

Environmental Theatre in the Bakaba Performance of the Kacang Manoge Community, Pesisir Selatan, West Sumatra

Rina Sari^{a,1,*}, Hirwan Kuardhani^{a,2},

^a Theatre Study Program, Faculty of Performing Arts, Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta, Jalan Parangtritis Km 6.5, Sewon, Bantul, Yogyakarta 55188, Indonesia

¹ rinasarigl2@gmail.com*; ² hirwan.kuardhani@isi.ac.id;

ORCID: ¹ 0000-0000-0000-0000; ² 0009-0007-0496-9467

* Corresponding author

Article history: Received: 21 June 2024 | Revised: 21 October 2024 | Accepted: 1 November 2024 |
Published: 1 December 2024 |

Article type: Research Article

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33292/locus.v2i02.19>

ABSTRACT	KEYWORDS
Bakaba is a solo-narrator performance tradition of the southern coast of West Sumatra, in which a storyteller delivers a spoken and sung tale to the accompaniment of a three-stringed spike fiddle. Scholarship on the tradition has concentrated on its musical dimension, documenting the sung repertoire while leaving the theatrical organisation of the performance, and the mechanisms by which particular troupes remain in demand, largely unexamined. This article examines the form of one such performance and the conditions of its persistence. It analyses a five-hour staging of the tale Darito Anak Jo Minantu given by the Kacang Manoge Community at a wedding celebration in Nagari Sungai Tunu, Ranah Pesisir, on 1 June 2021, observed and recorded during fieldwork carried out between 28 May and 1 June 2021 and supplemented by interviews with five members of the troupe: its founder, its current leader, its narrator, a singer, and a fiddle player. Richard Schechner's axioms of environmental theatre supply the analytical frame, applied to a transcript of the performance and to the interview material. The performance realises four defining features of folk traditional theatre and follows a five-part dramatic structure marked by four named types of song, sustained throughout by improvisation operating at the level of dialogue and texture rather than of plot. Its persistence rests on continually new, personally sourced tales, the inscription of spectators into the narration, patterned improvisation, and a post-performance discussion that turns listeners into future patrons.	improvisation Minangkabau oral tradition pengkaba Rabab Pasisia sikambang  This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license.

How to cite: Sari, R. & Kuardhani, H. (2024). Environmental theatre in the Bakaba performance of the Kacang Manoge Community, Pesisir Selatan, West Sumatra. *Journal of Local Culture Studies*, 2(2), 138–155. <https://doi.org/10.33292/locus.v2i02.19>

INTRODUCTION

Bakaba is a spoken-narrative performance art that has developed along the southern coast of West Sumatra, where a considerable number of Bakaba groups remain active (Hartitom et al., 2019). It is a *tutur* (oral-narrative) theatre form of the Minangkabau, delivered by a single narrator known as a *pengkaba* (Hanani, 2011). As a performance it combines song, spoken narration, and instrumental accompaniment from instruments such as the *saluang* (bamboo flute) and *gendang* (drum), though the *rabab* (three-stringed spike fiddle) remains its indispensable accompanying instrument (Primadesi, 2013). The term Bakaba derives from *kaba*, itself rooted in the Arabic *khobar* ('news'), yet in performance *kaba* refers less to news than to a Minangkabau philosophy of storytelling: *kaba baiak dihimbauan, kaba buruak dihimbauan* ('good news is proclaimed, bad news is discarded') (Hadijah, 2019). Bakaba emerged alongside the *rabab*, whose Pesisir Selatan variant, Rabab Pasisia, became closely tied to Islamic proselytising and, later, to the region's encounters with Portuguese and Dutch colonial culture (Hajizar, 2019). While other oral traditions native to the Minangkabau – among them Ba-ilau, Salawaik Dulang, Sijobang, Baikayaik, Pantun Bagurau, and Simalin – have largely disappeared, Bakaba is still staged regularly in Pesisir Selatan, typically four to six times a week, and rarely performs to an empty house (Sunarti, 2021).

Existing scholarship on Bakaba falls into three groups, each of which has established a good deal and each of which stops short at the same point. The first and largest treats the tradition as music. It documents the *sikambang* (sung verse in *pantun* form) embedded within *kaba* narration through recordings and interviews (Hartitom et al., 2019), the wider history of *rabab* music on the Minangkabau coast (Hajizar, 2019), and the musical idiom of neighbouring coastal genres (Kurniawan et al., 2018). This work has produced a reliable account of what is played and sung, and of how the *rabab* reached the coast, but it treats the audience as a context for the music rather than as a component of the performance. A second group asks whether the tradition will survive, describing the continuing existence of Rabab Pasisia in a particular *nagari* (Muslina, 2015), diagnosing the genre as an endangered oral tradition with a narrow and ageing pool of performers (Rosa, 2019), and situating it among the coastal oral forms that have already gone silent (Sunarti, 2021). This work establishes that decline is regional and demographic, but it diagnoses the genre as a whole and does not ask why individual troupes within the same region fare so differently. A third group reads Minangkabau oral performance as moral pedagogy, showing how local verbal art carries customary instruction (Hanani, 2011), how the ensemble form Randai transmits local wisdom (Hadijah, 2019), and how such knowledge is preserved in oral transmission (Primadesi, 2013). Here the message is analysed closely and the machinery that delivers it much less so.

The theoretical apparatus this article uses has likewise been applied to Indonesian material without being brought to bear on Bakaba. Folklore scholarship divides Indonesian traditions into oral, partly-oral, and non-oral forms (Danandjaja, 1984), a classification since applied to performance traditions of exactly this kind (Simatupang, 2013); read through it, Bakaba is simultaneously all three, since the *kaba* narrative belongs to oral folklore through its use of *pantun* and folk verse, the performance as a whole belongs to partly-oral folklore as a people's theatre built around a narrator and a spoken dramatic text, and the *rabab* belongs to non-oral folklore as an artefact of local musical culture. Studies of traditional theatre in Indonesia have established the criteria by which a performance is recognised as such (Sumardjo, 1992; Bandem & Murgiyanto, 1996; Ahmad, 1999), and environmental theatre has been used to describe performances that dissolve the boundary between stage and spectator (Yudiaryani, 2015; Hubbell & Ryan, 2021). Neither body of theory has been tested against a coastal Minangkabau solo-narrator performance, and the pattern is not confined to Bakaba: across maritime Southeast Asia, sung and chanted storytelling forms are routinely catalogued for their

musicological or linguistic interest well before – if ever – their theatrical mechanics receive comparable attention.

The gap, then, is not an absence of publications on Bakaba but a deficiency in what they collectively explain. No study has described how a named *pengkaba* and a named community organise a Bakaba performance as theatre, and none has identified the mechanisms – beyond musical continuity – through which one troupe remains commercially and socially viable while others in the same regency decline. This article is the first to analyse a complete Bakaba performance as an environmental theatre event, tracing its dramatic structure, its patterns of improvisation, and its post-performance sociality as a single system of transactions. It therefore addresses two questions: what form does the Bakaba performance of the Kacang Manoge Community (KKM) take, and by what means does that performance continue to be sustained in Pesisir Selatan?

METHOD

The study was designed as a single-case ethnographic study of one performance and the community that produced it. The account below sets out the design, the site and participants, the collection techniques, the validation and analytical procedure, and the ethical basis and positionality on which the fieldwork rested.

