



ARTICLE

Submitted date : June 8th 2025

Revised date : June 30th 2025

Accepted date : July 2nd 2025

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“Mberot”: Music, Conflict and Understanding

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Abstract:

“Mberot” was a documentary film that narrates a phenomenon which is trending on social media today, the phenomenon reflects a significant innovation of Bantengan in Batu, East Java. Bantengan was originally art which was sacred and rooted in traditional values, that now experiencing reinterpretation through musical innovation and modern presentation style. *Mberot* means to rebel and uncontrolled, becoming a symbol of creativity between the younger generation in the form of innovation of Bantengan with evolved music that is according to the interests of the current generation.

This study examines the phenomenon from the perspective of ethnomusicology and visual anthropology, focusing on musical innovation that combines traditional instruments such as *kendang*, *jidor*, and *angklung* with modern electronic beats. This research shows that innovation of *Mberot* is not merely a form of entertainment, but it is an adaptive strategy to sustain tradition amidst the currents of modernity. Through an expository documentary film “Mberot”, this research illustrates the process of cultural negotiation between traditional Bantengan and *Mberot*, and conveys that music also functioned as an agent of social change. The result of this study emphasizes that cultural preservation is not always identical to the presentation of existing traditional arts, but can also be realized through creative interpretations that are relevant to the context of the times.

Keywords: Musical Innovation of Bantengan; musical negotiation; documentary film; *Mberot*

Abstrak:

“Mberot” merupakan sebuah film dokumenter yang menceritakan sebuah fenomena populer di media sosial saat ini, fenomena tersebut mencerminkan inovasi yang signifikan dalam Kesenian Bantengan di Jawa Timur, khususnya di wilayah Kota Batu. Kesenian Bantengan yang awalnya bersifat sakral dan berakar pada nilai-nilai tradisi kini mengalami reinterpretasi melalui inovasi musikal dan pengemasan pertunjukan yang lebih modern. Mberot, yang secara harfiah berarti memberontak dan susah diatur, menjadi simbol kreatif generasi muda dalam bentuk inovasi Kesenian Bantengan dengan iringan musik yang telah berkembang sesuai dengan minat generasi saat ini.

Studi ini meninjau fenomena tersebut dari perspektif etnomusikologi dan antropologi visual, dengan fokus pada inovasi musikal yang menggabungkan instrumen tradisional seperti kendang, jidor, dan angklung dengan beat elektronik modern. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa inovasi dalam Mberot bukan sekadar bentuk hiburan, melainkan strategi adaptif untuk menjaga keberlanjutan tradisi di tengah arus modernitas. Melalui film dokumenter ekspositori berjudul Mberot, penelitian ini menggambarkan proses negosiasi kultural antara Kesenian Bantengan dan Mberot, serta menyampaikan bahwa musik juga berfungsi sebagai agen perubahan sosial. Hasil penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pelestarian budaya tidak selalu identik dengan penyajian kesenian tradisi yang telah ada, tetapi juga dapat diwujudkan melalui interpretasi kreatif yang relevan dengan konteks zaman.

Kata kunci: Inovasi Musikal Kesenian Bantengan; Film Dokumenter; negosiasi musikal; Mberot

1. Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of Indonesian cultural expression, traditional performing arts face unprecedented challenges in maintaining relevance while preserving their essential identity. The emergence of "Mberot" as a cultural phenomenon in Batu, East Java, represents a compelling case study of how traditional arts navigate the complex terrain between preservation and innovation. This phenomenon, which has gained significant traction on social media platforms, embodies the creative tension between maintaining cultural authenticity and embracing contemporary musical expressions.

The documentary film "Mberot" captures this cultural moment, documenting how the sacred and traditionally rooted Bantengan art form undergoes radical reinterpretation through musical innovation and modern presentation styles. The term "Mberot," meaning "to rebel" or "uncontrolled," has become emblematic of a generational creative response that seeks to maintain cultural continuity while speaking to contemporary sensibilities. This phenomenon reflects what Gelfand, Michele, and Brett identify as music's capacity to function as an agent of social change and cultural negotiation within society (Gelfand and Brett, 2004).

Unlike previous research that has focused on Bantengan preservation through traditional conservation efforts, this study examines preservation through musical innovation. The younger generation in Batu City has not merely inherited the Bantengan tradition but has actively engaged in reinterpreting and adapting it to contemporary contexts. This process creates a dialogical space between tradition and modernity, as well as between older and younger generations, fostering a harmonious synthesis that challenges conventional notions of cultural preservation.

