



From *Sahur* Wake-Up Practice to Cultural Performance: The Transformation of *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* in Indragiri Hilir

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Abstract

This study examines the transformation of *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* in Indragiri Hilir, Riau, from a practical Ramadan activity for waking residents for sahur into a distinctive cultural performance. Rather than treating transformation simply as the preservation of tradition through modernization, the study investigates how changes in performance, costume, sound, technology, and community interpretation have reshaped the practice over time. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study drew on non-participant observation in Pulau Palas and Sungai Luar during Ramadan, in-depth interviews with cultural practitioners, senior performers, community organizers, and traditional musicians, and photographic and documentary sources. The data were analyzed thematically and cross-checked through source and method triangulation. The findings show that the earliest remembered form of *Bagarakan* relied on young men, vocal calls, and improvised percussion to wake villagers. During the later development of the practice, Mamanda-related costumes and character conventions became associated with the procession, including royal costumes and male performers portraying a king and queen, contributing to the later emergence of the recognizable *Pengantin Sahur* figures. Subsequent adoption of megaphones, recorded music, bridal costumes, and later large amplified sound systems and popular music further transformed its sonic, visual, and entertainment character. Contemporary changes reveal competing interpretations concerning gendered performer roles, amplified music during Ramadan, and appropriate forms of cultural continuity. The findings contribute to understanding living cultural performance by showing that *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* persists not through unchanged cultural continuity, but through ongoing negotiation among inherited practice, artistic performance, technological change, and shifting social and religious expectations.

1. INTRODUCTION

At around one o'clock in the morning during Ramadan, waking residents for sahur in parts of Indragiri Hilir is no longer performed merely through calls or improvised percussion. In

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villages such as Pulau Palas and Sungai Luar, the activity has developed into a moving village performance involving costumed “bride and groom” figures, decorated carts, music, make-up, amplified sound, and groups of young participants. Earlier research in Pulau Palas describes *Pengantin Sahur* as a Ramadan procession in which a bridal pair is paraded through the village while residents gather to watch, with the role of the female bride traditionally performed by a man [1]. The combination of a practical Ramadan-time function and increasingly elaborate visual and sonic presentation makes *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* particularly significant as a case of a communal practice becoming a cultural performance.

The practice developed within a social environment strongly shaped by Banjar settlement in Indragiri Hilir. Banjar migrants had established communities in the region by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and subsequently developed extensive social, economic, and religious interactions with other groups in the area [2]. This historical setting is important for understanding *bagarakan*, a Banjar term associated with waking people, but it does not by itself establish that every later element of *Pengantin Sahur* resulted from Banjar-Malay assimilation. The more immediate analytical issue is how a practical activity undertaken during Ramadan gradually acquired recognizable performative features. In this sense, cultural performance is useful not simply as a label for “tradition,” but as a way of examining a contextual performance embedded in community life and constituted through visual, theatrical, musical, and social elements [3]. Accordingly, this study treats cultural performance as its primary analytical lens for examining how *Bagarakan* has been repeatedly reconfigured through theatrical, sonic, and institutional change. This primary lens is complemented by soundscape and heritage perspectives to interpret changes in acoustic practice and cultural representation.

Previous studies have documented important aspects of *Pengantin Sahur*, particularly in Pulau Palas. Misdawati and Yusuf examined changes in its implementation and identified innovation, social change, and village leadership as factors shaping its development [1]. Hadli and Yasir focused on symbolic meanings and community values, interpreting the bridal pair as a symbol of happiness during Ramadan, the decorated bridal platform as an expression of youth creativity and cooperation, and the cart as connected to the local coconut economy [4]. Dewantara et al. subsequently examined the origin, implementation, community preservation, and governmental support of the tradition, emphasizing the role of village youth in maintaining it [5]. More recently, Rifani and Susanti have shown that the institutionalization of *Pengantin Sahur* as a festival has altered its performers, equipment, frequency, and orientation, shifting the practice toward a more ceremonial, competitive, and entertainment-oriented form [6].