Research Design and Approach

A qualitative descriptive design was adopted, since the object of study – a live, unscripted narration shaped moment to moment by audience response – is not reducible to counts or fixed categories without losing the spontaneity the study set out to describe. A comparative design across several troupes was considered and set aside: the mechanisms of interest operate within a single performance over five continuous hours, and observing several performances partially would have sacrificed exactly the sequential detail the research questions require.

Three bodies of theory were brought to bear, each at a different point in the analysis. Richard Schechner's account of environmental theatre supplies the overall frame. It understands a performance as a participatory, actively inhabited system of transactions among performers, spectators, and setting (Hubbell & Ryan, 2021), and is commonly summarised in six axioms: the theatrical event is a set of related transactions; all the space is used for performance and all the space is used for audience; the event may take place in a wholly transformed space or in a found space; focus is flexible and variable; all production elements speak their own language; and the text need be neither the starting point nor the goal of the production, there being possibly no text at all (Yudiaryani, 2015). Three of these bear directly on Bakaba and were used as coding categories: the first, because the *pengkaba*, the *rabab*, the *kaba*, and the audience form a set of mutually sustaining transactions; the second, because Bakaba spectators are never confined to a fixed seating area; and the sixth, because Bakaba rests on improvisation rather than on a memorised script. The framework was developed chiefly from American avant-garde practice of the 1960s and 1970s, and the study transposes it onto a much older Minangkabau oral tradition deliberately rather than treating it as self-evidently universal; the strain in that transposition is examined in the conclusion.

Second, the criteria by which Indonesian scholarship recognises folk traditional theatre (Sumardjo, 1992; Bandem & Murgiyanto, 1996; Ahmad, 1999) were used to test whether the performance belongs to that category at all. Third, Brander Matthews' five-stage model of dramatic action, as set out for Indonesian drama studies by Satoto (1993) and resting on Freytag's (1896) account of rising and falling action, was applied to the transcript only after the performance had been segmented, so that the stages were identified from the material rather than imposed on it in advance.

Site, Period, and Participants

Fieldwork was conducted in Nagari Sungai Tunu, in the subdistrict of Ranah Pesisir, Kabupaten Pesisir Selatan, West Sumatra, between 28 May and 1 June 2021. Earlier visits in that week were used to observe the *nagari*'s everyday setting, secure informants' consent, and conduct two interviews; the final visit combined direct observation of a complete performance with same-day interviews conducted after the performance had ended.

The Kacang Manoge Community was selected purposively, on the homogeneous variant of that strategy, in which the sample is drawn from within a single clearly bounded group rather than at random. It was chosen because it is a long-established Bakaba troupe in Pesisir Selatan with a continuous performance history since 2000 and an active booking schedule. The performance analysed – the tale Darito Anak Jo Minantu, staged at a wedding celebration on 1 June 2021 (Kacang Manoge Community, 2021) – was selected because it was the tenth and final staging of that particular tale within a month, after which the narrator Ril Kelana Asmara (RKA) moved on to a newly composed *kaba*; it therefore represents the tale at its most fully developed.

Five informants were interviewed, each selected for a distinct vantage point on the community's history and practice rather than for convenience, so that claims about that history could be checked across roles rather than resting on a single account. They are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Informants, roles, and interview dates

Name	Age	Role	Interview date
Jamaris	58	Founder of the Kacang Manoge Community	30 May 2021
Nofri	33	Current leader	1 June 2021
Ril Kelana Asmara	—	<i>Pengkaba</i> (narrator)	1 June 2021
Yanti	37	Singer and member	1 June 2021
Robi	27	<i>Rabab</i> player and member	1 June 2021

Source: fieldwork, Nagari Sungai Tunu, 30 May – 1 June 2021.

Data Collection

Three techniques were used. Direct observation covered the performance in full, from the *pengkaba*'s arrival and the preparation of the performance space through the closing *sikambang* and the *ota lamak* ('pleasant chat') that followed it, a span of roughly seven hours including the opening *Rabab Pasisia* music. Attention was directed at four recurring matters: the disposition of performers and spectators in the space, the sequence of sung and spoken units, the content and timing of audience interventions, and the narrator's response to them. The performance was recorded in audio and video and photographed with the consent of the performers and the host household, and the recording was transcribed in full in Minangkabau by the first author, with an English translation supplied alongside.

Semi-structured interviews, of between forty and ninety minutes, were conducted with the five informants in Table 1 in Minangkabau and Indonesian. The guide covered the community's founding and repertoire, the narrator's method of composing a *kaba*, the handling of audience interruption, the function of each type of *sikambang*, and the sources of the troupe's bookings. The three interviews conducted on 1 June took place once the performance and its *ota lamak* had concluded, so that questions could refer to specific moments from that evening while they remained fresh for both parties. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by the first author.

Documentary material supplied the demographic and economic description of the site: the regency statistical yearbooks for 2020 and 2021 (Badan Pusat Statistik Pesisir Selatan, 2020, 2021), together with published work on the history of Rabab Pasisia (Hajizar, 2019; Yelni, 2015) used to situate the informants' own historical accounts.

Data Validation and Analysis

Credibility was established by triangulation of two kinds. Source triangulation set the five informants' accounts against one another, so that no claim about the community's history, repertoire, or booking practice rests on a single testimony; where an account was offered by only one informant, or where it concerns troupes not observed directly, it is attributed to that informant in the text rather than reported as an established fact. Technique triangulation set what was observed in performance against what informants said about it and against the documentary record, which is how, for instance, the narrator's stated practice of varying a tale's resolution could be checked against the tale as actually delivered.

The analysis proceeded in five steps. First, the recording was transcribed and translated. Second, the transcript was segmented into alternating sung and spoken units, each timed and labelled by the type of *sikambang* or the narrative content it carried. Third, each segment was coded against the three Schechner axioms identified above and against the traditional-theatre criteria drawn from Sumardjo (1992), Bandem and Murgiyanto (1996), and Ahmad (1999), with the spatial disposition of spectators and the incidence of audience intervention recorded separately. Fourth, the segments were mapped onto the five stages of dramatic action, and the sung text corresponding to each stage extracted (Table 3). Fifth, every point at which an audience intervention altered the delivered text was isolated, grouped by the kind of operation the narrator performed on it, and reduced to the six recurring patterns set out in Table 4; each pattern was then put to the narrator in interview, so that the categories represent his practice as he describes it as well as the transcript as recorded.

Research Ethics and Positionality

No institutional review board with jurisdiction over this research exists at the authors' faculty. Consent was therefore secured directly and in advance. The leader of the Kacang Manoge Community and the host household were approached before the performance and gave permission for observation, audio and video recording, and photography; each of the five informants gave verbal informed consent to be interviewed, to be recorded, and to be identified by name, which is consistent with the community's own practice of public attribution for its performers and organisers. Spectators are not named, and the audience utterances reproduced in Table 4 are attributed by position in the gathering rather than by identity. Nothing in the material is restricted or sacred: Bakaba is performed publicly, and the *kaba* analysed here is the narrator's own composition rather than inherited material held in trust by a lineage.