The significance of this study lies in its demonstration that cultural preservation need not involve freezing traditions in their original forms or allowing unchecked modernization. Instead, it can encompass creative interpretation and adaptation that remain contextually relevant (Winarno, 2017). The Mberot phenomenon illustrates how the younger generation's innovative approach to Bantengan—incorporating modern electronic beats with traditional instruments such as kendang, jidor, and angklung—represents more than mere entertainment or cultural trend.

From an ethnomusicological and visual anthropological perspective, documenting the Mberot phenomenon provides crucial insights into the dynamics of traditional music transformation within modernity's framework. This research addresses a critical gap in understanding how Musical innovation serves as a medium for cultural identity negotiation in the digital era, particularly in resolving conflicts between traditional Bantengan and its contemporary Mberot iteration.

Through qualitative research employing visual anthropological and ethnomusicological methodologies, this study reveals that Bantengan's

musical innovation transcends simple cultural development trends. Rather, it manifests as a complex process of cultural adaptation where music assumes a central role as a medium for cultural expression and negotiation. The research demonstrates how creative reinterpretation can serve as an effective strategy for cultural sustainability, offering a model for understanding how traditional arts can maintain their vitality while engaging with contemporary cultural currents.

This investigation into the Mberot phenomenon contributes to broader discussions about cultural preservation, intergenerational dialogue, and the role of musical innovation in maintaining cultural relevance. By examining how traditional and modern elements negotiate their coexistence within a single cultural form, this study provides valuable insights into the mechanisms through which cultural traditions adapt and survive in rapidly changing social contexts.

2. Literature Review

Fatima Tuzzaroh provides the most comprehensive examination of Bantengan art in East Java to date (Fatima Tuzzaroh, 2019). This publication offers extensive coverage of the art form's historical development, performance mechanics, symbolic dimensions, and its intricate relationships with religious, social, and cultural systems. Tuzzaroh's contribution is particularly significant in establishing the socio-cultural embeddedness of Bantengan, demonstrating how the art form emerges from and remains intrinsically connected to specific regional communities. Her analysis reveals that Bantengan cannot be understood merely as performance art but must be contextualized within the broader social fabric of East Javanese society. The work's emphasis on the interconnectedness between Bantengan and local communities provides crucial theoretical grounding for understanding how traditional arts function as vehicles for community identity and social cohesion. This perspective becomes particularly relevant when examining contemporary transformations such as the Mberot phenomenon, where community dynamics play a central role in determining the acceptance and evolution of innovative forms.

Andhika Putra Herwanto's "Bantengan: Kedigdayaan Seni Tradisi" contributes an essential historical perspective to Bantengan scholarship (Andhika Putra Herwanto, 2012). This work provides comprehensive coverage of the art form's general characteristics, historical trajectory, and the social organization of Bantengan communities. Herwanto's documentation serves as a foundational reference for understanding the traditional parameters within which contemporary innovations operate.

The historical framework established by Herwanto's research becomes particularly valuable when analyzing the Mberot phenomenon, as it provides baseline knowledge against which transformations can be measured and understood. His work establishes the traditional meanings and historical significance that contemporary practitioners both preserve and reinterpret.

through their innovations

Dwi Novita Ernaningsih provides a broader regional context by examining various art forms throughout East Java, including Bantenan within this diverse cultural landscape (Ernaningsih, 2016). While Ernaningsih's treatment of Bantenan lacks the detailed specificity found in dedicated studies, her work contributes valuable perspectives from regional artists and cultural practitioners across East Java (Ernaningsih, 2016).

This regional approach offers important insights into how Bantenan functions within the broader ecosystem of East Javanese traditional arts. Ernaningsih's inclusion of multiple artistic voices provides diverse perspectives on the origins and development of regional art forms, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how local traditions emerge from and respond to regional cultural dynamics

3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in visual anthropology and ethnomusicological approaches to comprehensively document and analyze the Mberot phenomenon in Batu City. The research framework integrates participant observation, visual documentation, and ethnographic fieldwork to capture the multifaceted nature of cultural transformation occurring within the traditional Bantenan art form. This methodological approach allows for an in-depth exploration of cultural change and the accompanying social dynamics that characterize the emergence of Mberot as a contemporary cultural expression.

The selection of visual anthropology as the primary methodological framework is deliberate and strategic. As Pink argues, visual documentation extends beyond mere image recording; it enables researchers to understand how visual transformations reflect deeper shifts in cultural values and meanings within society (Pink, 2006). This perspective is particularly relevant to the Mberot phenomenon, where visual elements—including modified dance movements, updated costumes, stage design, and modern lighting technology—serve as tangible manifestations of underlying cultural negotiations between tradition and modernity.

