

The Conservation of The Oklik Performance Within The *Bersih Desa* Ritual Tradition in Sobontoro Village, Balen District, Bojonegoro Regency

Lilis Lestari

(Sekolah Tinggi Kesenian Wilwatikta Surabaya /Indonesia/ lilislestari.ryn@gmail.com)

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*Correspondensi: Lilis Lestari¹,

¹Email: / lilislestari.ryn@gmail.com

² Email :

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the conservation of the Oklik performance as an integral component of the Bersih Desa traditional ritual in Sobontoro Village, Balen District, Bojonegoro Regency. The research focuses on the structural characteristics of the performance, its socio-cultural functions, conservation strategies, and the impacts generated by preservation efforts of this agrarian ritual art. The study addresses key questions concerning the role of the Oklik performance within the Bersih Desa ritual and the implications of its conservation for the local community. Research participants included Oklik performers, traditional leaders, village officials, and members of the younger generation in Sobontoro Village. A qualitative methodology employing an ethnographic approach was applied through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data were analyzed descriptively and interpretively, with particular attention

to ritual functions, symbolic meanings, sacred values, and conservation outcomes. The findings reveal that the Oklik performance functions as a ritual medium, a form of communal entertainment, and a mechanism for reinforcing social cohesion within the community. Academically, this study contributes a conceptual model for the conservation of ritual-based traditional arts that may be adapted to other cultural contexts. From a socio-cultural perspective, the conservation of Oklik strengthens local cultural identity, facilitates the regeneration of young artists, and revitalizes values of mutual cooperation and harmony among humans, nature, and spirituality. Economically, the conservation efforts stimulate the development of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) rooted in traditional rituals and enhance the potential for cultural tourism without compromising the ritual's sacred character. Additionally, the study demonstrates educational implications through the incorporation of Oklik into local arts and culture curricula and provides a reference for local government policies concerning the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. In conclusion, the conservation of the Oklik performance generates measurable and sustainable impacts on cultural preservation, community empowerment, and regional cultural development.

Keywords: Conservation; Oklik Performance; Traditional Ritual; Bersih Desa; Sobontoro Village

INTRODUCTION

The Bersih Desa (Village Cleansing) ritual constitutes an agrarian tradition that continues to be maintained by rural communities in Java as an expression of gratitude for agricultural abundance and as a means of sustaining harmonious relationships among humans, the natural environment, and spiritual forces. In Sobontoro Village, Balen District, Bojonegoro Regency, this ritual functions not only as a religious and communal practice but also as a dynamic arena for traditional artistic expression deeply embedded in local cultural values. One of the central artistic elements within this ritual is the Oklik performance.

The Oklik performance is a traditional bamboo-based musical art form that historically emerged from the agrarian life of the Sobontoro community. In its early manifestations, Oklik served ritualistic purposes such as warding off misfortune and disease, marking time, night watch duties, and facilitating spiritual communication. Throughout its historical development and processes of cultural acculturation—ranging from animist and dynamist belief systems to Hindu-Buddhist influences and later Islamic values—the form and function of Oklik have undergone significant transformation. Gradually,

Oklik evolved beyond its strictly sacred role to encompass functions as communal entertainment, a medium for social interaction, and a vehicle for reinforcing local cultural identity.

Nevertheless, contemporary social change, modernization, and shifting societal orientations have posed challenges to the sustainability of Oklik art. The frequency and intensity of Oklik performances within ritual contexts have declined, while the regeneration of practitioners has been hindered by diminishing interest among younger generations in traditional arts. Concurrently, Oklik has increasingly been presented in the form of festival performances or cultural spectacles, a transformation that carries the risk of altering its symbolic meanings and diminishing its sacred values (Sukri, 2025). These developments raise critical questions regarding the capacity of Oklik to remain viable, relevant, and meaningful without losing its ritual foundations and the cultural values that constitute its essence.