Recent Indonesian performance studies show that transformation is not a neutral process of “preserving” older cultural forms. The transformation of communal practices into staged artistic forms may create new aesthetic possibilities while simultaneously changing the social context, meanings, and modes of representation attached to the source practice [7]. Conversely, inherited oral and performative resources can be selectively reworked for contemporary audiences as part of cultural revitalization [8]. These perspectives are relevant to *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* because its continuity similarly depends on selective reformulation rather than the mechanical reproduction of an unchanged form. Intergenerational transmission further depends on how younger participants gain access to cultural knowledge and opportunities for participation [9], while digital circulation can expand the visibility of local cultural heritage and simultaneously introduce new pressures concerning representation, audience expectations, and community control [10].

Despite these contributions, three problems remain insufficiently resolved. First, the historical relationship between the older practice of waking people for *sahur* and the later emergence of *Pengantin Sahur* as a recognizable performance remains unclear. Published

accounts themselves provide different chronologies. Misdawati and Yusuf and Dewantara et al. identify 1981 as an important point in the emergence of the *Pengantin Sahur* form in Pulau Palas [1][5], whereas Hadli and Yasir place the tradition at least in the 1970s [4]. These differing accounts suggest that the history of the named performance may have been conflated with the longer history of the underlying bagarakan practice. Second, previous research has largely concentrated on Pulau Palas and has tended to document origins, meanings, preservation, or festivalization separately. Less attention has been given to the longer process through which sound, costume, performer roles, theatrical presentation, technology, and institutionalization collectively transformed the practice. Third, change has often been described as adaptation or preservation, while the disagreements generated by those changes—including changing expectations concerning performers, amplified music, and the appropriate form of a Ramadan-associated tradition—have received much less attention.

This gap is important because the transformation of Bagarakan *Pengantin Sahur* involves more than the replacement of older objects by newer technologies. Changes in sound, costume, visual presentation, performers, and organization alter how the practice is experienced and understood. Earlier studies indicate a movement from relatively simple processions toward decorated bridal platforms, amplified music, festivals, and competitive presentation [5][6]. Recent changes in Pulau Palas also show that male-female pairs have been introduced in some contexts in response to contemporary social and religious expectations. These developments suggest that continuity is produced through negotiation among artistic innovation, technology, generational participation, institutional intervention, and changing understandings of social and religious acceptability.

Against this background, this study asks: how did Bagarakan *Pengantin Sahur* transform from a practical activity for waking residents for sahur into a cultural performance, and how have changes in costume, sound, performer roles, technology, and community interpretation shaped that transformation? To answer this question, the study examines Pulau Palas and Sungai Luar through oral histories from senior practitioners, accounts from current performers and community organizers, direct observation, and photographic, audiovisual, and documentary evidence. Rather than assuming cultural assimilation as the primary explanation, the study traces the mechanisms through which the performance itself was produced and repeatedly reconfigured.

The central contribution of this study is to show that the continuity of *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* is produced through negotiated performance transformation rather than through the preservation of fixed “core values.” This argument is supported by a longer empirical reconstruction that distinguishes the earlier *sahur* wake-up practice from the later visual, theatrical, amplified, and festivalized form of *Pengantin Sahur*. By tracing changes in costume, sound technologies, performer roles, institutionalization, and contemporary social and religious debates, the study shows that the tradition persists through continuing negotiation among inherited practice, artistic performance, technological change, and shifting social expectations.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the transformation of Bagarakan *Pengantin Sahur* from a practical Ramadan wake-up activity into a cultural performance. Fieldwork was conducted from 23 to 31 March 2024, during Ramadan 1445 H, in Pulau Palas Village, Tembilahan Hulu District, and Sungai Luar Village, Batang Tuaka District, Indragiri Hilir Regency, Riau. The two sites were selected because Bagarakan *Pengantin Sahur* continues to be practiced in both communities and because they provide

relevant settings for examining changes in performance form, sound, visual presentation, and transmission.

Data were collected through in-depth recorded interviews, non-participant observation, photographic documentation, audiovisual recordings of performances, and documentary materials. Interviews were conducted during the 23–31 March 2024 fieldwork period, audiovisually recorded with participants' permission, and selected passages relevant to the analytical themes were transcribed and checked against the recordings before analysis. The fieldwork was conducted by the researchers in conjunction with a cultural documentation project facilitated by the Riau Provincial Culture Office. Direct observations of contemporary performances were conducted in Sungai Luar on 29 March 2024 and in Pulau Palas on 30 March 2024. Observation focused on the preparation and procession of Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur, including performer roles, costumes and make-up, sound-producing equipment, music, decorated carts, youth and community participation, and interactions between performers and spectators. The audiovisual materials used in this study, including interview and performance recordings, were produced during this field documentation and form part of the project archive.

