values in society. Whereas Abdul Muluk's traditional theater used to function as a medium of communication and collective expression, it has now been positioned as a commodity controlled by cultural institutions and market mechanisms. In the context of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater, the exclusivity of performances reflects the dominance of certain groups in the management of art, which implicitly narrows the space for cultural expression of local communities.

The interesting thing about the shift in function in Abdul Muluk's traditional theater lies in the process of transformation. Instead of becoming extinct, the theater underwent a form of adaptation that changed its essence. This shows that works of art such as theater as social products do not occur separately from the surrounding environment but are influenced by the social conditions that exist in society. Therefore, the main problem in this research is how and why there is a shift in the function of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater from folk performance to exclusive performance. Of course, external factors such as globalization, the rise of modern entertainment, and changes in cultural consumption patterns also influence the exclusivity of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater.

The urgency of the research lies in understanding how change occurs in traditional performing arts, and how it impacts on the sustainability of artworks as social products in society. Without an in-depth understanding of these shifts, Abdul Muluk will not only lose its social

function but also become endangered as regeneration and audiences dwindle. In this case, Abdul Muluk's shift to traditional theater shows how the market and more selective cultural policies are increasingly binding art, which was originally art as a medium of freedom of expression. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the factors causing the shift in the function of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater from folk performance to exclusive performance.

In this study, a sociological approach is important to understand how artworks are produced, distributed and consumed by society. Therefore, the theory used to analyze this research is the theory of social production of art originated by Janet Wolff (1981). Wolff does not set limits to determine which artworks can and cannot be studied, because this theory does not focus on one artwork, but in general (Windayanto & Santoso, 2024: 62-63). So, Wolff's theory can be applied in analyzing the shift in function that occurred in Abdul Muluk's traditional theater, but what must be understood is that this theory views works of art as social products.

Wolff also opposes the romantic idea that art is the result of individual creativity, but art is a complexly constructed social product (Wolff, 1981:1). In line with Windayanto & Santoso's perspective, artworks are not created out of thin air but are conditioned by various aspects of social production in the social structure of society (Windayanto & Santoso, 2024: 55-63). Social production in artworks is the result of social processes involving

institutions, economics, and other cultural factors. Wolff said that artists in the pre-modern period were very limited by social, political and financial pressures to work, so they ended up following instructions from customers (Wolff, 1981:27). This statement implicitly states that art does not stand alone and rejects art as a medium of individual expression by artists.

According to Wolff, in the mid-18th century, the decline of the patronage system resulted in artists' lives becoming more uncertain and subject to market relations. Increasingly, publishers and booksellers took over as facilitators for writers, and patrons of the arts, as well as the leading role of the academy, were replaced by a system of critic-dealers. In other words, people and institutions that were essentially mediators took a more important place in the matter of artists' economic survival (Wolff, 1981:44).

Thus, Abdul Muluk's shift to traditional theatre is more recognized when performing on a more formal stage, with institutional support they will be paid, which ultimately reduces accessibility for the wider community to watch the performance. Abdul Muluk's theater was originally a folk performance played in the middle of an open field that could be watched by anyone. Then it changed over time, turning into an exclusive performance that showed how economics and culture began to control who could enjoy the arts. Later, Wolff said that economics becomes a basic consideration relevant to the social production of art; what is

produced and performed and received by the audience is often determined by economic facts (Wolff, 1981:46). With the consideration of economic facts in the practice of performing arts, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater experienced a shift in function. At present, the shift of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater, which was previously the entertainment of the people, has shifted to exclusive performance because it has focused on economic benefits.

In establishing the "great tradition" of literature or painting, the role of publishers, critics, gallery owners, museum curators and journal editors cannot be overestimated (Wolff, 1981:45).

This statement states that the role of various parties is very important and cannot be underestimated. Literature and art do not only develop because of the writers or artists, but also because of other parties. In this case, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater is no longer performed for free, meaning that it undergoes a process of exclusivity controlled by other parties.

Various scholars have researched Abdul Muluk's traditional theater. These studies can be grouped into two categories. First, from the aspect of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater Darius, 2019; Handayani, 2017; Bahar, 2022; Notosutanto et al., 2023; Lubis, 2023; Ilham et al., 2023; Suboh, 2023; Nandang Sunandar & Bustomi, 2023) second, from the aspect of function shift (Lase dkk., 2021; Sukma, 2020), and third from the aspect of the influence of globalization on performing arts (Hariyono, 2016).