The first author is Minangkabau and had prior social ties to Pesisir Selatan and to members of the community before the fieldwork began. That position eased access, made interviews in Minangkabau possible, and allowed the idiomatic and dialectal exchanges in Table 4 to be understood as they occurred. It also has limits, which are stated in the conclusion: familiarity shapes which questions seem worth asking, and a researcher without those ties might have pressed harder on the comparative claims the community makes about its neighbours.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Nagari Sungai Tunu and the Kacang Manoge Community

Pesisir Selatan is the most extensive regency in West Sumatra, stretching some 218 kilometres along the province's south-western coastline between the city of Padang and the border with

Bengkulu. In 2020 its population reached approximately 504,400, up 6.63 per cent on the previous count, with a sex ratio of roughly 95 men to every 100 women in Ranah Pesisir subdistrict (Badan Pusat Statistik Pesisir Selatan, 2020). Roughly 45 per cent of its land remains forested, and its fifteen subdistricts run the length of the coast between the Bukit Barisan range and the Indian Ocean. Most residents farm or fish; rice cultivation and coastal fishing dominate the local economy, with trade and artistic performance more often practised as supplementary than as primary occupations (Badan Pusat Statistik Pesisir Selatan, 2021; Sunarti, 2021).

Nagari Sungai Tunu, in Ranah Pesisir, is the home base of KKM. Some distance from the subdistrict capital, it remains comparatively sparsely settled: most houses are timber-built and spaced 100 to 500 metres apart rather than clustered, and a significant share of front yards double as small stalls selling coconut water, snacks, and daily provisions to visitors drawn to the *nagari*'s beaches, since tourism supplements farming and fishing income for many households (Nofri, personal communication, 1 June 2021). The detail matters for what follows. In a settlement of this kind a wedding such as the one KKM performed for on 1 June 2021 draws much of the *nagari* as both hosts and audience, and the intimate, unstructured viewing atmosphere described below is less a stylistic choice than a reflection of how the community already gathers for any shared occasion.

Minangkabau society, Nagari Sungai Tunu included, follows a matrilineal *adat* (customary law): descent and clan membership pass through the mother, and the two great clan lines, Piliang and Chaniago, branch into smaller *suku* (clans) such as Patopang, Jambak, and Sikumbang. Inheritance follows the same line, in part to keep ancestral land intact as a shared family resource, and women customarily reside in and control the *rumah gadang* (great house), while men traditionally reside in the *surau* (neighbourhood prayer house) or *marantau*, that is, migrate for work (Navis, 1984). Navis (1984) describes the arrangement as fundamentally egalitarian rather than a reversal of patriarchy: women hold property and a status no lower than men's, while men's standing rests not on ownership but on labour and mobility. That ideal is visible in the *nagari*'s economic life, where women farm, fish, trade, and climb coconut palms alongside men, and where women *rabab* performers are common, several returning home only at dawn after a performance just as their male counterparts do — in a *nagari* where the proverb restricting unmarried women from staying out late, *anak gadih pantang pulang laruik sanjo*, is not observed in practice (Jamaris, personal communication, 30 May 2021). The composition of the Bakaba audience, examined below, sits in some tension with this.

Kacang Manoge was founded on 2 February 2000 by Jamaris together with fellow *rabab* and Bakaba musicians in Nagari Sungai Tunu. Leadership passed to Jamaris's son Nofri and his peers in 2012, and the group has since released recordings and built a presence on social media (Jamaris, personal communication, 30 May 2021; Nofri, personal communication, 1 June 2021). Of its seven members — Ril Kelana Asmara, Nofri, Robi, Yanti, Ayu, Erel, and Eri Muliana — five typically perform at any one engagement, combining Rabab Pasisia musicians with the *pengkaba*.

From Inherited Repertoire to Personal *Kaba*: The Pirin Asmara Turn

The *rabab* reached Pesisir Selatan during the Dutch colonial period and was subsequently reworked by local musicians — around 1871, according to informants — into an instrument played resting on the leg rather than under the chin, becoming known as Rabab Pasisia. It is one of four regionally distinct *rabab* traditions recognised across Minangkabau: alongside Rabab Pasisia, Rosa (2019) identifies Rabab Pariaman, generally regarded as the oldest, Rabab Darek in the highland interior, and Rabab Badoi, each with its own home region, playing posture, and vocal style, such that a performance's regional origin is often audible before its content confirms it. The instrument's association with sung narration reaches back to the arrival of Islam on the west coast of Sumatra by way of Aceh in the seventeenth century, when

the term *rabab* itself entered Minangkabau usage from a Moroccan instrument name associated with Islamic proselytising (Hajizar, 2019). Bakaba as a distinct form of sung storytelling emerged alongside Rabab Pasisia around the 1920s, according to informants, initially retelling established Minangkabau folk tales such as Sabai Nan Aluih, Cindua Mato, and Malin Kundang.

A turning point came in 1967, when the *rabab* musician Pirin Asmara (1948–2004) began performing *kaba* drawn from his own life and from stories of regional kingdoms rather than only inherited folk tales – among them Sutan Palembang, Kaba Paruntuangan, and Kaba Puti Gondoriah (Yelni, 2015). Several *sikambang* still in use today, including Sikambang Mudiak Surantiah and Sikambang Data, are attributed to him (Yelni, 2015). The innovation was structural rather than merely thematic. By drawing on lived, verifiable experience rather than a fixed repertoire, Pirin Asmara made each new *kaba* a one-time composition rather than a variant retelling, shifting the *pengkaba*'s core skill from faithful reproduction of inherited material toward the on-the-spot composition that RKA now practises – several later narrators, including RKA himself, adopting 'Asmara' as part of a stage name in homage. Read through Schechner's first axiom, this is the performance environment acting on itself: an element of the environment, here a single narrator's practice, alters the terms on which every subsequent performance in the tradition is made (Hubbell & Ryan, 2021).

Found Space and Two Furnishings: The Staging of 1 June 2021

On 1 June 2021 KKM staged Darito Anak Jo Minantu – the story of Buyuang Sabarila, a fisherman-labourer (*mamayang*) expelled by his in-laws for his poverty, who leaves his pregnant wife Upiak Erni to seek his fortune abroad – at a wedding celebration in Nagari Sungai Tunu. The wedding followed customary Minangkabau *adat* still widely observed in Pesisir Selatan, including the *makan bajambah* procession, in which guests sit cross-legged on mats and are served by the *sumando* (in-marrying son-in-law), and *makan babinjek*, in which the dishes served are eaten by hand; decorations of patchwork cloth and coloured paper are likewise customary rather than a concession to visiting researchers (Jamaris, personal communication, 30 May 2021; Nofri, personal communication, 1 June 2021). Bakaba's place within such a celebration – alongside other occasions such as Baralek Gadang (large-scale wedding festivity), Maangkek Datuak (installation of a customary titleholder), Turun Mandi (a newborn's first ceremonial bathing), Manyaratuih, and Manjalang (post-wedding visits to extended family) – situates the performance within, rather than alongside, the *nagari*'s continuing *adat* life.