For the present article, interviews with five key informants were selected purposively on the basis of direct involvement, length of experience, specialized artistic knowledge, and relevance to different stages of the transformation. Purposive sampling is appropriate where participants are selected because their experience and knowledge directly correspond to the analytical aims of a qualitative study [11]. At the time of the 2024 fieldwork, the informants were Ahmadi (52), a Banjar-Malay cultural practitioner from Tembilahan; Ramli (82), a senior Mamanda artist from Pulau Palas; Safrizal (45), a Bagarakan practitioner and youth leader from Sungai Luar; Suhadana Putra (42), a traditional musician from Tembilahan; and Ikbal Yuanel (24), a Bagarakan practitioner from Pulau Palas who had performed the female bridal role. Their different social and generational positions were analytically useful: Ahmadi contributed local oral-historical knowledge; Ramli provided a senior practitioner's perspective on Mamanda and earlier forms of Bagarakan; Safrizal represented intergenerational transmission and technological change; Suhadana Putra contributed specialist knowledge of musical and sonic transformation; and Ikbal provided a contemporary performer's perspective on the bridal role.

The interviews explored six interconnected issues: the earlier function of Bagarakan as a means of waking residents for sahur; the emergence of theatrical and visual elements; the relationship between Mamanda performance and the later bride-and-groom figures; changes in percussion, amplification, and musical repertoire; intergenerational transmission; and contemporary debates over the appropriate form of the tradition. Because the study reconstructs developments across different historical periods, interview accounts were evaluated according to each participant's temporal and experiential position. Oral-history methodology emphasizes the need to interpret memory as situated testimony rather than treating every recollection as equivalent documentary evidence [12]. Thus, Ahmadi's account of the early post-independence period was treated as local oral-historical knowledge rather than eyewitness testimony, whereas Ramli's recollections of his own participation, Safrizal's experiences since childhood, and Ikbal's experience as a contemporary performer were treated as first-hand evidence for the periods they personally experienced.

The recorded interviews, interview notes, field observations, performance footage, photographs, and documentary materials were analyzed thematically. Following contemporary guidance on thematic analysis, the analytical process sought coherence between the research question, coding decisions, interpretation, and the resulting themes rather than treating themes as categories that simply "emerged" without researcher

interpretation [13]. The material was first organized according to informant, historical period, location, and type of evidence. Recurrent statements and observed changes were then coded according to their relevance to the research question. Related codes were grouped into five analytical themes: (1) the practical function of the early sahur wake-up activity; (2) the emergence of theatrical and visual performance; (3) transformations in sound, music, and amplification technology; (4) intergenerational transmission and changing community participation; and (5) contemporary contestation and negotiation surrounding the performance. Divergent interpretations were retained rather than reconciled into a single account, particularly when they reflected generational differences or disagreement over contemporary changes.

Data credibility was strengthened through source and method triangulation. Multiple triangulation enables qualitative researchers to compare different sources and forms of evidence in order to reduce dependence on a single interpretive perspective [14]. Interview accounts were therefore cross-checked against audiovisual interview recordings, direct field observations, performance footage, photographs, and documentary materials. Historical claims were also compared among informants with different degrees of direct experience. Accounts concerning Mamanda-related costumes, for example, were assessed alongside Ramli's recollections as a Mamanda practitioner and available visual documentation, while changes in the soundscape were compared with Safrizal's first-hand experience and Suhadana Putra's knowledge as a traditional musician. This source-sensitive procedure enabled the analysis to distinguish among direct observation, first-hand recollection, inherited oral history, and later interpretation, rather than treating all historical statements as having the same evidentiary status.