The empirical foundation of this research rests on extensive fieldwork conducted over three months in Batu City, East Java. The study focuses on innovative Bantenan groups, particularly Putra Ganesha and Sapto Anom Buwana, which have emerged as prominent representatives of the Mberot movement. These groups were selected based on their active engagement with musical innovation, their integration of traditional and modern elements, and their significant presence on social media platforms.

The research employed immersive participant observation as a core data collection method. As Nichols explains about the participatory Mode, the filmmaker is directly involved in the action or interviews (Nichols, 2024). The researcher lived within the Mberot artist community for the duration of the

fieldwork period, facilitating deep integration into the cultural milieu and enabling intimate access to the creative processes that define this phenomenon. This approach allowed for the documentation of various stages of artistic production, from initial conceptualization to public performance.

The participant observation encompassed multiple dimensions of the Mberot experience:

1. Training and Rehearsal Processes: Systematic observation of practice sessions provided insights into how traditional Bantengan techniques are modified and integrated with contemporary musical elements. These sessions revealed the pedagogical methods used to transmit both traditional knowledge and innovative adaptations to new practitioners.
2. Performance Preparation: Documentation of pre-performance activities illuminated the logistical and creative considerations involved in presenting Mberot to diverse audiences. This included costume preparation, sound system setup, and the coordination between traditional musicians and modern electronic music elements.
3. Live Performances: Observation of performances across various contexts—from traditional ceremonial occasions to contemporary entertainment venues—provided data on how Mberot adapts to different audience expectations and cultural settings.

The visual documentation component of this methodology represents a systematic approach to capturing the material and aesthetic dimensions of cultural transformation. Using ethnographic filmmaking techniques, the researcher recorded detailed visual evidence of the Bantengan-to-Mberot transformation process. This documentation strategy focused on several key areas:

Choreographic Innovation: Frame-by-frame analysis of dance movements to identify specific modifications made to traditional Bantengan choreography, documenting how these changes reflect contemporary aesthetic preferences while maintaining connection to traditional forms.

Costume and Material Culture: Photographic documentation of costume evolution, examining how traditional dress codes are reinterpreted through contemporary fashion sensibilities and the incorporation of modern materials and technologies.

Spatial and Technological Integration: Visual recording of how modern staging technologies—including advanced lighting systems, sound amplification, and digital projection—are integrated into traditionally outdoor, community-based performances.

Social Interaction and Audience Response: Documentation of audience engagement patterns, performer-audience interactions, and the social dynamics that emerge during Mberot performances.

The analytical approach combines ethnomusicological analysis with visual

anthropological interpretation. Musical innovations are examined through detailed analysis of instrumentation, rhythmic patterns, and harmonic structures, while visual data is interpreted through the lens of cultural symbolism and social meaning-making processes.

The integration of traditional ethnomusicological methods with visual anthropological techniques enables a comprehensive understanding of how cultural transformation operates simultaneously across auditory and visual modalities. This methodological synthesis is essential for capturing the holistic nature of the Mberot phenomenon, where musical and visual innovations are inextricably linked.

Throughout the research process, particular attention was paid to ethical considerations regarding the documentation of living cultural practices. Prior informed consent was obtained from all community members, and the research was conducted in collaboration with community leaders to ensure that the documentation process respected local cultural protocols and contributed positively to the community's own cultural preservation efforts. The methodology also incorporated community feedback mechanisms, allowing participants to review and comment on preliminary findings, thereby ensuring that the research accurately represents the community's own understanding of the Mberot phenomenon and its cultural significance.

4. Results

The primary outcome of this research is the production of "Mberot," a 15-minute expository documentary film that serves as comprehensive ethnographic documentation of the musical negotiation process within Bantengan art in Batu City. This documentary represents both a methodological tool and research finding, demonstrating how visual anthropology can effectively capture and communicate complex cultural transformation processes.

4.1 Film Structure and Narrative Architecture

The documentary is structured as a three-act narrative comprising eight distinct sequences, each addressing specific aspects of the cultural negotiation occurring within the Bantengan community. This structural approach allows for systematic exploration of the phenomenon while maintaining narrative coherence that effectively communicates the research findings to both academic and general audiences.