The staging pattern is consistent from engagement to engagement. The *pengkaba* arrives roughly thirty minutes before the performance begins, around 20:00 local time, after the *isya* (evening) prayer, and is received and served refreshments by the host while the performance space is prepared. Two furnishings are essential and no others are used: a kapok mattress and a length of batik cloth to cover the performer's legs against the night cold, laid on the floor rather than on a raised stage. Rabab Pasisia music, in which the *pengkaba* also takes part, opens the evening and runs for roughly two hours before Bakaba proper begins (Figure 1). This is a found space in Schechner's sense, and a minimally furnished one: nothing is built, masked, or lit for the occasion, and the entire apparatus of the performance is a mattress, a cloth, a fiddle, and a voice.



Figure 1. Rabab Pasisia musicians of the Kacang Manoge Community opening the performance.
Photograph by the first author, Nagari Sungai Tunu, 1 June 2021. Reproduced with the consent of the performers.

The Bakaba performance itself unfolds in five parts. RKA opened with a Sikambang Aia Haji, a mournful sung prelude in *pantun* form through which the *pengkaba* requests permission to begin and previews the coming tale, a use consistent with that type's customary function (Table 2):

Yo lei... laki Erna Buyuang Agus urang kayo rayo... Yo nan babeda jo laki Erni tuan eiii... ('the husband of Erna, Buyuang Agus, is a wealthy man... so different from the husband of Erni...')

At this stage the audience is still scattered, and only the more attentive spectators begin to gather, since Bakaba's intended audience extends beyond those seated directly in front of the *pengkaba* to anyone within earshot (Simatupang, 2013). The *pengkaba* then announces the story's title and the names of its characters — typically invented, colourful names such as si Banun, si Upiak, or si Buyuang rather than the names of real people — before elaborating each character's physiological, sociological, and psychological background, drawing the audience closer as description accumulates (Figure 2). When RKA describes a character's appearance, appreciative remarks from listeners — *ondeh yo padiah bana* ('my, how lovely') — are immediately folded back into the sung text as improvised elaboration, initiating the call-and-response that defines the remainder of the performance.



Figure 2. Active spectators gathered around the *pengkaba* during the analysed performance.
Photograph by the first author, Nagari Sungai Tunu, 1 June 2021. Reproduced with the consent of those depicted.

The narration then turns to conflict, here Sabarila's expulsion and departure, delivered with what Bandem and Murgiyanto (1996) describe as *bawa* and *rasa*: the atmosphere created by audience response, and the emotion, including tears, that the *pengkaba* invests in delivery.

Laughter and teasing punctuate this section as often as pathos, as the *pengkaba* works audience members' appearance or profession into the tale as comic asides. The conflict resolves — in this telling, when Sabarila discovers buried gold in a dream sent by an elder — to applause and cheering, before the performance closes with a second *sikambang* whose function differs from the first: rather than introducing the tale, it distils its moral. The full sequence ran roughly five hours, from about 22:00 to 03:00, with the *pengkaba* withdrawing once the closing *sikambang* was sung while the accompanying musicians played on alone.

Four Marks of Folk Traditional Theatre

Indonesian regional theatre is commonly divided into traditional forms transmitted orally across generations and more recently developed regional theatre (Bandem & Murgiyanto, 1996). Traditional theatre is further distinguished by locus: court theatre performed for a restricted audience within palace walls, and folk traditional theatre performed for, and often about, ordinary people. Bakaba belongs to the latter. Its early home was the *surau*, where children traditionally received instruction in *tambo* — a term Bandem and Murgiyanto (1996) trace to the Sanskrit *tambay* or *tambe*, 'to begin' — the corpus of Minangkabau oral history recounting the origins of the region's clans, lands, and customary law, a link still audible in *sikambang* verses that recite the maxim *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah* ('custom is founded on religion, religion is founded on scripture') (Navis, 1984). As the tradition matured it moved beyond the *surau*: informants describe Bakaba later being invited into the Pagaruyung palace environment to entertain and instruct commoners alongside its continuing life among ordinary people, without ever becoming an exclusively court form of the kind Bandem and Murgiyanto (1996) describe.

Several scholars converge on what marks a performance as traditional theatre. Sumardjo (1992) lists eight traits: an unscripted story, presentation through song, a persistent comic element, dramatic action performed spontaneously, accompaniment on traditional instruments, an audience that follows the performance in a relaxed and familiar manner, use of regional language, and an open performance venue. Ahmad (1999) adds that playing style rests on improvisation and that dramatic value does not distinguish tragedy from comedy, while Bandem and Murgiyanto (1996) condense their own account into three criteria: the viewing atmosphere, the supporting elements that frame the viewing, and the occasion through which performers engage their audience. On the second of these Bakaba is notably unadorned. RKA wears no special costume and performs seated on the mattress and cloth described above rather than on a constructed set, so that whatever supporting elements shape the performance are carried almost entirely by *rabab* and voice. The minimalism throws the third criterion, the occasion of audience engagement, into sharper relief: there is little else to hold attention once the *sikambang* stops. Four characteristics, synthesised from these accounts, together mark Bakaba as folk traditional theatre.

An open and unstructured viewing atmosphere. Bakaba spectators are under no obligation to arrive on time, sit still, or attend continuously. Audience members park motorbikes in front of the performance area, drift in and out, use their telephones, or stand with their backs to the *pengkaba*, consistent with the general absence, in traditional theatre, of any requirement that spectators fix their attention on the performer (Bandem & Murgiyanto, 1996). Only those with a genuine interest in the tale settle in front of the *pengkaba* for its duration, where an event takes shape because those present reflect themselves against others in an unrestricted environment and find there a vantage point outside their ordinary lives (Simatupang, 2013). This use of space matches Schechner's second axiom closely: all the space present is simultaneously performance space and audience space (Yudiaryani, 2015).

A divided audience and its responses. Spectators play a central role in the success of any performance (Satoto, 1993), and Noer (1983) holds that a theatre audience matters most when

it remains free of preconception, open-minded, and honest in its reactions — a description that fits the unfiltered, often boisterous responses documented in Table 4. For Bakaba specifically, spectators are the *pengkaba*'s principal resource for developing the tale. An active audience gathers close to the *pengkaba* and responds vocally; a passive audience, drawn from all ages, listens from a distance without engaging directly. Several children were present at the edge of the gathering on 1 June, having spent part of that day at the *surau* studying *tambo* and *silek* (Minangkabau martial art) before arriving; for them Bakaba supplies a second, entertainment-based route to the same customary knowledge, absorbed by proximity rather than by direct instruction (Hanani, 2011).

Narration through instrumental music and song. Where Bakaba narration elsewhere in Minangkabau is accompanied by instruments such as the *saluang*, in Pesisir Selatan the *rabab* is indispensable, and the style of singing from *sikambang* to *sikambang* varies by narrator as a mark of individual and regional character (Hartitum et al., 2019). That variation extends beyond Pesisir Selatan: Bakaba accompanied by Rabab Darek and Rabab Pariaman further north tends toward a higher, more piercing vocal register and a faster tempo than Rabab Pasisia, so that a listener can often place a performance regionally from its music alone (Ahmad, 1999).

A playing style built on improvisation. As in traditional theatre generally, where skilled performers are expected to sing and play an instrument as well as act and improvise (Ahmad, 1999), the *pengkaba* occupies four roles at once — author, director, actor, and musician — sustaining a five-hour performance through continuous invention rather than a memorised text (Simatupang, 2013). The blending of tragedy and comedy within a single telling, without a hard boundary between them, is itself characteristic of traditional theatre's melodramatic register (Ahmad, 1999).