Ethical considerations were addressed by informing all participants about the purpose of the cultural documentation and the intended use of their contributions for documentation, academic analysis, and publication. Participants gave informed consent for the use and publication of their oral statements, transcribed information, names, photographs, and audiovisual recordings. To minimize researcher bias during observation and interpretation, the researchers maintained a non-participant observational position, distinguished descriptive field records from subsequent analytical interpretation, and cross-checked interpretations across interviews, audiovisual records, photographs, and direct observation. Contrasting or critical views were retained in the analysis rather than excluded in order to avoid presenting the transformation of *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* as a uniform or uncontested process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. From Sahur Wake-Up Practice to Communal Performance

The findings indicate that the earliest remembered form of *Bagarakan* was not yet the elaborate *Pengantin Sahur* performance known today. Rather, it functioned primarily as a practical activity carried out by village youth to wake residents for sahur during Ramadan. In Ahmadi's oral-historical account, young men who had finished Qur'anic recitation at the mosque remained awake until early morning and walked through the village between approximately 1:00 and 3:00 a.m., calling out and striking available objects to wake residents. This was particularly important before alarm clocks and other electronic means of regulating time became widely available. Because Ahmadi was not an eyewitness to the early post-independence period, his testimony is treated as local oral-historical knowledge rather than direct evidence of the practice's precise beginning.

This distinction is important because previous studies generally begin with the already recognizable form of *Pengantin Sahur*. Misdawati and Yusuf identify 1981 as an important

point in its emergence in Pulau Palas and describe a procession involving bridal figures and musical accompaniment [1]. Dewantara et al. similarly discuss it as a developed Ramadan performance involving a bridal couple and later festival activities [5]. The present field data suggest, however, that the history of the named *Pengantin Sahur* performance should be distinguished from an older and less theatrical *bagarakan* practice whose primary purpose was to wake residents for the pre-dawn meal.

Ramli's recollections provide stronger first-hand evidence for this earlier communal stage. As a senior Mamanda artist who participated in *Bagarakan* during his youth, he recalled:

“When I was young in Pulau Palas, I also joined in waking people for sahur. We did not only go around our own village; sometimes we also went to neighboring villages” (Ramli, interview on 31 March 2024, translated by the authors).

His account shows that the activity extended beyond a single settlement and was reproduced through collective and inter-village participation. It was therefore already more than an individual act of waking people; it was a mobile communal practice performed in public space.

The material form of this earlier practice was closely connected to everyday village life. Improvised sound-producing objects were used because specialized musical equipment was not yet readily available. Field accounts refer to household objects, agricultural tools, metal implements, and drums used as percussion. Suhadana Putra, a traditional musician, recalled that communities used locally accessible materials, including oil drums around warehouses and metal implements associated with agricultural work. These objects were significant not only for their simplicity but also for their functional relationship to the practice: sound was produced primarily to travel through the village and wake sleeping residents.

The evidence therefore suggests that the earliest remembered *Bagarakan* was primarily acoustic and utilitarian rather than visual and theatrical. Its effectiveness depended on collective sound production, movement through village space, and the ability to reach households during the pre-dawn hours. At this stage, there is no clear evidence in the oral-historical accounts that bride-and-groom figures were an essential component. This distinction addresses a chronological problem in previous descriptions of *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur*, where the earlier wake-up practice and the later bridal performance have sometimes been treated as though they were historically identical.

Nevertheless, the earlier practice already contained characteristics that enabled later transformation. It was repetitive, collective, mobile, and publicly observable. Participants moved through shared village space and produced coordinated sound for residents waiting to be awakened. Performance studies allow such repeated and socially framed actions to be understood as potentially performative even when they do not originate as formal theatre [15]. This helps explain how a practical communal activity could gradually become an event that was watched, anticipated, and aesthetically elaborated. Comparable Indonesian cases likewise show that cultural performance may emerge through the selective reworking of prior social practices rather than through the preservation of an unchanged original [7][8].

The contrast with the contemporary form makes this transformation particularly clear. Field observation in 2024 showed costumed bridal figures, make-up, decorated carts, amplified music, and spectators who remained awake partly to watch the procession. Some residents specifically waited to see the bridal figures, while groups constructed decorated platforms resembling wedding stages. This differs markedly from the remembered earlier form, in which sound production and village circulation were directed primarily toward waking residents.

The first major finding of this study, therefore, is that the transformation of *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* did not begin with technological modernization alone. It involved an earlier shift in the social character of the activity—from a practical *sahur* wake-up mechanism toward a recurring communal event that increasingly attracted attention beyond its original function. The older acoustic practice provided the organizational and social basis for later theatricalization, but the evidence does not support treating the fully developed *Pengantin Sahur* performance as an unchanged tradition dating directly from the early post-independence period. Rather, its contemporary form is better understood as the outcome of successive layers of transformation.