Thus, previous research encouraged researchers to look at the shifts that occurred in the Abdul Muluk traditional theater in Muaro Jambi Regency.

This research has fundamental differences compared to previous research on the Abdul Muluk traditional theater. If previous research such as focusing on the development of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater in Muaro Jambi Regency; how the form of revitalization carried out on Abdul Muluk's traditional theater; analysis of the dramatic structure; the death of the artist and the influence of globalization has an impact on the development of traditional arts in Indonesia. Meanwhile, this research focuses more on the shift in function that occurs, from folk performance to exclusive performance that can only be watched by certain circles.

This research not only describes the shift that occurred in Abdul Muluk's traditional theater in the historical trajectory but also analyzes how the shift occurred by looking at the social, economic and cultural factors that resulted in the shift. The shift in the role of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater, which used to be just folk performance, became exclusive performance controlled by market mechanisms. Another major difference is the theoretical approach used. This research uses a sociological approach with Janet Wolff's theory of social production of art. Wolff emphasizes that artworks are not only an individual expression of the artist but are also influenced by the economy and cultural institutions.

Thus, this research not only offers a new study of the shifting function of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater but also provides an in-depth understanding of how traditional arts experience shifts during social and economic dynamics. Focusing on the shift from folk performance to exclusive performance is an original aspect that distinguishes it from previous research.

The method used in this research is qualitative method. With qualitative methods, researchers can see phenomena more broadly and deeply according to what happens and develops in society (Sugiyono, 2013:206). The research uses primary data and secondary data. Primary data is data obtained from interviews with the community, local artists, and traditional speakers related to Abdul Muluk's theater. While secondary data is data obtained from, writings, and previous research results. Data collection techniques were carried out through literature study, observation, interviews and documentation (Creswell, 2019).

Literature study is analyzing previous research literature on Abdul Muluk's traditional theater. Observation is done to observe objects and obtain data and facts (Sugiyono, 2013:226). Observations are made frankly to the data source. Then structured interviews, by preparing questions that have been prepared by researchers. The sources in the study consisted of Oky Akbar, a traditional theater academic who is currently making a dissertation on the Abdul Muluk traditional theater, Nukman as the Chairperson of the Oral

Tradition Association in Jambi Province, Lazuardy Aditya Marga as the Abdul Muluk traditional theater actor as well as the grandson of the Village Head, Fargawati as a theater actor, Yakub and Sambawi as the surviving Abdul Muluk Traditional Theater Performers, and Budiman as a theater actor as well as the head of the Abdul Muluk traditional theater group.

The research process began with an observation of the theater community AiR Jambi, which initiated the Dul Muluk Festival. This festival was the starting point for the rediscovery of the two surviving Abdul Muluk traditional theater groups in Muaro Jambi Regency, namely the Mekar Kembali group from Sembubuk Village and Sereh Serai Serumpun in Muaro Jambi Village. After analyzing performance recordings and drafting interview questions, researchers met directly with the head of Teater AiR Jambi and the head of the Dul Muluk Festival to understand the dynamics of the performance and the challenges in revitalizing this theatre.

Direct observation was conducted in Sembubuk Village and Muaro Jambi Village, by interviewing the oldest generation of theater actors. The results of the observations showed that the Abdul Muluk traditional theater group no longer holds open performances as in the past and only performs if there are orders or invitations. This indicates a shift in traditional theater. In comparison, researchers watched a performance of So Balik Duo by the Abdul Muluk Reborn group at the Jambi

Cultural Park Building, showing changes in the form of performances with a more modern concept, shorter duration, more dramatic and contemporary stories, and the involvement of female players. These findings confirm that there has been a shift in the function and structure of the performance. The absence of open performance activities by traditional theater groups, as well as the emergence of other versions by paying to watch performances, reinforces that Abdul Muluk's traditional theater has lost its original role as folk performance.

