

Local Wisdom Represented by Words in Nonik Performance Ritual in Lembu Village, Semarang Regency

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Abstract. *Noknik* art performance is a combination of theater and movement art that has developed in Semarang Regency. The uniqueness of *Noknik* art can be seen in the musical accompaniment of tambourines and poetry *using* a combination of Kawi and Arabic languages. This lyric of the art performance ritual is full of advice and guidance for life. This research aims to reveal lyrics containing local wisdom to share with audiences during the performance. The method used in this research is the descriptive qualitative method through qualitative research. The steps in qualitative research are (1) collecting data through participant observation, in-depth interviews with *Noknik arts groups*, documentation, and focus group discussions; (2) data reduction and classification; (3) data analysis; and (4) staging and concluding. The result shows that the lyrics of the art performance ritual are full of local wisdom. This local wisdom can be seen from the words used during the ritual. Each component in each step of the ritual depicts these people in understanding the relation between the villagers and their ancestors, villagers and nature, and villagers and God. The words of each ritual component also symbolize the way people think of their world. Nonik art performance allows villagers to strengthen social bonds, intensive conversation, and experience sharing among members of similar cultural backgrounds and communities.

Keywords: art performance, local wisdom, ritual, ancestor, villagers, and nature.

1 Introduction

Noknik is an art that can be found in the Bancak Beringin area, precisely in Dukuh Gunungjayan, Ngrandu, Nglembu. and its surroundings. Several Noknik art groups are spreading across Semarang Regency, such as Noknik *Jaya Sakti* and *Paguyuban Noknik Nurul Hidayah Mustakim*. This traditional art is often performed by residents of the Bancak community, Semarang Regency for guidance and entertainment purposes, and it is held every year. [1] stated that Noknik art is also often performed at weddings and circumcision ceremonies. The Nonik art performance is one of old traditions that villagers in Dusun Lembu, Randu and Gunung Jaya in Bancak Village still maintain. The existence of Nonik in this village is not so promising due to some factors that prevent this traditional art from developing well. The less intention of the society members and also the progress of other traditional arts cause this art can hardly develop its potential. Villagers have other alternatives to study and to practice more interesting traditional arts. They come from other close villages or cities. Good facilities on transportation and the infrastructure of road make it easy to get and to

learn other traditional arts. The recent media has helped villagers learn new traditional art in a very short time. According to [2] the modern touch to either the music or the kinds of art also makes the villagers interested in seeking other alternatives to art and music. [3] delves into the deep impact of modernity on local arts, culture, and personal identities, showing how these traditional aspects are often forced to adapt or even disappear under the pressure of modernization. The phenomenon of Nonik is significant for its exploration of Indonesian society in transition. Unfortunately, currently, public enthusiasm and interest in Nonik art is dwindling.

Indeed, the Nonik art, which continues to thrive today, is a cultural heritage passed down from previous generations. For the communities of Dusun Lembu, Randu, and Gunung Jaya in Desa Bancak, Nonik serves as a traditional art form that plays a significant role in enlivening their social and cultural life. Social and cultural values of the villages emerge in small parts of ritual and art performances. These values are simplified in terms and steps practiced by the practitioners during the preparation, and execution of this traditional art. Each term used during the ritual before the performance is rich in symbolism reflecting their belief not only in the consciousness of the existence of the ancestor, universe, and God but also in the hope of a better outcome from their life. Referring to [4] culture is embedded and practiced by people who live together and expect the same vision of achieving a better life and living in harmony with others.

Nonik represents a rich cultural legacy inherited from past generations. It reflects the history and traditions of the local community, preserving values and practices that strengthen their cultural identity and intergenerational connection. Nonik is more than just entertainment; it serves as a communal event where people from all walks of life come together. By involving the entire community in the performance, Nonik provides an opportunity for social interaction, strengthens communal bonds, and creates a shared experience. Behind the Nonik performance, audiences can take wise teachings on how people live together hand in hand with their family, friends, neighbors, universe, and God. Besides, this performance makes the village more appreciated as one of the tourist objects in Semarang Regency. [5] stated that Indonesia is well known as a country that has so many places with nature and cultural potential. This research aims to figure out the local wisdom that can be learned from the existence of Nonik performance art.