3.2. Theatricalizing *Bagarakan*: Mamanda, Costume, and the *Pengantin* Figures

The transformation of *Bagarakan* from an acoustic practice for waking residents into a cultural performance became increasingly visible as theatrical elements were incorporated into the procession. Field evidence indicates that Mamanda, a traditional Banjar theatre form, played an important role in this development. Rather than treating the *pengantin* figures as an original element of *Bagarakan* or simply explaining them as a product of Banjar-Malay assimilation, this study identifies a more specific performance genealogy in which Mamanda costumes and character conventions gradually shaped the visual form of *Bagarakan*.

Ramli's testimony provides the clearest evidence of this process. As a senior Mamanda artist and former *Bagarakan* participant in Pulau Palas, he recalled that royal costumes representing a king and queen were later incorporated into *Bagarakan*:

"Mamanda costumes included the clothes of the king and queen. These were later also used in *Bagarakan*. Two men dressed as the king and queen and were paraded around the village." (Ramli, interview, 31 March 2024, translated by the authors).

According to Ramli, these costumed figures attracted residents' attention, and people began waiting for the procession to pass. The incorporation of theatrical costume therefore transformed *Bagarakan* from an activity that was primarily heard into an event that was also watched.

This finding is consistent with the performative character of Mamanda itself. Kleden-Probonegoro describes Mamanda as a Banjar theatre form closely connected to Banjarese social and cultural life [16]. Costume is also important in establishing character identity. Arifah et al. show that royal costume functions as a visual sign through which the role and status of the king become recognizable in performance [17]. In the context of *Bagarakan*, the adoption of king-queen costumes was therefore not merely decorative borrowing; it introduced a theatrical vocabulary through which characters could be visually recognized by the community.

Field data also provide a social context for why both characters were performed by men. *Bagarakan* took place between approximately 1:00 and 3:00 a.m., with participants moving around the village under conditions in which street lighting was still limited. In Ahmadi's oral-historical account, women's participation in such late-night activities was considered socially inappropriate at the time:

"In the past, it was taboo for women to be outside the house late at night. Moreover, street lighting was very limited at that time. So, to attract attention, one of the men was dressed as a woman." (Ahmadi, interview, 2024, translated by the authors).

This account suggests that male performance of the female figure should be situated within the social conditions and timing of *Bagarakan*, rather than understood solely as a cross-gender performance practice. In Ahmadi's oral-historical account, prevailing social norms limited women's participation during the pre-dawn hours, while dressing one male participant as a woman also created visual attraction within the procession. The paired figures can therefore be understood as reflecting an intersection between Mamanda theatrical conventions, the conditions under which *Bagarakan* was performed, and local social norms.

Ramli's account further connects these paired figures with the king-queen roles of Mamanda. Over time, this visual pairing came to be understood and presented as the *pengantin* figures that became characteristic of *Pengantin Sahur*. However, the available oral-historical and documentary evidence does not identify a specific individual or exact year when the king-queen pairing began to be referred to or understood as *pengantin*. Rather, the evidence points to a gradual reframing of theatrical characters within a new performance context.



Figure 1. From Mamanda Theatrical Costume to the *Pengantin* Figures in *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur*

(left) Mamanda performers in Pulau Palas, in an undated archival photograph from Ramli's private collection;

(right) contemporary *Pengantin Sahur* performers during the 2024 field documentation.

[Source: (left) Ramli's private collection, reproduced with his permission; (right) authors' field documentation, 2024]

The contemporary experience of Ikbal Yuanel demonstrates the continuation of this performance convention. Having performed the female bridal role, Ikbal explained:

"Bagarakan is entertainment for the community. I joined because this tradition has been passed down through generations, and I wanted to help enliven it." (Ikbal Yuanel, interview, 31 March 2024, translated by the authors).

Ikbal's account indicates that the female bridal role is understood as a performed character and a form of participation in community entertainment rather than as an expression of the performer's personal gender identity. In contemporary practice, however, this convention has increasingly encountered changing social and religious interpretations concerning male performers portraying female characters, as discussed in the following section.