This research uses Miles and Huberman Model data analysis techniques. Miles and Huberman said that qualitative data analysis is carried out continuously until the data is complete and saturated (Sugiyono, 2013:246). The data analysis technique is data reduction, all data obtained from observations, interviews, literature studies are sorted based on their relevance to the research focus. After being reduced is the presentation of data in descriptive narrative form. The results of observations in the field show that the Abdul Muluk traditional theater group in Muaro Jambi Regency no longer holds open performances but is held when there are orders or invitations. On the other hand, the Abdul Muluk Reborn performance was found to have changed the form of the performance. Data is presented by linking empirical findings in the field. Then present the data by interpreting and analyzing the data based on empirical and data findings (Yin, 2011:220). The data is presented by analyzing it further to understand how

the shift in function and the change in performance form occurred. This analysis uses Janet Wolff's theoretical approach.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Dynamics of The Development of Abdul Muluk Traditional Theater**

Abdul Muluk traditional theater was originally a poem written by Raja Ali Haji around 1845. Then, Abdul Muluk's poem developed in Jambi around the 19th century which was brought by traders from Malaysia. Initially, the poem was in the form of a script written in Arabic (Jawi). Then it developed into a performance. According to Oktovianny, based on history, the poem Abdul Muluk or Dul Muluk was first brought by Wan Bakar. Wan Bakar was an Arab trader who later stopped in Southern Sumatra. According to Sham (1993: 459-728) that Sultan Abdul Muluk's poem consists of 1818 stanzas (Nadya, 2017:177).

Administratively, Jambi Province used to be part of Southern Sumatra. Based on what is written on the South Sumatra Province website, on September 12, 1950, the province of South Sumatra included Jambi, Bengkulu, Lampung, and Bangka Belitung Islands. Then, on January 6, 1957, it was designated as the anniversary of Jambi province as stated in the Djambi Province Regional Regulation No. 1 of 1970. Therefore, it is not surprising that Abdul Muluk traditional theater also exists in Jambi and in several other Malay regions such as Palembang and Riau.

The development of Abdul Muluk traditional theater in Muaro Jambi

Regency, Jambi Province, is spread orally (Mulyani dkk., 2020). Oral means spoken, performed through a combination of various qualities of the human voice, for example, vowels and consonants, high and low voices, long and short voices, pauses, pressure, sound color, and so on (Simatupang, 2013:26). In 1965, there were developments in terms of presentation. Initially, poetry was only recited, then it developed into a play performance or called theater. From 1968 to 1970 was the heyday of Abdul Muluk's poetry. However, it experienced a state of suspended animation in 1971-1982. Then, it was revitalized in 2021 by the Art in Revolt (AiR) Theater Community in Jambi. The AiR Theater Community, in the Cultural Facilities program held by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology. This revitalization succeeded in finding two Abdul Muluk traditional theatre groups that still exist in Muaro Jambi Regency. These groups are the Sereh Serai Serumpun Group and the Mekar Kembali Group.

Both Abdul Muluk's traditional theatre groups, before and after revitalization, are no longer actively performing. They only existed formally, if the government or certain groups wanted to watch Abdul Muluk's traditional theater performances, they had to book them in advance, at least two months before the performance. This already shows a form of shift in the function of Abdul Muluk's theater, which turned out to be unavoidable. This shift indicates changes in social and economic structures that affect its existence. This



phenomenon is in line with Wolff's view, which states that art is always influenced by the surrounding social, economic and cultural conditions.

### **The Shifting Function of Abdul Muluk's Traditional Theater from Janet Wolff's Perspective**

The shift in the function of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater from folk performance to exclusive performance is a phenomenon that cannot be separated from the social, economic and cultural conditions in the community. In Janet Wolff's perspective, art is not an entity that can stand alone, but art is a social product that is constructed by various external factors. These external factors refer to economic conditions, social structures, institutions, and the times that shape how art is produced, distributed, and consumed by society. Wolff asserts that art production is not only determined by the creativity of individual artists, but also by the social system that regulates it (Wolff, 1981). This means that the production of art, in this case Abdul Muluk's traditional theater, is not only determined by the creativity of artists or groups, but also by the social dynamics that shape, control, change, and even threaten its sustainability.

In the past, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater served as folk performance that strengthened social bonds among the community. Today, the rise of more practical and accessible modern entertainment has changed the way people consume art. This has had an impact on Abdul Muluk's traditional

theater, which has lost its audience and had to adapt to a more formal and economically profit-oriented format. Abdul Muluk's traditional theater not only affected the loss of audiences but also experienced a shift in the pattern of art consumption that had an impact on the function of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater today. Through Wolff's perspective, this shift is also influenced by institutional and patronage factors, and socio-economic factors.