4.1.1 Act I: Historical Context and Traditional Foundations

The opening act establishes the historical and cultural foundations of traditional Bantengan, providing essential background for understanding the significance of contemporary innovations. This section draws upon extensive interview data and archival materials to present the traditional

	<p>musical forms and their cultural meanings within East Javanese society.</p> <p>4.1.2 Act II: Emergence of Innovation and Social Conflict</p> <p>The central act focuses on the emergence of musical innovation as a response to social tensions within the Bantengan community. This section documents the specific musical transformations that characterize the Mberot phenomenon and examines how these innovations have generated both support and resistance within traditional communities.</p> <p>4.1.3 Act III: Cultural Negotiation and Resolution</p> <p>The concluding act explores the ongoing process of cultural negotiation between traditional and innovative approaches, demonstrating how the Bantengan community is working toward synthesis and understanding between different generational and aesthetic perspectives.</p> <p>4.2. Documentation of Musical Innovation Process</p> <p>The documentary provides detailed documentation of how musical innovation emerges as a direct response to social conflict within the Bantengan tradition. Through extensive interviews with practitioners from both traditional and innovative camps, the film reveals the complex motivations and creative processes that drive musical transformation.</p> <p>4.2.1 Traditional Musical Forms</p> <p>The research documented the fundamental characteristics of traditional Bantengan musical accompaniment, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instrumentation: Traditional ensembles primarily featuring kendang (drum), jidor (large drum), and angklung (bamboo percussion), with specific rhythmic patterns that correspond to different phases of the performance • Musical Structure: Cyclical rhythmic patterns that provide a temporal framework for dance movements and dramatic sequences • Cultural Function: Music's role in creating sacred space and facilitating spiritual connection between performers and audiences <p>4.2.2 Innovative Musical Adaptations</p> <p>The Mberot phenomenon demonstrates significant innovation in musical approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic Integration: Incorporation of electronic beats and synthesized sounds alongside traditional instruments • Rhythmic Fusion: Blending of traditional Bantengan rhythms with contemporary popular music styles
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- Amplification Technology: Use of modern sound systems to increase volume and reach larger audiences
- Creative Arrangement: Restructuring of traditional musical sequences to accommodate contemporary aesthetic preferences

4.3 Social Conflict and Cultural Tension

The documentary reveals that musical innovation within Bantengan has generated significant social tension between different factions within the community. These conflicts center around fundamental questions of cultural authenticity, tradition preservation, and acceptable forms of artistic evolution.

4.3.1 Traditional Perspective

Representatives of traditional Bantengan express concerns about:

- Loss of sacred elements through commercialization
- Dilution of cultural meaning through modern adaptations
- Inappropriate use of traditional symbols in contemporary contexts
- Risk of cultural appropriation by younger generations

4.3.2 Innovation Perspective

Proponents of the Mberot approach argue for:

- Necessity of adaptation for cultural survival
- Relevance to contemporary audiences, particularly youth
- Creative freedom as essential for artistic development
- Economic viability through increased audience appeal

4.4 Negotiation Processes and Emerging Synthesis

The research documents ongoing efforts within the Batu City Bantengan community to develop synthesis approaches that honor traditional values while incorporating beneficial innovations. These negotiation processes demonstrate sophisticated cultural diplomacy and community-based conflict resolution.

4.4.1 Community Dialogue Initiatives

The documentary captures several community meetings where representatives from different approaches engage in structured dialogue about the future of Bantengan. These sessions reveal:

- Shared Values: Both groups demonstrate commitment to preserving Bantengan's cultural significance
- Common Concerns: Mutual interest in ensuring the art form's

continued viability

- Complementary Strengths: Recognition that traditional knowledge and innovative creativity can be mutually reinforcing

4.4.2 Hybrid Performance Models

The research identified emerging performance models that integrate traditional and innovative elements:

- Contextual Adaptation: Using traditional forms for ceremonial occasions and innovative approaches for entertainment contexts
- Collaborative Performance: Joint performances featuring both traditional and modern musical elements
- Educational Integration: Teaching programs that include both traditional techniques and contemporary adaptations

5. Discussions

The findings from this research reveal a sophisticated model of cultural adaptation that challenges conventional binary distinctions between tradition and modernity. The innovation of Bantengan art in Batu City demonstrates that cultural preservation and creative transformation can operate as complementary rather than opposing forces. This discussion examines the theoretical and practical implications of the Mberot phenomenon for understanding cultural sustainability in contemporary Indonesia.

The most significant finding of this research is the demonstration that Bantengan innovation in Batu City maintains essential traditional elements while incorporating contemporary modifications. This preservation-through-adaptation model suggests that cultural continuity does not require static maintenance of historical forms but can be achieved through dynamic engagement with tradition that responds to contemporary contexts.