2 Methods

This study uses a qualitative research methodology that emphasizes the procedures for using tools and techniques in research-oriented to the natural paradigm. In collecting data, the researchers used interviews, observation, and utilization of documents. The interview was conducted by asking informants some questions. The informants come from different social backgrounds, practitioners, villagers ranging from 23 to 60 years old, cultural officers, and viewers. Data taken from observation derive from the ritual before the performance, the activity of viewers during the performance, and the dialogues and body gestures of the performers. We also collect data in the form of documents, such as old photographs, written text of song lyrics, and scenarios of performances written by the director. This was done using the non-participatory

observation method. A direct and planned observation of Noknik art aims to obtain an accurate picture of the role of this art in society and the extent to which the community uses this traditional art in their daily lives. After collecting and triangulating the data, the analysis steps are done according to [6], namely through the process of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Nonik Performance Art Presenting a Symbol of Social Integration

There are some reasons that make people think Nonik is the symbol of social integration. Here are some reasons supporting to the acknowledgment of social symbol.

a. Accessibility for all Social Strata:

According to [7], traditional art performances, including Nonik, are designed to be enjoyed by so many people from all social statuses. There are no barriers of age, social status, or economics that limit access to all audiences. They enjoy the performance together with their relatives and choose the closer or more distant from the stage. Usually, the hosts do not facilitate a seat, so most audiences watch the performance by standing or sitting in groups while enjoying the meals they bring from home. During the time of watching, they may interact with other neighbors. The audiences not only come from Dusun Lembu, they may also come from other villages nearby. This show is open to everyone, and everyone is allowed to participate and enjoy this art despite their diverse background.

b. Free and Fully Funded by the Organizer:

Nonik performances are often held for free. The organizer or sponsor usually bears the cost associated with the performances, so there's no financial burden for the audience. Frequently, the host of this art performance is an individual who invites the Nonik to perform since he or she has a special moment to celebrate. The rich who will marry their daughter or son is one of the examples of this special moment. Performing traditional art makes them feel proud of inviting villagers and celebrating that special moment together with villagers. Everyone is allowed to access and strengthen the principle of inclusivity in the arts. Regularly, the government also gives financial support and facilities to perform various traditional arts at the same moment. This moment happens as the villagers celebrate Independence Day and this event is usually held not only in the level of village but also in the level of sub-district and regency. Villagers go and see the performative arts for free. As the committee prepares and offers them tickets for a vote, they can get gifts provided by the committee. Villagers take advantage of the moments given by the governments.

c. There Are No Social Barriers:

Nonik performances generally have no separation or barriers between different social groups. Here, everyone can present in the same seat and area, enjoying the performance together regardless of social status or background. This matter can create an egalitarian and harmonious atmosphere for all audiences. Even when audiences may share a seat and area, there are always some respected persons who are invited to see the performance because of their strategic and important position in the village. These persons will have their seats close to the stage and or person who holds Nonik's performance. to support and to have deep conversation with the host.

d. Audience Interaction:

Villagers considered Nonik performance as an opportunity to have interaction and make conversation after they spent the day working in the rice field, garden, and company. The interaction goes among the members of the community as they meet, during the performance, and after the event. Usually, they talk with the person they are familiar with or a person having the same age. The topic varies depending on the person to whom they talk. They can talk about the performance itself by giving comments on the Nonik performance, their family problems, social issues, and their work. Since they interact in groups, there will be several groups sitting in a circle formation. Nonik is an art that often involves direct interaction with the audience. Performers may interact with the audience or invite them to participate in the performance as guest stars. This interaction fosters a sense of involvement and togetherness, strengthening the relationship between the performer and all audiences.

e. Supporting Music and Other Familiar Songs:

Music in Nonik performances usually presents familiar songs. They used to sing some Arabic lyrics. Along with the development of Javanese songs, villagers get accustomed to listening to Javanese songs, and gradually the lyrics of song accompanying nonik performances are dominated by this familiar one. These song lyrics often have cultural meanings and reflect the community's daily life. The lyrics tell about the request to see and give attention to the beauty of the village. They contain some words picturing the mountain, the rice field, and the green grass on the mountain foot. They often play some sensitive topics in humorous stringed words. This is the way they communicate some hot issues and because this way, the audiences feel the performances want to make a joke with them. It, sometimes, happens that the Nonik performers make fun of their partner on the stage through the lyrics of the song. Reversely, the counterpart gives a response that raises applause from the audience. Using familiar songs, Nonik arouses the audience's emotions and thrives the unity in the community. The arrangements of some traditional instrument music such as *rebana* (tambourine), *gendang* (two-headed drum), and *bedug* (larger two-headed drum) accompany the song during the performance. The use of these instruments accompanying the performance of Nonik gives evidence to the acculturation of Arabic and Javanese culture. Nonik is bridging the elements of society, creating experiences together with glorifying culture and strengthening the sense of unity.