### **Institutional and Patronage Factors**

In the past, Abdul Muluk's traditional theatre was performed in open spaces, such as fields, and was organized voluntarily without charge. Mulyani explains that this theater serves as entertainment for the local community to overcome boredom after working in gardens, rice fields or fields all day; it is also a means to establish friendship and build communication between residents (Mulyani dkk., 2020:83-84). Furthermore, Budiman said that Abdul Muluk's traditional theater is often performed in an open field (interview 2024). The public can watch the performance for free, and the presence of the audience is very important in the performance. In addition, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater is also part of celebratory events, such as weddings.

Through Wolff's perspective, social institutions play an important role in how art is produced and distributed. Art cannot be separated from the social structures that govern it, including the institutions and patronage systems that

support its survival. In the past, the government played an important role in supporting the survival of traditional theater groups, which should continue to this day. Traditional theater groups, such as Abdul Muluk's traditional theater, were given performance venues and financial assistance to facilitate performance needs. For example, they were invited to perform at the Jambi Province language office in 2025 (Budiman, interview November 2024) or financed by the village head (Yakub, interview January 13, 2024). This support at the time enabled Abdul's traditional theater to survive in the community.

Then, over time, the government's attention to Abdul Muluk's traditional theater diminished. Not only financial support, but even invitations to official events were rare, so performance space also began to be limited. This is in line with what Wolff said about the patronage system in art. According to him, in the feudal and classical eras, art relied heavily on patronage, where artists were supported by certain rulers or institutions. Since the 18th century, the patronage system weakened and made artists' lives uncertain and turned to submitting to market tastes to survive (Wolff, 1981:44). The weakening of the patronage system caused traditional theater artist Abdul Muluk to seek his own alternatives to survive.

The existence of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater, which is in the same area as the Muaro Jambi Temple National Cultural Heritage Site (KCBN), should have a positive impact on the

arts. In 2024, Muaro Jambi Temple held the International Borobudur Writers & Cultural Festival in collaboration with the Region V Cultural Center. This activity was attended by more than 90 participants from all over Indonesia and invited speakers from various countries. At that time, the government preferred to show contemporary art rather than take advantage of the opportunity to introduce the traditional art of Abdul Muluk theater that had long developed in the area. This should have been a moment to introduce the arts of Muaro Jambi Regency and give space to the groups that developed around Muaro Jambi Temple (Borju, interview on November 22, 2024). As stated by Wolff, social institutions have a role in determining who becomes an artist and how artworks are performed and accessible to the public (Wolff, 1981:40).

This condition shows that the institutions that used to be the main support for the sustainability of the arts are now weakening, so the patronage system is no longer reliable. With the lack of support, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater has shifted its function from a social performance to a more formal and economically oriented one, to survive in an increasingly competitive art ecosystem. This shows that shifts in art institutions and patronage have an impact on the way art is produced, performed and consumed by society.

### **Social and Economic Factors**

Social and economic changes in society have also contributed to Abdul Muluk's shift in the function

of traditional theater. People are now more focused on their work, so they don't have time to enjoy entertainment that requires social engagement such as theater. Especially Abdul Muluk's traditional theater, which takes a long duration. Many people and the younger generation prefer entertainment that can be enjoyed at home without leaving their daily activities. Nowadays, even housewives prefer to watch Indian serials on television or social media while cooking or doing housework. In addition, in the context of weddings and other artistic events, the choice of entertainment in the community is growing and the prices vary. In the past, the only entertainment, especially in Muaro Jambi Regency, was Abdul Muluk's traditional theater, unlike today. Today, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater has been sidelined and replaced by modern and popular arts such as organ, *Nge band*, orchestra, and others. Especially with the rise of modern wedding trends, which tend to prefer pop music or orchestral entertainment. Even if they have more funds, they prefer to bring in famous capital artists.