Within this context, the conservation of Oklik performances has become an urgent concern. Conservation should not be understood merely as the preservation of performative forms but must also encompass the safeguarding of symbolic meanings, social functions, and the broader ritual framework in which the performance is situated. Effective conservation efforts

require the active involvement of local communities as custodians of the tradition, as well as strategies to support intergenerational transmission and the regeneration of cultural practitioners to ensure the sustainability of Oklik art amid ongoing social change. This research is significant in that it seeks not only to document and analyze the forms and functions of Oklik performances within the Bersih Desa ritual sequence, but also to generate practical and meaningful impacts for the community. From a socio-cultural perspective, the study is expected to reinforce local cultural identity and enhance collective awareness within the Sobontoro community regarding the importance of ritual arts in communal life. From an educational standpoint, the findings may serve as a contextual resource for learning about local arts and culture grounded in indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, the study aims to contribute to the development of a creative economy based on traditional rituals and to inform local government policies related to the safeguarding and preservation of intangible cultural heritage.

Based on this background, the present study focuses on the conservation of Oklik performances within the Bersih Desa ritual tradition in Sobontoro Village, Balen District, Bojonegoro

Regency. It is expected that this research will provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of Oklik as a form of ritual art and offer insights into community-based conservation as a strategic approach to sustaining traditional arts at the local level.

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a ritual ethnography perspective to examine the conservation of the Oklik performance within the Bersih Desa traditional ritual series in Sobontoro Village, Balen District, Bojonegoro Regency. This qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to deeply understand the symbolic meaning, social function, sacred values, and cultural practices that accompany the Oklik performance as an agrarian ritual art. Through this approach, this research positions Oklik as a living cultural practice inseparable from the social system, beliefs, and agrarian life of the local community (Moleong, 2002).

This research was conducted in Sobontoro Village, an agrarian region that continues to maintain the Bersih Desa traditional ritual, with the Oklik performance as a vital part of the ritual series. Sobontoro Village was chosen as the research location due to its authentic

traditions, rich cultural values, and the challenges faced in conserving traditional arts amidst modernization and social change. The socio-cultural conditions of the community, which still uphold the values of mutual cooperation, togetherness, and agrarian spirituality, provide a strong context for the study of community-based performing arts conservation.

The research subjects involved various parties directly and indirectly involved in the Oklik performance and the Bersih Desa ritual. These included Oklik artists, elders and traditional figures, arts leaders, village officials, community leaders, the village's younger generation, as well as community supporters and spectators of the ritual. Furthermore, the author involved local artists and cultural figures, as well as supporting institutions that play a role in preserving village arts and culture. This diversity of subjects enabled the author to capture a comprehensive perspective on the meaning, function, and conservation efforts of the Oklik performance.

Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted in both participatory and non-participatory ways to directly understand the ritual stages, performance forms, bamboo music playing patterns,

costumes, community roles, and symbolic elements that emerge in the Oklik performance. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with artists, traditional figures, village officials, and the community to gain an understanding of the history, function, cultural values, and preservation strategies of Oklik. Documentation was conducted by collecting photographs, videos, interview recordings, field notes, simple musical notation, and other supporting documents relevant to the research.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively and analytically using an interactive analysis model that includes data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification (Moleong, 2002). The data obtained were selected and grouped based on research themes, such as performance forms, ritual and social functions, symbolic values, and conservation practices. Furthermore, the data were presented in narrative and interpretive form to reveal the relationship between the Oklik performing arts, the Bersih Desa ritual, and the dynamics of cultural conservation. To maintain data validity, this study applied triangulation of sources, techniques, and time by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation at various stages of the ritual implementation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. History and Origins of Oklik Art in Sobontoro Village

Oklik is a traditional bamboo-based percussive art form originating from Sobontoro Village, Balen District, Bojonegoro Regency. The term Oklik is derived from the characteristic “klik-klik” sound produced by the bamboo gong, reflecting its onomatopoeic nature. Historically, Oklik developed from the kentongan tradition commonly found in rural Javanese communities during the pre-colonial period, functioning as a medium of social communication prior to the introduction of modern technology. Over time, Oklik evolved into a distinctive cultural expression of the agrarian Sobontoro community, integrating social, spiritual, and aesthetic dimensions while embodying a worldview that emphasizes harmony among humans, the natural environment, and religious values (Mursim, 2025).

In its initial function, the bamboo gong served as a communal communication tool used to signal night patrol schedules, sahur (pre-dawn meals), magrib (sunset), and emergency situations such as fires, thefts, or disease outbreaks. Each signal was conveyed through specific rhythmic patterns that

were collectively understood by community members. The repeated and communal practice of striking the kentongan gradually transformed this functional activity into a collective musical expression, which later crystallized into a folk art form known as Oklik.