Bakaba's solo-narrator form is worth placing alongside Randai, the Minangkabau traditional theatre best known outside the region, in which a circle of performers combines *silek*-based movement, group singing, and spoken dialogue to enact a *kaba* collectively rather than through a single voice (Primadesi, 2013; Hadijah, 2019). Where Randai distributes the telling across many bodies moving through a shared circular space — itself an independent realisation of Schechner's second axiom — Bakaba concentrates the same narrative labour onto one *pengkaba*, whose skill is judged less by choreography than by vocal stamina, memory, and the speed with which he folds an audience's own words back into the story. The two forms share a repertoire of Minangkabau *kaba* and a grounding in *tambo* and *adat* instruction, and both have been documented as vehicles for transmitting local wisdom (Hadijah, 2019); their difference lies almost entirely in how many performers a given *nagari*'s tradition asks to carry that weight. Whether solo narration offers Bakaba any particular resilience relative to Randai's more resource-intensive ensemble form — requiring one trained performer rather than a full troupe — is a comparison this study did not set out to test, but one that KKM's persistence makes worth asking.

The Five-Part Dramatic Structure and the Four Types of *Sikambang*

RKA structures the performance according to Brander Matthews' model of dramatic action — exposition, complication, climax, resolution, and conclusion (Satoto, 1993) — realised through the alternation of *sikambang* song and spoken narration.

Exposition corresponds to the opening *sikambang*, in which the *pengkaba* requests permission to begin and previews the coming tale, immediately followed by the announcement of the title. RKA selects titles and plots that mirror conflicts familiar to the local community: under Minangkabau *adat* a man conventionally resides in his wife's family home after marriage, even where he could afford to rent his own, and a poor son-in-law such as Buyuang Sabarila, looked down on by wealthier in-laws under exactly this arrangement, is a recognisable figure to the

largely male active audience that gathers around the *pengkaba*. Four named types of *sikambang*, each with a distinct function, are recognised in the tradition and are summarised in Table 2; the opening *sikambang*'s mournful, drawn-out melody is traced by informants to the coastal community's historical sorrow under Portuguese incursion, still audible in performance today (Bandem & Murgiyanto, 1996).

Table 2. Types of *sikambang* and their function in performance

Type	Function and distinguishing use
Sikambang Aia Haji	Life-story songs; used to open the Bakaba performance
Sikambang Lagan	Present in every scene; accompanies the announcement of the story's title
Sikambang Aia Tajun	Marks emphasis on fragments considered important; used to close the performance
Sikambang Gadih Basanai	Songs about young people; used for Bakaba with romantic themes

Source: adapted from Kurniawan et al. (2018, pp. 81–85).

In practice, contemporary *pengkaba* rely mainly on the more flexible Sikambang Lagan, adaptable to stories of everyday life, romance, or comedy alike, since fewer younger performers are trained to compose new *sikambang* of the other types.

Complication follows as the *pengkaba* introduces each character's name and background — here, the contrast between the impoverished Sabarila and his wealthy brother-in-law — delivered at a faster tempo and with a louder *rabab* than the opening *sikambang*. The shift is deliberate: RKA reports consciously changing his *rabab* rhythm and vocal pace at this point to signal to attentive spectators that the performance is moving from scene-setting into its central conflict (Ril Kelana Asmara, personal communication, 1 June 2021). This is also where improvisation typically begins, as audience remarks are folded into the spoken text and a call-and-response develops, demanding of RKA exactly the combination of speed and structure Simatupang (2013) identifies as the core requirement of *tutur* performers: dialogue must be produced instantly, in response to an unpredictable prompt, while still advancing recognisably toward the conflict the audience already senses is coming.

Climax corresponds to the conflict itself: Sabarila's expulsion from his in-laws' home and his departure while his wife is pregnant, delivered as the tale's critical turning point in the sense Satoto (1993) gives the term. RKA voices this section with weeping and a keening vocal quality that draws the audience fully into the emotional register of the story, prompting direct, sympathetic remarks from spectators (Simatupang, 2013).

Resolution follows Freytag's (1896) account of falling action, in which some reversal of fortune resolves the conflict built up in the preceding stage: here, Sabarila's dream of buried gold and consequent windfall, met with applause as the audience shares in what Simatupang (2013) calls the listener's heightened experience of the telling. By RKA's own account this resolution is one of several he rotates across stagings of the same tale. Darito Anak Jo Minantu had, by 1 June 2021, been performed roughly ten times in different locations, and in at least one other staging Sabarila grows wealthy through his own labour reselling fish rather than through a dream, a variation introduced deliberately so that repeat audiences, and the narrator himself, do not tire of an identical ending (Ril Kelana Asmara, personal communication, 1 June 2021). Resolution is thus itself a site of the plot-level improvisation that the dialogue patterns in Table 4 document at a finer grain.

Conclusion is carried by the closing *sikambang*, in this performance Sikambang Aia Tajun, whose faster tempo and morally didactic lyrics distinguish it from the opening *sikambang* even though both retain *pantun* form (Hartitom et al., 2019). Beyond summarising the tale's

meaning, the closing *sikambang* releases the audience from the narrative world back into ordinary life, carrying its values home with them (Hartitom et al., 2019). Table 3 presents a representative excerpt of the sung text at each stage.

The choice of Sabarila's occupation is worth pausing on. Fishing and casual labour are among the most common livelihoods in Ranah Pesisir, and a large share of the subdistrict's fishing workforce works intermittently rather than as a stable, full-time trade (Badan Pusat Statistik Pesisir Selatan, 2021). Sabarila's poverty is therefore not an abstract narrative device but a condition many in the active audience either share or recognise at close range, which is very likely part of why RKA's choice of this occupation — rather than, say, a trader or a civil servant — reliably draws so direct and personal a response from the men gathered in front of him.

Table 3. Excerpt of the sung text at each stage of the dramatic structure, Darito Anak Jo Minantu

Stage	Excerpt (Minangkabau)	English translation
Exposition	<i>Jikok tuan nio mandanga, dangakanlah kaba denai ko...</i>	'If you wish to listen, hear my <i>kaba</i> ...'
Complication	<i>Sabarila nan banasib malang, lahia dari kaluarga nan bansaik...</i>	'Sabarila, ill-fated, born to a poor family...'
Climax	<i>Alah mangamuak Upiak Limi, mancaliak Sabarila nan jago siang...</i>	'Upiak Limi raged, seeing Sabarila rise at midday...'
Resolution	<i>Ondeh mak oi, Sabarila bamimpi tengah malam, apak gaek manamui inyo...</i>	'Oh dear — Sabarila dreamed at midnight; an old man came to him...'
Conclusion	<i>Nan carito alah habih... kok tuan bansaik harato jan sampai bansaik raso jo pareso...</i>	'The tale is done... if poor in wealth, do not be poor in wit and feeling...'

Source: transcription of the performance of 1 June 2021; translation by the first author.