In addition, management is less than optimal by the Mekar Kembali group and the Sereh Serai Serumpun group. The management in question is the absence of good fund management. When they get paid for the previous performance, they do not set it aside for the next performance. This causes the group to rely on institutions and patronage, such as assistance or invitations from the government, or interested individuals. This results in the absence of further

performance activities, which can be enjoyed by the wider community. Worse, there is no transparency of the honorarium given to Abdul Muluk's traditional theater performers by the group leader, when they get a call or funds from the government. Group leaders are always money-oriented (Adit, interview January 13, 2023). This happened to the Mekar Kembali group, resulting in a decline in the enthusiasm of first-generation players to return to playing Abdul Muluk's traditional theater. Many first-generation or older players have old wounds from this incident.

In addition to being theater performers, they are agrarian people who earn a living in the agricultural and plantation sectors, so they also must be more realistic about prioritizing their work. Most of them are farmers or odd workers who must divide their time between working and practicing theater. In the past, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater was seen as collective entertainment that prioritized togetherness. Today, times are changing, and needs are increasing. Playing Abdul Muluk's traditional theater, if it is done for free, they do not get income, so they are not active in the group (Oky, interview November 11, 2023). This is inversely proportional to conditions in the past, when people supported Abdul Muluk's traditional theater as part of their social life.

Therefore, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater also experienced a shift due to increasingly pressing economic factors. According to Wolff, art production is always influenced by economic factors,

where changes in the economic system can significantly alter the development of art (Wolff, 1981:46). Abdul Muluk's traditional theater performers are mostly farmers and agrarian workers. When economic demands increase, many of them prefer to focus on work or be pay-oriented if asked to perform. In addition, the influx of globalization, followed by the changing times that are increasingly advanced and modern, has an impact on traditional entertainment (Hariyono, 2016:88-89). As is the case, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater is increasingly abandoned and even unknown by the public because art is considered old-fashioned and no longer suits the tastes of today's modern society.

In the modern era, people tend to prefer entertainment that is fast and easily accessible. Especially nowadays, the influence of technology is everywhere. For example, entertainment that can be watched at home such as movies, short videos, which are more in demand. Meanwhile, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater, although naturally the duration has been shortened, the show still takes one to two hours. The performance form is more conventional, making it less attractive to the younger generation. The presence of performing arts genres in today's times has resulted in a lack of interest even by the community that owns them (Bahar, 2022). This shift shows that without strong economic support, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater is difficult to survive and compete with modern entertainment that is more practical and economical.

Moreover, there is no regeneration to continue Abdul Muluk's traditional theater. There are some young people or local youth who want to learn, but they are not consistent (Yakub, interview on January 13, 2024). This inconsistency causes none of the local youth, who really understand how to play Abdul Muluk theater according to the original tradition. This is what affects Abdul Muluk's traditional theater performances today, where many scenes are missed and the duration is cut because it is still played by elderly players, who are no longer able to play long on stage. In addition, their memory is no longer in good condition.

“Datuk is very happy to teach young people because Datuk is old, so he can no longer stay up late, after praying Isha he goes straight to bed” (Yakub, interview on January 13, 2024).

Then, the story is just that there is no innovation so that it is increasingly not in demand by the community. Both the Mekar Kembali group and the Sereh Serai Serumpun group tend to maintain the old story of Abdul Muluk. The old story tells of a King named Abdul Muluk who wanted to marry the daughter of the King next door named Siti Rafeah. After that, Abdul Muluk proposed to Siti Rafeah, the proposal was accepted and a hantaran procession scene was shown according to the traditions of the people of Muaro Jambi Regency. Then the closing story, the wedding party of Abdul Muluk and Siti Rafeah. Although the Sereh Serai Serumpun group included some contemporary elements such as current

jokes such as mentioning the issue of coal in Jambi, during the performance at the Dul Muluk Festival in 2021, the story is still the same. The story is only limited to that, due to the age factor of the first generation of traditional theater actors, who no longer remember the full story. If you look at the DulMuluk theater in South Sumatra, they are able to maintain their existence in the community, because the DulMuluk theater in Palembang no longer tells the story of Abdul Muluk, but the story is adjusted to current conditions and trends, they only maintain the role (Oky, November 11, 2023).

### **The Impact of The Shift in Function of Abdul Muluk's Traditional Theater**

According to Wolff, artists or art groups are no longer completely independent in determining the form and substance of their works, but artworks must be produced with the market in mind, and publishers determine what kind of works are distributed (Wolff, 1981:34). Thus, there is a shift in accessibility to watching performances. In the past, performances were open and free, but now they are more exclusive. The exclusivity of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater can be seen in the ticketing system and the shift in performance form that has occurred.