The evidence from the Mberot phenomenon indicates that no new presentations of Bantengan art completely abandon their traditional foundations. Instead, innovations are carefully calibrated to maintain core cultural values while adapting surface elements to contemporary preferences. This approach reflects what might be termed "rooted innovation"—creative development that maintains deep connection to traditional sources while allowing for contemporary expression.

This finding has profound implications for cultural preservation theory. Traditional approaches to cultural heritage often emphasize conservation through isolation from contemporary influences, viewing any modification as potential contamination of authentic cultural forms. The Mberot case study demonstrates an alternative model where cultural authenticity is

	<p>maintained through adaptive engagement rather than protective isolation.</p> <p>The success of this approach in maintaining both cultural integrity and contemporary relevance suggests that cultural preservation strategies should focus on supporting communities' own processes of cultural negotiation rather than imposing external standards of authenticity. This community-centered approach to cultural preservation aligns with recent developments in applied anthropology that emphasize community agency in cultural maintenance and development.</p> <p>The insights provided by Gembong Sunarto, Chairman of the Batu City Arts Council, offer crucial theoretical framework for understanding how cultural innovation operates within traditional communities. Sunarto's observation that "traditional arts need not always be frozen in outdated forms, but there must be boundaries so that the development of these arts does not deviate from existing traditions" articulates a sophisticated understanding of cultural dynamics that deserves careful analysis.</p> <p>Sunarto's reference to "boundaries" (batasan-batasan) within cultural innovation points to the existence of implicit community standards that guide acceptable forms of creative development. These boundaries appear to operate as flexible guidelines rather than rigid restrictions, allowing for creative exploration while maintaining cultural coherence.</p> <p>The research reveals that these boundaries are not externally imposed but emerge from ongoing community dialogue and consensus-building processes. The boundaries themselves appear to be subject to gradual modification as community values evolve, suggesting a dynamic relationship between innovation and tradition that allows for both creative freedom and cultural continuity.</p> <p>The role of cultural leaders like Sunarto in articulating and maintaining these boundaries highlights the importance of community agency in cultural preservation. Rather than passive recipients of either traditional or modern influences, the Bantengan community in Batu City demonstrates active engagement in determining how their cultural practices should evolve.</p> <p>The integration of traditional Bantengan musical elements with contemporary Mberot innovations represents what Ribeth Nurvijayanto identifies as a form of creative performance art (garapan seni pertunjukan kreasi) (Humaedi <i>et al.</i>, 2024). This conceptualization provides important theoretical framework for understanding how musical innovation functions within traditional art forms.</p> <p>The musical aspects of the Mberot phenomenon demonstrate how sound can serve as a medium for cultural negotiation. The careful integration of traditional instruments (kendang, jidor, angklung) with contemporary</p>
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electronic elements creates sonic spaces where different cultural values and aesthetic preferences can coexist and interact.

This musical negotiation process reveals several important characteristics:

- Temporal Layering: Traditional and modern musical elements often operate on different temporal scales within the same performance, creating complex rhythmic interactions
- Harmonic Dialogue: The integration of traditional and electronic sounds creates new harmonic possibilities that neither tradition could achieve independently
- Cultural Mediation: Music serves as a non-verbal medium through which different generational and cultural perspectives can find common ground

The performance context provides a crucial space for testing and refining cultural innovations. Unlike static cultural products, live performance allows for immediate community feedback and real-time adjustment of cultural experiments. The Mberot phenomenon demonstrates how performance contexts can function as cultural laboratories where communities can explore new possibilities while maintaining connection to traditional foundations.

6. Conclusions

The Mberot phenomenon demonstrates that cultural preservation and innovation can operate as complementary processes when communities maintain agency over their cultural development. The success of this approach suggests that cultural policy and theory should focus on supporting community-based processes of cultural negotiation rather than imposing external standards of authenticity or development. The research contributes to understanding how traditional communities can maintain cultural integrity while engaging creatively with contemporary contexts, offering a model for cultural sustainability that may be applicable in diverse cultural settings.

7. Acknowledgments

This documentary film is not merely a visual work, but also a journey filled with stories, extensive discussions, filming in various locations, and editing that consumed considerable time and energy. We learned a great deal, not only about the technical aspects of production, but also about understanding reality, exploring different perspectives, and conveying stories honestly and touchingly. This documentary film certainly would not have been realized without the assistance and support of many parties. We want to express our deepest gratitude to the sources who were willing to share their stories, the enthusiastic production team, and all parties who

provided space, time, and trust throughout the process. We are aware that this documentary film may not yet be perfect. However, our hope is simple: that what we present can make an impact, provoke thought, and open new conversations about the topic we have raised.

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