These findings demonstrate that the emergence of the *pengantin* figures resulted from a process of theatricalization, rather than merely the addition of a cultural symbol. Mamanda provided costumes and character conventions that strengthened the visual dimension of the procession, while the social conditions surrounding *Bagarakan* also shaped its pattern of

performance. Together, these developments transformed residents from people who were primarily awakened by sound into spectators who actively anticipated the procession. This pattern resonates with other Indonesian cases in which inherited performative resources are reformulated within new artistic contexts [8]. Mamanda thus provided an important bridge between functional communal activity and the development of *Bagarakan* as theatrical spectacle.

3.3. From *Tetabuhan* to *Bass*: Sonic and Technological Transformation

The transformation of *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* was not limited to its visual and theatrical dimensions. A second major transformation occurred in its sonic organization. Field evidence shows a gradual movement from improvised percussion (*tetabuhan*) to megaphones, recorded music, and eventually large amplified sound systems dominated by strong bass and popular musical repertoires. This change altered not only the technology of sound production but also its spatial reach, intensity, and the way residents experienced the procession during the pre-dawn hours of Ramadan.

In the earlier remembered form of *Bagarakan*, sound was produced through objects embedded in everyday village life. Suhadana Putra, a traditional musician, explained that communities used whatever materials were locally available, including oil or copra drums, agricultural implements, and pieces of metal. As he recalled, “People used whatever *tetabuhan* were available in the village to wake residents for sahur” (Suhadana Putra, interview, translated by the authors). The early acoustic character of *Bagarakan* was therefore closely related to the community’s material environment rather than specialized musical technology.

Safrizal’s testimony provides the clearest first-hand chronology of subsequent technological change. Having participated in *Bagarakan* since childhood, he recalled:

“When I was young, *Bagarakan* was still simple. We used *tetabuhan* to wake people for sahur. Later came the toa, then sound systems. Now the sound is much louder, with strong bass and music including DJ or what people here call house music” (Safrizal, interview on 30 March 2024, translated by the authors).

His recollection shows that sonic transformation involved more than replacing one instrument with another; it marked a shift from collectively produced percussion to electronically reproduced and amplified sound.



Figure 2. From *Tetabuhan* to Amplified Sound: Changing Sonic Technologies in *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur*. (left) Reconstruction of earlier *tetabuhan* practice; (right) contemporary large amplified sound system.

[Source: Field documentation, 2024]

This shift can be understood through the concept of the soundscape. Schafer's formulation directs attention to the sonic environment through which people experience and interpret place [18], while LaBelle's concept of acoustic territories emphasizes that sound occupies shared space and can generate both connection and tension [19]. More recent research extends this perspective by showing that sound can function as a form of cultural representation [20] and that festival soundscapes shape relationships among music, spatial movement, participants, and community experience [21]. In *Bagarakan*, the transition from *tetabuhan* to amplified bass similarly transformed the sonic environment: earlier percussion depended on participants' physical effort and locally available objects, whereas amplified systems enabled recorded music to travel through village streets with far greater intensity.

The timing of this acoustic occupation is particularly significant because *Bagarakan* takes place during the pre-dawn hours of Ramadan. The practice is not a fixed sacred ritual; historically, its function was practical and communal. Nevertheless, its sound operates within a religiously marked temporal environment. Eisenlohr shows how mediated sound and public listening participate in Muslim sonic atmospheres [22]. *Bagarakan* differs from explicitly devotional practices because amplified performances increasingly include dangdut, DJ, and house-style music. Technological change has therefore altered not only volume but also the content and affective quality of the Ramadan soundscape.

The growing presence of popular music also connects *Bagarakan* with broader Indonesian entertainment cultures. Aryandari shows how dangdut koplo circulates through regional adaptation and digital mediation [23], while Raditya emphasizes that technology is actively negotiated within musical practice rather than functioning as a neutral delivery system [24]. These perspectives help explain why bass-oriented popular music in *Bagarakan* is not merely background sound but reshapes the atmosphere and audience expectations surrounding the procession.

Field evidence, however, does not support an overly harmonious interpretation of amplification. The project field documentation recorded critical responses to large sound systems and loud popular music during Ramadan, which some observers regarded as inconsistent with the religious atmosphere of the month. Since religious authorities were not systematically included among the study participants, these responses should not be interpreted as representing a general position among religious leaders. Rather, the evidence points to competing community interpretations of whether bass-heavy popular music is appropriate within the social and religious setting of Ramadan.