3.2 The Nonik Art Reflects Deeply Respects its Ancestors.

This respect is manifested in several ways during the performance.

a. Ancestor Prayer:

Before the Nonik performance begins, prayer is usually recited to seek blessings and protection from the ancestors. Villagers believe their ancestor will always be able to help whenever they are requested. The smoke of incense is the media that can fasten and ease them to send the prayer to their ancestor. This ritual acknowledges the role of ancestral spirits in guarding the event and ensuring its success. By invoking the ancestors, the community demonstrates respect and connection to their cultural heritage. Prayer is also addressed to spiritual entity existing in the village that they believe they can help them make the art performance succeed or fail. [9] stated that the prayer is an effort to make those spiritual power cause problems during the performance.

b. Prayer Together for the Gods:

Besides prayers for ancestors, prayers are also offered to the gods, the universe, or higher spiritual beings. Before the Islam teachings came to the village, villagers believed a number of Gods in Hindu. Each God rules and controls the universe that belong to their responsibilities. The different prayer was addressed to different Gods. This belief is kept at present as manifested by their belief to the power of universe. Before the art performance they pray for having good weather and situation that may support the performance. Villagers also believe in the power of spiritual beings that exist and protect them. According to their belief, each person has four brothers and one supporter (*sedulur papat lima pancer*) Overall, "Sedulur Papat Lima Pancer" represents the balance and relationship between various aspects of human life, both in the spiritual, social, and personal dimensions. This expression suggests that a harmonious life is the result of balance between the body, soul, mind, desires, as well as relationships with family, society, and the environment. This dual calling shows a holistic approach to seeking protection and goodness, acknowledging that both the divine and ancestors are integral parts of well-being and success in performances.

c. Cultural Continuity and Respect:

Nonik is a traditional art that maintains cultural values represented by some activities conducted by the leader of this art in the form of prayer, served offerings, the plot of the story, lyrics sung by the performers, and costumes. All of them reveal such clues on teachings that can be delivered to common people and audiences. Through the prayers in the Nonik performance, the community shows respect for their ancestors and helps keep their traditional practices and values alive. Respecting this heritage is important for maintaining cultural traditions and strengthening social connections. Offerings serve such values on the relation between human beings and the universe. The story of Nonik contains topics coming from Arabic and Javanese myths that show the great contradiction between good and bad characters. The cultural values of Nonik can also be seen from lyrics sung by the performers that contain daily issues, advice,

and motivation to get qualified life as human beings. Last, performers wear simple ones but keep the aesthetic aspects as shown by their colorful costumes.

d. Cultural and Spiritual Significance

The act of praying before the performance for protection and success highlights the spiritual meaning of Nonik art. This emphasizes the belief that arts is not just an amusement, but a cultural and spiritual practice which deeply embedded in society's values and traditions. The consciousness of the existence of spiritual beings surrounding their lives emerges as the result of long-term mechanism processes and roots to their way of seeing and manifesting their life as created human beings and having a responsibility to pay back their deeds at the end of their life. That is why, villagers in *Dusun Lembu* keep tradition to maintain their relation with their ancestors, the universe, and God. Nonik art serves as an honor to the ancients and spiritual entity, reflecting the deep respect of society towards their cultural heritage and the ongoing relationship with the spiritual world.

3.3 Nonik Arts is a Mix between Hindu and Islamic Culture

As shown in the rituals and offerings before the show, Nonik is a syncretism between Hindu and Islam. This syncretism can be seen from a few key elements of said ritual:

a. Offering Rituals:

Before a Nonik show, an offering ritual is performed. This ritual consists of offering preparations to ask for blessings and ensure the show's success. It represents the unification of Hindu and Islamic practices in the context of Nonik culture. The ancestors of villagers *Dusun Lembu* followed and believed in Hinduism for several years. The name of *Lembu* can be traced back as a reference to a sacred animal in Hinduism. The practice of Hinduism can still be seen from the preparation they have when they are going to have strategic and important events or after they have succeeded in cultivating and harvest season. The villagers celebrate their thank-giving party by performing traditional art in which the elements of Hinduism is still conserved by them. The elements are mixed with Islamic elements in the form of lyrics, the theme of the story, the prayer, and also the costume the performers wear.