The impact of the shift in the function of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater from folk performance to an exclusive spectacle can also be seen from various aspects. This aspect is seen from the Abdul Muluk traditional theater performance at the Dul Muluk Festival

in 2021, with the Abdul Muluk Reborn performance at Taman Budaya Jambi in 2024. The following is the form of the shift that occurred:

#### **a. Shifts in the story**

One of the most striking shifts in Abdul Muluk's traditional theater is the story that is presented. In Abdul Muluk's traditional theater, he tells the story of King Hamisyah, the leader of the Bari-Bari kingdom, who had a son named Abdul Muluk. After King Hamisyah died, Abdul Muluk became his successor, who is now called King Abdul Muluk. King Abdul Muluk got married and held his wedding party, now he had two wives named Siti Rafeah and Siti Rahma. Then, the King of Hindustan, the leader of the opposite kingdom, took a fancy to King Abdul Muluk's wife. There was a war, and the story ended. That is the story performed by the Abdul Muluk traditional theater group, at the 2021 Dul Muluk Festival. This performance takes one to two hours.

Meanwhile, the story displayed by Abdul Muluk Reborn is different, even though the title alone is *So Balik Duo*. *So Balik Duo* tells the story of a king's daughter named Melati, who is continuing her education abroad. There, Melati already has a lover named Tantan, while in her kingdom, she has been matched with the son of the royal advisor by her father Abdul Muluk. When Melati returned to her kingdom, they held a proposal ceremony according to Jambi customs such as bringing betel nut and rings by the male side. After the proposal



was made, it turned out that Tantan, Melati's lover, found out about it. Tantan and Melati finally quarreled, and they both decided to elope. Their conversation is overheard by Khadam. Khadam is a character who tells stories and makes jokes. After he learned that Melati had eloped with her lover, he announced it to the public and was heard by the king. This shocked the kingdom because Melati broke the marriage custom and she had to *So Balik Duo*, which means returning the ring and all the goods given by the male party as double. However, the king did not accept his son doing that, so he asked Tantan and the man of his choice to fight. Whoever won the fight would marry his daughter Melati. The fight was fought and both ended up dead.

This shift reflects how traditional stories can be adapted to the needs and interests of today's audiences who tend to favor romance and short stories. However, this shift in storytelling has led to the loss of some of the traditional aspects and original values of Abdul Muluk's theater.

#### b. Shift in players

Abdul Muluk's traditional theater is all male. This is due to the culture of the ancients who viewed women as taboo to play theater. In the past, women were not allowed to go out at night, while theater rehearsals were often held at night, making it impossible for women to play in Abdul Muluk's traditional theater (Sambawi, interview on 10 November 2024).



**Picture 1:** The entire cast of Abdul Muluk's Sereh Serai Serumpun Tradition Theater Group in 2015  
(Source: Budiman, 2015)



**Picture 2 :** Female Characters Played by Men (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baUb2o3Vmeo>, 2021)

It can be seen in the picture above, that in the past, all of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater performers were male. However, nowadays there has been a shift, that women can play theater as shown below.

#### c. Shift in duration

The duration of the performance is one of the most obvious aspects that has changed. In the past, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater could last all night, from night to morning, because the story



**Picture 3:** The traditional *hantaran* scene when proposing to Melati  
In the play Abdul Muluk Reborn  
(Source: Iis Wulandari, 2024)

was long and had many acts. Changes began to appear in Abdul Muluk's traditional theater performances at the 2021 Dul Muluk Festival. The duration of the show has changed to one to two hours. Then, it got shorter in Abdul Muluk Reborn's show entitled *So Balik Duo*. This shift occurred due to changes in society, preferring performances that are short and do not take much time. In addition, the short duration is because it adapts to the needs of the audience. This reduction in duration also causes a loss of knowledge about the original Abdul Muluk traditional theater story. In the future, this will be a mistake and a problem if it is rewritten.