Local institutional contexts further demonstrate that sonic change has become part of the negotiation over which elements of *Bagarakan* should remain recognizable. In government-facilitated activities observed during the study, earlier forms of *tetabuhan* using agricultural and household objects were presented alongside contemporary amplified sound. This evidence does not establish a specific government policy to revive *tetabuhan*. Rather, it shows that institutional settings can provide space for older sonic elements to be selectively reintroduced within contemporary performances. Sonic transformation is therefore not a linear movement from "traditional" to "modern": as amplification becomes increasingly prominent, earlier *tetabuhan* can simultaneously be reframed as markers of historical continuity and local distinctiveness.

The movement from *tetabuhan* to bass therefore represents more than technological modernization. It changes how *Bagarakan* occupies public space and how different community members believe it should sound. The procession may still wake residents for *sahur*, but its sound now simultaneously produces entertainment, spectacle, and debate over social and religious appropriateness. Sonic transformation is thus integral to the broader shift from practical wake-up activity to cultural performance.

3.4. From Communal Necessity to Entertainment and Festival Performance

Beyond changes in costume and sound, *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* has also undergone a broader diversification of its social functions and forms of organization. Entertainment, spectatorship, creative expression, and heritage representation now coexist with its historical function of waking residents for *sahur*.

Electronic devices have reduced residents' practical dependence on communal wake-up activities. Nevertheless, *Bagarakan* continues to be performed. Field observations in 2024 showed that some residents remained awake to watch the procession, particularly the bridal figures and visual displays. Performers' accounts also indicate that *Bagarakan* is now understood as a form of community entertainment and an intergenerationally transmitted tradition. Decorated carts, bridal costumes, make-up, and sound systems further demonstrate that the procession is organized not only to be heard but also to be seen and enjoyed.

This shift is also evident in the organization of contemporary performances. Safrizal explained that in Sungai Luar, *Bagarakan* is no longer performed every night during Ramadan but is generally organized periodically, partly because of practical and financial considerations. Community performances continue to depend on voluntary donations, collective labor, and borrowed equipment, including sound systems. His account indicates that reciprocity and collective organization remain important even as the performance becomes more elaborate. The transformation of *Bagarakan* should therefore not be understood simply as a process of commercialization.

Alongside these community-based performances, festivalization has emerged as another organizational form. The observations on 29 and 30 March 2024 were conducted in connection with the Festival *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* organized by the Indragiri Hilir Regency Government. Festival settings can reorganize cultural practices around public visibility, spectatorship, institutional objectives, and image-making [25]. More recent research further demonstrates that festivalization is associated with changing modes of cultural curation, audience experience, and institutional presentation [26]. Studies of traditional performance similarly show that presenting inherited cultural practices to contemporary audiences involves negotiation between local cultural frameworks and new modes of presentation [27]. In *Bagarakan*, however, festivalization did not initiate the transformation itself. Theatrical figures, spectatorship, amplified sound, and popular music had already developed before formal government packaging. Festivalization therefore consolidated and publicly reframed an existing movement toward cultural performance rather than creating that transformation from the outset.



Figure 3. *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* as a Government-Organized Festival Performance. *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* presented as part of a public cultural event organized by the Indragiri Hilir Regency Government.
Source: Field documentation, 2024.

Rifani and Susanti [6] similarly note that festival and competition formats have altered the performers, equipment, timing, and orientation of *Pengantin Sahur*. The present findings place these changes within a longer transformation in which theatricalization, spectatorship, and amplified sound had already developed before formal festival organization.

This institutional shift also has a limited economic dimension. During *Bagarakan* events, some residents operate roadside stalls, while make-up, costume rental, and sound-system services may generate income. Some groups borrow equipment, whereas those with greater financial resources may rent larger sound systems. These practices indicate partial marketization rather than full commercialization: economic activity has developed around the performance without replacing its communal organization. Comparable festival research likewise shows that cultural preservation and commodification can coexist rather than operate as mutually exclusive processes [28].