b. Incense Burning:

Incense is a gum or resin, often used as incense, which is produced from the *Styrax benzoin* plant. Its equivalent term in English is *benzoin*. There are various incenses used in the ritual. They may come from West Sumatra or Southeast countries. Because of the financial consideration, the ritual usually takes the cheaper one, incense from Sumatra. This ritual uses the burning of incense, which is a common practice in Hindus. To minimize and acculturate this tradition and the belief of most villagers, the elder or spiritualist (someone considered to have spiritual power because of his experience, influence, and wisdom) combines the practice with Islamic prayer. This deed represents a call for a spiritual being and purification of the room, which reflects the influence of the Hindu culture. The smoke flying to the sky is believed as a medium that makes the prayer easy to come to God.

c. Food Offerings:

Offerings include a variety of foods that have a specific symbolic meaning. *Nasi Liwet* (steamed rice) is one of the components served before the performance. This rice dish is a special cuisine from Indonesia, especially Javanese. This rice is steamed in a different way than Javanese people steam for their daily needs. During the process of cooking, the rice is mixed with coconut cream, chicken broth, bay leaves, and lemongrass, this combination makes the rice emit an aroma of savory, and aromatic steamed rice. Then, this *nasi liwet* is served with shredded chicken and a cut-egg. The meal is shared with the members of the team and some audiences who have the opportunity to have it. This traditional rice dish symbolizes wealth and divine grace, reflecting the values of Hinduism and Islam as regards prosperity and gratefulness. In Hinduism, rice is regularly considered a sacred dish, whereas in Islam, rice symbolizes food and blessings.

d. Three Flowers (*Tiga Bunga*):

The three kinds of flowers that accompany the process of ritual are the cantilever flower (*kantil*), roses (*melati*) and ylang ylang flower (*kenanga*). The inclusion of three flowers in this ritual possesses significant symbolism. Roses, according to the informant symbolize diversity of life. The different colors of roses such as white, red, and yellow represent the way villagers earn for many. Most villagers work as farmers and cultivate various plants to fulfill daily needs such as paying tuition fee, buying seconder needs, and monthly expenses. Other villagers earn their money by working in the city as laborers and or chicken farmers. On the other hand, the ylang-ylang flower (*kenanga*) is considered a symbol of true love. It is said that the ylang-ylang flower will bring happiness and eternity to those who carry it. This flower is also believed to bring good luck and success in romantic relationships. The cantilever flower (*kantil*) is a reminder for people. The flowers also work as a reminder for individuals to remain focused on God, emphasizing the Islamic principle of always remembering the Divine. *Kantil* in the Javanese language means always close to the heart. Last but not least, people need to keep in their hearts that even though they work during the day and share belongings with others as a way of expressing love to others, they must remember that in the end, they have to remember God. Feeling close to God will guide them in achieving the final goal of living in the world. Through this ritual and offerings, Nonik's art captures a harmonious blend of Hindu and Islamic elements, exhibiting how diverse cultural and religious traditions can co-exist and enrich one another. This fusion not only displays the historical interaction between these two cultures but also emphasizes shared values like respect, gratitude, and spiritual mindfulness.

4 Conclusion

Nonik is one of the traditional arts that is struggling for their existence against the modernization occurring in the world of performance art. They compete with a new perception in the minds of viewers in the recent era. Due to the fast progress of media, music and art lovers have so many alternatives to various objections. Art is no longer

considered from the value or teachings as traditional art performances have, art is seen as media to meet their need for entertainment. After they are busy with their daily activities that take energy and emotion, the recent generation sees art as a way of releasing their daily problem. Indeed, this is not a good tradition for the recent generation. They need to have their feeling about their own culture and tradition and be proud of them. Traditional performance arts need to be modernized to answer the challenge in the future. The community has a responsibility to put the right tract to facilitate the next generation with values that make them a social and humanized society. So many traditional arts give examples of the of integrates social cohesion, ancestral reverence, and cultural synthesis, making it a vibrant representation of a society that honors its past, celebrates diversity, and bridges cultural traditions. Nonik art serves as a profound symbol of social integration, cultural respect, and acculturation.

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