The emergence of Oklik is closely linked to the socio-cultural context of the agrarian Sobontoro community situated along the Bengawan Solo River, where values of mutual cooperation (gotong royong) and ritual traditions such as Bersih Desa or Sedekah Bumi (Earth Almsgiving) are deeply embedded in daily life. Bamboo, as a readily available natural resource, became an integral material in the community’s material culture. Oklik emerged organically from grassroots initiatives—primarily among farmers and village youth engaged in night patrols—rather than from elite cultural circles, reflecting its character as a folk art rooted in the community’s social, spiritual, and recreational needs (Kadarminto, 2025).

Between the 1950s and 1970s, Oklik began to be performed rhythmically as a form of collective entertainment, particularly during post-harvest periods, the month of Ramadan, and prior to traditional ceremonies. Multiple performers played bamboo gongs of varying sizes to produce low, medium, and

high tonal ranges, forming simple yet cohesive rhythmic compositions. During this phase, Oklik functioned not only as entertainment but was also imbued with spiritual significance, as it was believed to ward off misfortune and maintain equilibrium between humans, nature, and ancestral spirits.

Within the Bersih Desa ritual tradition of Sobontoro Village, Oklik occupies a central role as an accompaniment to the procession of offerings from the village hall to sacred sites such as the punden (ancestral shrine) or Mojo well. The rhythmic sounds of Oklik are believed to reinforce the ritual's sacred atmosphere, invoke ancestral presence, and intensify the collective sense of togetherness during the procession. In this ritual context, Oklik functions as a symbolic collective voice, articulating social solidarity and affirming the communal identity of the village (Suyanto, 2025).

From the 1990s through the early 2000s, Oklik experienced a process of adaptation and modernization, extending its performance contexts beyond ritual settings to include Indonesian Independence Day celebrations, sub-district and district cultural festivals, school events, and other social occasions. Institutional

support from village and regional governments, including formal recognition of Oklik as communal cultural heritage, facilitated the establishment of organized Oklik performance groups. During this period, younger generations contributed creative innovations through the development of instruments, the incorporation of additional musical elements, and the use of choreographed movement and costumes, while maintaining the core traditional characteristics of the art form (Kadarminto, 2025).

Philosophically, Oklik embodies strong communal values, particularly gotong royong, as each performer assumes a distinct role that contributes to a unified and harmonious rhythmic structure. Bamboo, as the primary material, symbolizes simplicity, resilience, and sustainability within the agrarian context of Sobontoro, while the sound of Oklik is believed to transmit positive energy and express the collective spirit of the community. Consequently, Oklik functions not merely as a form of entertainment, but also as a medium of spiritual expression, social cohesion, and cultural education that reinforces the local identity of the Sobontoro community amid ongoing socio-cultural change.

2. Form of the Bersih Desa Traditional Ritual in its Procession

The Bersih Desa (Village Cleansing) ritual in Sobontoro Village constitutes an annual agrarian tradition performed as an expression of communal gratitude for agricultural yields and as a collective supplication for the village's safety and prosperity. The ritual is understood as a process of both physical and spiritual purification, encompassing not only the cleansing of the village's physical environment but also efforts to restore social harmony by mitigating conflict, misfortune, and perceived threats. In this sense, the Bersih Desa ritual functions as a collective mechanism for sustaining balance among humans, the natural environment, and divine forces, while simultaneously expressing reverence for ancestral spirits who are believed to safeguard the village.

In its implementation, the Bersih Desa ritual operates as a unifying social institution that engages all segments of the community, transcending age groups and social stratifications. Its continuous annual observance reflects a strong collective consciousness within the Sobontoro community regarding the preservation of ancestral cultural heritage, which serves as a shared

identity and remains actively embedded in everyday village life.

The Bersih Desa ritual embodies a set of cultural values that are internalized and enacted at each stage of the ceremonial process. These values are not merely symbolic in nature but are expressed through tangible social practices and communal interactions.

The core values articulated through the ritual include:

- a) religious values, manifested in expressions of gratitude to God and collective prayers for safety and well-being;
- b) respect for ancestral traditions, demonstrated through reverence for the village's founders and historical legacy;
- c) social values, reflected in the cultivation of harmony and social solidarity;
- d) ecological values, indicated by an awareness of and commitment to harmonious relationships with the natural environment; and
- e) moral values, expressed through attitudes of humility, mutual respect, and ethical conduct within the community.