Improvisation at the Level of Texture Rather Than Plot

Improvisation — spontaneous movement and dialogue without prior rehearsal — has been part of traditional theatre practice since its earliest forms, demanding of its practitioners accumulated performing experience, narrative and contextual knowledge, and the composure to manage a performance's shifting course (Arizona, 2017). Distinguishing improvisation as an acting technique from improvisation as a mode of performance in its own right, Santosa (2017) notes that in the latter mode a performer is free to express within the bounds of an underlying structure — precisely the position RKA occupies as he moves between rehearsed *sikambang* and unplanned exchange with the audience, and precisely the spontaneity Spolin describes as the personal freedom a performer finds in confronting a live situation directly rather than reciting a predetermined script (as cited in Santosa, 2017). Kuardhani (2014) frames improvisation, alongside creativity, as a working method for reflecting lived experience, visible in Bakaba through its blending of *sikambang* with Minangkabau proverb, the mixing of *adat* sayings with Pesisir Selatan dialect, and *rabab* accompaniment that varies with every telling.

Following a fourfold typology of improvisation — solo, with property, paired, and within a narrative frame (Arizona, 2017) — Bakaba draws on all four at once: RKA improvises solo as sole narrator, uses the *rabab* as his property, builds paired improvisation through spontaneous exchange with spectators, and improvises throughout within the overarching frame of an unwritten *kaba*. Santosa (2017), citing Leep, further distinguishes three functions improvisation can serve — as a self-contained performance, as a tool available to an actor within a scripted role, and as a process available to non-actors — and Bakaba draws on the second and third at once, since RKA is simultaneously the trained performer improvising as a craft and the vehicle through which untrained audience members become, briefly, co-authors of the telling. Table

4 sets out six recurring patterns identified across the performance, each showing the audience response that prompted the narrator's reply and the reply itself.

Table 4. Patterns of improvisation observed in the performance of 1 June 2021

Pattern	Audience response	Narrator's improvised reply
Incorporating a responding spectator as a character in the tale	<i>Ondeh... mak oii... Yo... nan janiah.</i> ('Oh my... goodness... yes... how fine.')	<i>Tangango uda di muko awak di buek nyo.</i> ('He left <i>uda</i> open-mouthed by what he did in front of us.')
Matching the tone of the <i>sikambang</i> to the audience's mood	<i>Padiah bana mak oii... Saba yo Sabarila. / Yo sanasib wak Sabarila.</i> ('How painful... be patient, Sabarila.' / 'We share Sabarila's fate.')	<i>Baitu bana yo da parasaan hiduik.</i> ('Such, indeed, are life's trials.')
Recalling an earlier audience response and reintroducing it later	<i>Bawoklah ka gaduik indaruang lai. / Yo lalai... yolah payah.</i> ('Just take it to the rice mill already.' / 'Ah, quite forgotten... what a shame.')	<i>Piti pambawok tu bana ndak ado da... agiahlah piti dek uda, tapi uda kanai hati tadi ka Erni.</i> ('There truly is no money to bring, <i>da</i> ... give <i>uda</i> the money, but <i>uda</i> 's heart was moved by Erni just now.')
Drawing two spectators into a joking exchange with each other	One spectator jokes about a rival's earnings as a motorcycle-taxi driver; a second answers in kind, to shared laughter, including from its target	The narrator lets the exchange run before folding both spectators' lines back into the sung narration
Turning a spectator's rhymed question into <i>pantun</i> -form narration	<i>Warna apo otonyo tu, Asmara?... kok lewat inyo manyapo, sapo sarentak jo klakson oto.</i> ('What colour is that car, Asmara?... when he passes he waves, greeted at once by the car's horn.')	<i>Kok warna jan ditanyo, warnanyo merah nyalo, sarupo jo lado... kironyo inyo batanyo, awak babaliak alah kayo, kok uda masih sansaro.</i> ('Don't ask the colour — bright red, like a chilli... so that is what he was asking: I have come back wealthy, while <i>uda</i> is still struggling.')
Asking the audience directly for help resolving the conflict	<i>Sehat lah lai Erni, alah pulang laki tu a... ndak mode tu do da, paluak Erni untuang tabaun baun badan lakinyo.</i> ('Is Erni well now, her husband has returned... why not just embrace her, so she catches her husband's scent.')	<i>Nyo paluak lah dek Sabarila si Erni, langsung manangih Erni di paluak Sabarila.</i> ('Sabarila embraced Erni, who wept at once in his arms.')

Source: transcription of the performance of 1 June 2021 and interview with Ril Kelana Asmara, 1 June 2021; translation by the first author.

By RKA's own account, the fourth pattern — letting two spectators banter before folding their exchange back into the narration — is sometimes a strategy for buying time when he has temporarily run out of narrative material, at which point he explicitly solicits the audience's help in resolving the conflict rather than inventing a resolution alone (Ril Kelana Asmara, personal communication, 1 June 2021). This is consistent with Santosa's (2017) observation that traditional performers alter dialogue in the moment without disrupting the underlying story. Read across all six patterns, what stands out is cumulation rather than repetition: the narrator's recall of earlier audience responses, and his ability to weave them back into later sections, is itself a mark of skilled improvisation, requiring command of plot, character, dramatic structure, and the emerging shape of each scene at once (Arizona, 2017).

It is equally worth noting what the six patterns do not show. At no point does an audience response derail the underlying plot: Sabarila is expelled, struggles, and is redeemed regardless of which jokes, endearments, or questions the audience contributes along the way.

Improvisation here operates almost entirely at the level of texture, dialogue, and local colour rather than of macro-level plot – with the single exception of the rotating resolutions described above, which the narrator varies between stagings rather than within one. That division of labour explains how RKA can sustain five hours of genuinely spontaneous exchange without ever losing the thread of a coherent five-part structure, and it qualifies the sixth Schechner axiom rather than simply confirming it: Bakaba has no fixed text, but it does have a fixed narrative skeleton, and the absence of a script is not the absence of a plan.

Ota Lamak: The Performance Environment After the Performance

RKA's name travels with him from performance to performance, so that many spectators arrive already familiar with him, while newcomers build familiarity through the call-and-response of the performance itself; being named or teased within the tale is, for many spectators, a mark of acceptance. Unlike most other *pengkaba* in the region, according to the community's own members, who leave promptly once a performance ends, RKA and KKM extend the evening by roughly an hour into *ota lamak* ('pleasant chat'), an informal discussion in which spectators ask about the story's inspiration and, in the process, exchange telephone numbers with the *pengkaba* – exchanges that translate directly into future bookings and word-of-mouth recommendation (Nofri, personal communication, 1 June 2021; Ril Kelana Asmara, personal communication, 1 June 2021).

This practice instantiates Schechner's observation that a performance's action runs not only between performer and performer but between performer and spectator and among spectators themselves (Hubbell & Ryan, 2021), and it echoes Sathotho's (2010) point that a performance's setting comes to absorb its participants' full attention as it unfolds. What the Bakaba case adds is temporal: the transactions do not stop when the performance does. The relationship is reinforced by a common grounding in *surau* instruction received in childhood, so that Bakaba functions, for *pengkaba* and audience alike, as a continuation of the *tambo* teaching both received early in life, repackaged as entertainment (Navis, 1984).