### **Exclusive Performance**

According to Guy Debord in Andreas, spectacles are not just a show or performance, but a way to shape the mindset of society (Andreas, 2020). While exclusive is when talent already exists and they are "bought" (Savanevičienė & Vilčiauskaitė, 2017:243). An exclusive spectacle is a performance that not only

functions as entertainment but also has a role in shaping the mindset of society, where only certain individuals can participate because the performance has been "bought" by a certain party. Abdul Muluk's traditional theater, which used to be entertainment enjoyed by anyone, is now only performed at certain events, meaning that only certain people can watch. In addition, the high cost of tickets makes this theater less affordable, especially for school children. For example, the ticket for Abdul Muluk Reborn theater performance is Rp 25,000 per viewing.

Then, to invite Abdul Muluk's traditional theater performances in their original form, considerable financial preparation is needed. Based on an interview with the head of the Sereh Serai Serumpun group, the minimum cost that must be provided is IDR 10 million. This covers the actors' honorarium and the rehearsal process. Then, in an interview with the head of Teater AiR who had organized the Dul Muluk Festival, they provided funds of Rp15 million per group. This is a high amount, considering that this theater used to be performed for free in the open field as folk performance. This high cost is also one of the reasons why Abdul Muluk's traditional theater performances are now more often performed at official events or waiting for invitations. This further emphasizes the shift of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater from folk performance to an exclusive spectacle that can only be accessed by certain circles. This shift not only reflects a change in the function

of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater but also illustrates how this tradition is becoming detached from its community.

If analyzed further, using the concepts of territorialization and deterritorialization, Gilles Deleuz and Felix Guattari's thoughts. In territorialization, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater is an art that is an integral part of the community. This theater performance is not only as folk performance, but represents local culture, which can be seen from elements in the performance such as Jambi language dialogue. Meanwhile, there is a shift in function that gives rise to new cultural meanings, displayed locally because its territorial existence cannot survive, which is called deterritorialization (Wulandari & Kartika, 2020:169).

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on research that has been conducted on the shifting functions of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater in Muaro Jambi Regency, this performing art has experienced significant changes in the aspects of function, accessibility, and patterns of public consumption of traditional arts. This shift was influenced by various patronage, economic, and globalization factors that made a shift from inclusive folk performance to exclusive spectacle.

Historically, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater developed from poetry, then transformed into theater performances. Initially, these performances were organized for free in open spaces and became entertainment for the local

community. Over time, there has been a shift in the pattern of production, distribution and consumption in the community. Abdul Muluk's traditional theater has been produced according to market needs because it is oriented towards economic profit, distributed in certain places, so that consumption power is limited and exclusive. This shift reflects that art is no longer a medium of expression for artists or culture but is also influenced by the surrounding social and economic structures.

The results of in-depth analysis with Janet Wolff's perspective, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater experienced a shift that was influenced by institutional and patronage factors, as well as the economy. Institutional factors show that the government and cultural institutions that previously supported the continuation of the theater are now paying less attention. As a result, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater groups must find alternative funding. Meanwhile, economic factors also affect the theater, with most of the performers coming from farmers and agrarian workers preferring to prioritize their work. In addition, changes in consumption patterns and globalization have caused the younger generation to prefer modern entertainment that is more practical and accessible.

The shift in the function of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater also occurs in the form of performance. Previously, the stories were based on Abdul Muluk's stories with long plots, but now the stories have adapted to the preferences of modern audiences who prefer short

and dramatic plots. The duration of the performance, which used to last all night, is now shortened to one to two hours. Then, in terms of accessibility, performances that were once free can now only be enjoyed by paying for tickets or through special orders.

In addition, the exclusivity of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater can be seen in the ticketing system and performance fees. The cost of a ticket for a performance at Taman Budaya Jambi with a duration of approximately one hour, reaches Rp25,000 per spectator, while to invite a performance in the traditional form requires a minimum fund of Rp10 million. This shows that Abdul Muluk's traditional theater can only be enjoyed at certain times and in certain segments. This condition makes Abdul Muluk's traditional theater further away from the roots of the community.

Thus, the shift in the function of Abdul Muluk's traditional theater is a consequence of broader social and economic changes. Abdul Muluk's traditional theater has been controlled by market mechanisms. This shows how traditional art survives and adapts in the modern era, despite changes to its essence and underlying values. Without serious efforts, Abdul Muluk's traditional theater risks losing its relevance amid the dynamics of modern society.

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