These values elevate the Bersih Desa (Village Cleansing) ritual beyond a mere ceremonial activity, positioning it instead as an integrated cultural system that reinforces social cohesion and supports the sustainability of agrarian communities. The Bersih Desa ritual in Sobontoro Village exemplifies a syncretic Javanese tradition that interweaves elements of indigenous belief systems, agrarian cultural practices, and Islamic teachings. This syncretism is manifested in the incorporation of Islamic religious gatherings and the recitation of prayers alongside traditional ritual practices, including the preparation of offerings, ceremonial processions, and expressions of reverence toward ancestral spirits.

The prayers, conducted by religious teachers (ustad) and village elders, illustrate the integration of Islamic religious values with Javanese cosmological perspectives, wherein notions of safety, prosperity, and well-being are understood not solely at the individual level but also in collective and ecological terms. Within this framework, the Bersih Desa ritual functions as a space for cultural negotiation, enabling the community to preserve its traditional identity while simultaneously accommodating

religious principles. Consequently, the Sobontoro Bersih Desa ritual may be interpreted as an adaptive and syncretic tradition in which religious and customary elements operate in a complementary manner to sustain harmony among humans, the natural environment, and spiritual forces, while also reinforcing the cultural identity of the village community.

As part of this ritual tradition, the Bersih Desa ceremony is conducted through a structured sequence of activities, namely:

- 1) the recitation of Surah Yasin on the evening preceding the *Sedekah Bumi* (Earth Almsgiving) day;
- 2) preparations for the ritual procession at the village hall on the morning of the event;
- 3) the procession of offerings from the village hall to the Mojo Well;



*Figure 1. Procession to Mojo Well
(Doc. Lilis, September 2025)*

- 4) the ceremonial reception of the procession by the religious teacher, traditional leaders, sub-district head, and village head;
- 5) collective prayers led by village elders

- and the custodian of the Mojo Well;
- 6) the placement of offerings within the ritual area surrounding the Mojo Well;



Figure 2. Offerings for the Village Cleansing Ritual (Doc. Lilis, September 2025)

- 7) the communal distribution and symbolic scramble for the seven *tumpeng* (cone-shaped rice offerings);
- 8) a communal meal marking the conclusion of the daytime ritual activities; and
- 9) the evening performance of Oklik and Tayub, which formally concludes the ritual series.

3. The Artistic Value of Oklik in the Village Cleaning Traditional Ritual Series

The Bersih Desa (Village Cleansing) ritual in Sobontoro Village constitutes a socio-religious practice that integrates elements of tradition, religious belief, and artistic expression into a cohesive cultural system. Within this ritual framework, the Oklik

performance functions as an essential component rather than merely a form of entertainment; it operates as a symbolic medium through which the community articulates its spiritual and social expressions. The inclusion of Oklik affirms local cultural identity while intensifying the ritual's sacred atmosphere and reinforcing communal cohesion.

The values embodied in the Bersih Desa ritual, including those expressed through the Oklik performance, encompass several interrelated dimensions.

These include:

- a) religious values, manifested through prayers and slametan as collective expressions of gratitude to God;
- b) social values, reflected in practices of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) and active community participation;
- c) ecological values, demonstrated by respect for nature as the source of life and sustenance;
- d) aesthetic values, expressed through performing arts, costumes, and the arrangement of ritual offerings; and
- e) intergenerational solidarity, as the ritual involves and connects participants from diverse age groups.

Furthermore, each component of the ritual carries distinct symbolic meanings that contribute to its overall significance, such as:

- The tumpeng (cone-shaped rice offering) symbolizes the relationship between humanity and the divine;
- kembang setaman (a mixture of fragrant flowers) represents purity and inner cleansing; and
- water signifies life, fertility, and renewal.
- the Oklik procession symbolizes the dynamics of communal life and the spirit of togetherness,
- prayers conducted at the punden (ancestral shrine) function as acts of remembrance and reverence for the village's origins and founding ancestors.

Taken as a whole, the Bersih Desa ritual embodies the principle of balance among humans, nature, and God, a foundational concept in Javanese cosmology commonly understood as the ideal of harmony in life.