A Male Pengkaba in a Matrilineal Nagari

The matrilineal, egalitarian *adat* described above sits in some tension with what was observed on 1 June 2021. The *pengkaba* role itself, and the active, vocally engaged segment of the audience clustered closest to the performer, were both overwhelmingly male, while women present were more often among the passive audience or occupied with hosting duties. This is not evidence that Bakaba departs from Minangkabau *adat* so much as a reminder that matrilineal descent and inheritance – the domain in which Navis (1984) locates women's structural equality – is a distinct sphere from public performance and *adat* leadership, which have historically been more visibly occupied by men across Minangkabau cultural life, notwithstanding women's well-documented participation as Rabab Pasisia musicians noted above (Jamaris, personal communication, 30 May 2021). Bakaba's audience composition appears to track that longstanding division rather than any formal or *adat*-based barrier to a woman taking up the role; on the evidence gathered here, no such barrier exists.

Why the *pengkaba* role specifically has not attracted women performers to the extent that Rabab Pasisia musicianship has is a question a single-performance study cannot answer with confidence, and it is flagged here as an empirical pattern deserving dedicated attention rather than explained away – the more comfortable reading, that *adat* itself excludes women from the role, is not supported by what informants described. One speculative distinction is worth noting without overstating it. *Rabab* musicianship, as practised by the women the community's members describe, is typically one voice and instrument among an ensemble, whereas the *pengkaba* performs entirely alone, holding the floor as sole narrative and musical authority for up to five hours before a crowd containing, on the evidence of this performance, a significant contingent of unrelated adult men. Whether that difference in exposure and solitary visibility

— rather than any judgement about skill or suitability — plays a part in who takes up the role is a question this study can raise but not settle; distinguishing a gap in opportunity from a gap in aspiration would require asking women *rabab* musicians directly whether, and why, narrating alone holds less appeal than playing within an ensemble, which an informant group confined to the community's existing membership was not positioned to do.

Four Transactions That Keep the Community in Demand

Taken together, the elements described above help explain why KKM continues to be booked with a regularity that, according to its own members, many other Bakaba groups in the region do not enjoy — a comparative claim this study cannot verify independently, since only one troupe was observed, but one offered consistently by all five informants. Four factors stand out. The first is narrative novelty: KKM narrates continually new material drawn from personal experience rather than the inherited repertoire still used by some other groups, following Pirin Asmara's example, so that a repeat spectator can reasonably expect a story not heard from this *pengkaba* before. The second is audience inscription: RKA consistently writes audience members into the unfolding tale, so that being recognised or teased by name becomes a pleasure that converts a one-time attendee into someone with a personal stake in seeing him perform again. The third is patterned improvisation: that inscription is sustained through the repertoire of techniques traced in Table 4 — weaving in audience character, exchanging verse for verse, drawing in several spectators at once, recalling earlier responses later in the telling — rather than through one-off jokes, which is what turns a single evening's rapport into something spectators look forward to repeating. The fourth is *ota lamak*, the post-performance discussion most other *pengkaba* forgo, which converts spectators into a referral network, since a booking in Pesisir Selatan's tightly connected *nagari* communities more often follows a personal recommendation than an advertisement.

Read through Schechner's axioms, these four are not separate causes but expressions of a single condition. The first axiom, performance as a set of transactions, is realised in audience inscription and patterned improvisation, where the transaction runs directly between *pengkaba* and named spectator. The sixth axiom, that a production need not rest on a fixed text, is realised in the turn to new, unscripted personal material. And the second axiom, that all space present is simultaneously performance and audience space, persists past the performance itself in *ota lamak*, where the boundary between performer and spectator continues to dissolve after the *sikambang* has ended. Bakaba survives in Pesisir Selatan, on this reading, because the community around it remains an active, participatory environment in Schechner's specific sense, in which the story told is, in a meaningful sense, the community's own.

These findings both extend and complicate the literature reviewed at the outset. Where Hartitum et al. (2019) and Hajizar (2019) treat *sikambang* and *rabab* primarily as musical material worth documenting in its own right, the analysis above suggests their significance is difficult to separate from the transactional context in which they are deployed: a *sikambang* abstracted from its audience-facing function loses much of what makes it worth documenting at all, and the tempo shift at the onset of complication is legible as a musical event only because it is first a signal to listeners. The concern with endangerment shared by Muslina (2015) and Rosa (2019) sits more uneasily against KKM's experience. Where Rosa (2019) attributes the tradition's fragility chiefly to a narrow and ageing pool of active performers, KKM's continued demand suggests that at least some communities remain socially and commercially viable under exactly that demographic pressure. The divergence is worth stating precisely: the present case does not contradict the regional diagnosis, since one healthy troupe is compatible with general decline, but it does suggest that endangerment is distributed far more unevenly across individual communities than a regional diagnosis implies, and that the relevant variable may be relational rather than demographic. On the evidence assembled here, what

distinguishes KKM from its neighbours is not a larger or younger membership but a set of practices that keep its audience in continuous transaction with it. Finally, where the pedagogical literature (Hanani, 2011; Hadijah, 2019) establishes that Minangkabau oral performance transmits customary instruction, the present case specifies the mechanism by which the transmission survives long enough to matter: the moral of a *kaba* reaches the children at the edge of the gathering only because the adults at its centre keep booking the performance.

CONCLUSION

Analysed as an environmental theatre event, the Bakaba performance of the Kacang Manoge Community takes the form of a five-part sung-and-spoken structure – exposition, complication, climax, resolution, and conclusion – carried by a single narrator across roughly five hours in a found space furnished with nothing but a mattress and a length of cloth, punctuated by four named types of sung verse and sustained throughout by improvisation that operates at the level of dialogue and texture while leaving the narrative skeleton intact. It survives in Pesisir Selatan not because of any single feature in isolation but because narrative novelty, the inscription of spectators into the tale, patterned improvisation, and the post-performance discussion that follows it function together as mutually reinforcing transactions. The persistence of the tradition, on this evidence, is a property of the relationship between performer and community rather than of the repertoire that relationship carries.

Two contributions follow. For theatre anthropology, the case suggests that environmental theatre, developed to describe a deliberate late-twentieth-century break from scripted, proscenium-bound Western practice, also describes traditions that never had a proscenium or a fixed script to break from. Where the framework's original case studies show performers dismantling an inherited textual and architectural convention, Bakaba shows a tradition in which transaction, found space, and textlessness were never absent to begin with – which suggests that environmental theatre may be less a twentieth-century invention than a recurring possibility that long-running oral traditions had already realised on their own terms. The material also qualifies the framework at one point: the absence of a fixed text is not the absence of a fixed narrative structure, and the improvisation documented here is patterned rather than free. For cultural heritage practice, the case suggests a target for support. Where revitalisation programmes for endangered oral traditions commonly default to archiving past performances or subsidising performers directly, the mechanisms identified here are relational: continually new and personally sourced material, the deliberate inscription of audience members into the telling, and structured post-performance engagement. Local government and cultural bodies may find as much value in documenting and encouraging these audience-facing practices as in the more conventional work of archiving repertoire.

Four limitations bound these claims. The analysis rests on a single performance of a single tale by a single narrator, so that the dramatic structure and the improvisation patterns identified are offered as a description of this performance and, provisionally, of this narrator's practice, but have not been verified against a second or third staging. Claims about how the community compares with other Bakaba groups in the region – including that most other narrators do not hold a post-performance discussion, and that this troupe is booked more regularly than most – rest on the testimony of its own members rather than on independent observation of those groups, and should be read accordingly. The Minangkabau-to-English translations throughout, including those in the tables, were produced by the first author alone; a second translator's review would strengthen confidence in the glosses of dialectal and idiomatic material. And the first author's prior relationship to the region and to the informants, while it eased access and rapport, may equally have shaped which questions were asked and which

responses felt natural to probe further. None of these undermines the description of the performance itself, but each bears on how far the conclusions should be generalised.

Three lines of research follow directly. The first is comparative: observing further performances by this community and by other Bakaba troupes in Pesisir Selatan would place the claims about differential survival on independent footing and test whether the four mechanisms identified here distinguish thriving troupes from declining ones in general. The second concerns gender: the male composition of the narrator role and of the active audience, in a society whose customary law grants women structural equality and whose fiddle players include many women, deserves sustained attention in its own right, beginning with interviews among women musicians about the appeal, or lack of it, of narrating alone. The third is regional: testing whether environmental theatre describes other Southeast Asian narrator-led traditions as economically as it describes this one would establish whether what has been observed here is a property of Bakaba or of solo oral narration more broadly.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors thank the Faculty of Performing Arts, Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta, for its support throughout this research. Sincere thanks are due to the Kacang Manoge Community – in particular Jamaris, Nofri, Ril Kelana Asmara, Yanti, and Robi – for their generosity in sharing their time, their performance, and their knowledge of Bakaba during fieldwork in Pesisir Selatan, and to the host household in Nagari Sungai Tunu for permitting the performance of 1 June 2021 to be observed and recorded. All five informants agreed to be named.

DECLARATIONS

Funding. This research received no external funding.

Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest. Neither the authors nor their institution has any financial or professional relationship with the Kacang Manoge Community beyond the research relationship described in this article.

Ethical approval and informed consent. No institutional review board with jurisdiction over this research exists at the authors' faculty. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all five informants and from the leader of the Kacang Manoge Community before the fieldwork began, covering observation, audio and video recording, photography, publication, and identification by name. Consent to publish the photographs reproduced as Figures 1 and 2 was obtained from the performers and from those depicted, and from the host household of the wedding celebration at which the performance took place.

Data availability. The audiovisual recording of the performance of 1 June 2021, the Minangkabau transcript and its English translation, the interview recordings and transcripts, and the field notes underlying this article are held by the first author at the Faculty of Performing Arts, Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta. They may be consulted on reasonable request, subject to the consent of the Kacang Manoge Community and to the exclusion of material that would identify individual spectators.

Use of generative artificial intelligence. Generative artificial intelligence tools were used for language editing and for formatting the manuscript to the journal template. They were not used for data collection, transcription, translation, analysis, or the formulation of the findings. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the article.

REFERENCES

Ahmad, K. (1999). Pengaruh teater tradisional pada teater Indonesia. *Budaya Jaya*, November 1999.

- Arizona, N. (2017). Pengembangan metode improvisasi ketoprak untuk pelatihan teater modern judul Tonil. *Tonil: Jurnal Kajian Sastra, Teater dan Sinema*, 14(2), 65–74.
- Badan Pusat Statistik Pesisir Selatan. (2020). *Kabupaten Pesisir Selatan dalam angka 2020*. Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Pesisir Selatan.
- Badan Pusat Statistik Pesisir Selatan. (2021). *Kabupaten Pesisir Selatan dalam angka 2021*. Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Pesisir Selatan.
- Bandem, I. M., & Murgiyanto, S. (1996). *Teater daerah Indonesia*. Kanisius.
- Danandjaja, J. (1984). *Folklor Indonesia: Ilmu gosip, dongeng, dan lain-lain*. Grafiti Press.
- Freytag, G. (1896). *Technique of the drama: An exposition of dramatic composition and art* (E. J. MacEwan, Trans.). Scott, Foresman. (Original work published 1863)
- Hadijah, L. (2019). Local wisdom in Minangkabau cultural tradition of Randai. *KnE Social Sciences*, 3(19), 399–411. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v3i19.4871>
- Hajizar. (2019). Tradisi musik Rabab di daerah Pesisir Minangkabau (Rabab Piaman dan Rabab Pesisir). *Laga-Laga: Jurnal Seni Pertunjukan*, 5, 185.
- Hanani, S. (2011). Sastra lisan lokal sebagai pembangun pendidikan moral. *Ekspresi Seni*, 13.
- Hartitom, H., Simatupang, G. R. L., & Ganap, V. (2019). Rabab Pasisia sebagai pertunjukan seni tutur di Kabupaten Pesisir Selatan. *Resital: Jurnal Seni Pertunjukan*, 20(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.24821/resital.v20i1.2588>
- Hubbell, J. A., & Ryan, J. C. (2021). Environmental theater. In *Introduction to the environmental humanities* (pp. 191–210). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351200356-11>
- Kacang Manoge Community. (2021, June 1). *Darito Anak Jo Minantu* [Performance]. Nagari Sungai Tunu, Ranah Pesisir, Pesisir Selatan, West Sumatra, Indonesia.
- Kuardhani, H. (2014). *Potehi: Teater boneka Tionghoa peranakan di Jawa*.
- Kurniawan, A. W., Sastra, A. I., & Nursyirwan. (2018). *Ayun-Ayun Jo Galitiak: Ekspresi musikal dalam babiola pada masyarakat Kabupaten Pesisir Selatan*.
- Muslina, N. (2015). Eksistensi Rabab Pasisia pada masyarakat Nagari Gurun Panjang Utara, Kecamatan Bayang, Kabupaten Pesisir Selatan. *Jurnal Program Studi Pendidikan Sosiologi*, 10–17.
- Navis, A. A. (1984). *Alam berkembang jadi guru: Adat dan kebudayaan Minangkabau*. Grafiti Press.
- Noer, A. C. (1983). *Pengelolaan teater*.
- Primadesi, Y. (2013). Preservasi pengetahuan dalam tradisi lisan seni pertunjukan Randai di Minangkabau Sumatera Barat. *Jurnal Kajian Informasi dan Perpustakaan*, 1(2), 179–190. <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkip.v1i2.12060>
- Rosa, S. (2019). Rabab Pasisia Selatan di Minangkabau di ambang kepunahannya. *Lokabasa*, 8(1), 75–83.
- Santosa, E. (2017). Improvisasi dalam teater: Antara teknik pemeranan dan pertunjukan. *Tonil: Jurnal Kajian Sastra, Teater dan Sinema*, 14(1), 95–105.
- Sathotho, S. F. (2010). *Ritual Suran di Dusun Kudus, Desa Tirto, Kecamatan Grabag, Kabupaten Magelang: Sebuah kajian penampilan* [Undergraduate thesis, Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta].
- Satoto, S. (1993). *Kajian drama I*. STSI Press Surakarta.
- Simatupang, G. R. L. (2013). *Pergelaran: Sebuah mozaik penelitian seni-budaya*.
- Sumardjo, J. (1992). *Perkembangan teater modern dan sastra drama Indonesia*. Citra Aditya Bakti.
- Sunarti, S. (2021). *Ba-ilau memanggil harimau: Tradisi lisan Pesisir Selatan Sumatera Barat*.
- Yelni, S. A. (2015). *Pirin Asmara: Maestro Rabab Pasisia Pesisir Selatan*.
- Yudiaryani. (2015). *WS Rendra dan teater mini kata*. Galang Press.