4. Meaning and Symbolism of the Well "Mojo" in Sobontoro Village

The Mojo Well functions as the primary focal point for communal gatherings during the Bersih Desa (Village Cleansing) ritual in Sobontoro Village and is culturally interpreted as an ancient water source imbued with cosmological significance. At this site,

community members assemble to perform collective prayers, enact symbolic acts of purification, and prepare for subsequent ritual activities as expressions of ancestral reverence and gratitude for the blessings bestowed upon the village. In 2025, the Bersih Desa ritual was conducted over the period of 12–14 September, with the Mojo Well serving as the initial locus of the ceremonial sequence, which culminated in a communal feast held within the village.



*Figure 3. Mojo Well
(Documentation by Lilis, September 2025)*

According to local oral traditions, the Mojo Well is believed to be associated with Dewi Sri and her punakawan during their lelono (spiritual journey). The narrative recounts that Dewi Sri, upon reaching the site in a state of exhaustion, embedded the roots of a mojo tree into the ground in search of water, resulting in the emergence of a spring that is believed never to have dried up. This mythological account is understood by the local community as the origin of the Mojo Well's perceived sacred and magical properties, which have been

transmitted across generations as symbols of fertility, protection, and prosperity. Consequently, the Mojo Well occupies a dual role as both a historical-spiritual landmark and a communal ritual space that reinforces the social, ecological, and religious interconnectedness of the Sobontoro community.

5. Impact of Research on Society and Cultural Preservation

This study demonstrates a measurable impact on the Sobontoro Village community, particularly in enhancing collective awareness of the importance of preserving Oklik as a form of local cultural heritage. The impacts of the research may be categorized into several interrelated domains, such as:

1) Social and Cultural Impacts.

The findings contribute to the strengthening of the Sobontoro community's cultural identity by deepening local understanding of the meanings and functions of Oklik performances within the Bersih Desa ritual tradition. As a result, collective awareness regarding the significance of safeguarding ritual-based arts has increased, accompanied by the revitalization of core communal values such as mutual cooperation (gotong

royong), social solidarity, and respect for ancestral heritage as integral components of community life.

2) Educational Impacts.

The results of this study offer valuable resources for arts and cultural education grounded in local wisdom, both within formal educational institutions and in village-based art studios. The documentation and analysis of Oklik performances provide contextual learning materials that support the teaching of traditional performing arts, symbolic values, and local cultural knowledge, particularly for younger generations.

3) Impact on the Regeneration of Traditional Arts.

This research promotes the active involvement of younger community members in Oklik artistic practices through processes of cultural transmission, ritual participation, and informal training at the village level. Such engagement contributes to the sustainability of Oklik as a living tradition that continues to be transmitted across generations.

4) Impact on the Local Creative Economy.

The study identifies the potential for Oklik performances to be developed as part of a culture-based creative economy, including the production of bamboo musical instruments, the creation of artistic documentation, and the development of

village-based cultural tourism. Importantly, these economic initiatives can be pursued without diminishing the sacred values and ritual contexts that are inherent in the Bersih Desa tradition.

5) Implications for Cultural Policy and Heritage Preservation.

Finally, this research serves as an academic reference for local governments and cultural institutions in the formulation of policies related to the safeguarding and preservation of intangible cultural heritage. The study of Oklik conservation provides both conceptual and empirical foundations for the development of community-based traditional arts preservation programs in Bojonegoro Regency.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the Oklik art form and the Bersih Desa (Village Cleansing) ritual in Sobontoro Village constitute an agrarian cultural heritage that has emerged from the social, spiritual, and ecological needs of the local community. Originally functioning as a traditional medium of communication, Oklik has evolved into a form of folk performance that plays a significant role in

reinforcing social solidarity, facilitating aesthetic expression, and supporting ritual practices within village life. Within the context of the Bersih Desa ritual, Oklik functions not merely as entertainment but as a symbolic medium that accompanies collective prayers, enhances the sacred atmosphere, and articulates a sense of communal unity.

The Bersih Desa ritual in Sobontoro, which is spatially and symbolically centered on agricultural land and the Mojo Well, reflects the Javanese agrarian worldview that emphasizes harmony among humans, the natural environment, and spiritual forces. Each phase of the ritual—from preparatory activities and slametan offerings, to ritual processions and artistic performances—embodies an integrated set of religious, social, ecological, and educational values. The sustained practice of this tradition, alongside the adaptive transformation of Oklik in response to contemporary contexts, demonstrates the cultural resilience of the Sobontoro community in negotiating social change. At the same time, it underscores the importance of preserving traditional arts as expressions of local identity and as effective media for cultural transmission to future generations.

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