Government involvement further positions *Bagarakan* within processes of heritage production. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that heritage-making involves not only preservation but also the selection, framing, and display of cultural practices [29]. Recent studies similarly show that public heritage presentation can introduce new relationships among performance, entertainment, tourism, market interests, and authenticity [30][31]. Although *Bagarakan* differs from these cases, they help explain how institutional visibility can influence which elements are publicly represented as heritage.

Community participation therefore remains crucial. Heritage governance requires meaningful community involvement rather than relying solely on top-down management [32]. Recent empirical research further indicates that active community participation strengthens cultural knowledge, awareness, and the sustainability of living heritage [33]. In *Bagarakan*, youth groups, residents, cultural practitioners, service providers, and local government officials all participate, although they may assign different priorities to entertainment, authenticity, and heritage representation. The transformation of *Bagarakan* is therefore better understood as functional diversification rather than functional replacement. Waking residents for *sahur* remains its historical reference, while

spectatorship, entertainment, limited economic activity, festival organization, and heritage recognition have become increasingly significant.

3.5. Contesting Tradition: Religion, Gender, Generation, and Heritage Negotiation

The persistence of *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* does not rest on a single consensus about how the tradition should be performed. Field evidence instead reveals differing interpretations of continuity, propriety, and authenticity, particularly concerning male performers portraying female bridal roles, the use of amplified popular music during Ramadan, and institutional involvement in determining which elements should represent *Bagarakan* as cultural heritage.

These findings complicate the assumption that transformation is a harmonious process in which new elements are simply added while “core values” remain unchanged. Digital circulation, changing religious sensibilities, generational differences, and government involvement have introduced new audiences and standards of judgment. Field documentation records criticism of both the male-male bridal pairing and the use of powerful amplified sound during Ramadan. Some community members regard these practices as inconsistent with contemporary expectations regarding gender roles or the religious atmosphere of Ramadan. Research on digital heritage similarly shows that online visibility can broaden access while also exposing local cultural practices to new pressures of representation and external evaluation [10].

The bridal roles provide one of the clearest examples. Earlier performance conventions involved two male performers occupying differentiated king-queen and later groom-bride roles. Comparative scholarship on Asian theatre cautions against interpreting cross-gender performance primarily through performers’ personal gender or sexual identities [34]. Ikbal Yuanel, who had performed the female bridal role, described his participation as a voluntary effort to enliven the tradition and entertain the community. However, the social interpretation of this role has changed. In Pulau Palas, some groups now use male-female pairs who are spouses or close relatives in order to reduce controversy.



Figure 4. Contemporary Variations in the Bridal Pairing of *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur*. (left) Two male performers portraying the bridal pair in Sungai Luar; (right) a male-female bridal pair in Pulau Palas.

[Source: Field documentation, 2024]

These differences reveal two ways of understanding continuity. The first is formal continuity, which prioritizes maintaining recognizable conventions inherited from earlier generations. The second is social continuity, which allows contested elements to be modified so that the practice remains acceptable within changing social, moral, and religious expectations. Smith’s understanding of heritage as a cultural process is useful here because heritage involves decisions about which elements of the past are considered

significant, how they should be represented, and who has the authority to define legitimate continuity [35]. In *Bagarakan*, the coexistence of different bridal configurations demonstrates that continuity is therefore not simply inherited; it is actively produced through choices about what should remain recognizable and what may be adjusted. Recent heritage research similarly indicates that authenticity should not always be understood as the preservation of an immutable cultural form. Rather, authenticity may itself be negotiated as communities respond to changing social expectations and new contexts of cultural presentation [36].

Ramli's position illustrates this tension. As a senior practitioner and Mamanda artist, he objected to changing the traditional bridal configuration because he regarded it as a distinctive feature of the performance form he had known. His recollection should not be treated as evidence that all community members or religious figures in earlier periods accepted the practice. Rather, his account shows how a senior practitioner constructs historical legitimacy through experience and memory. For Ramli, authenticity is associated with continuity with an experienced form, whereas supporters of newer configurations understand continuity through adaptation.

The generational pattern is more complex than an opposition between older defenders of tradition and younger advocates of modernization. Younger performers such as Ikbal participate because they regard *Bagarakan* as an inherited practice worth continuing. Cultural transmission depends on younger generations' access to cultural knowledge and opportunities for participation [9]. It is therefore an active process in which practices, technologies, memories, and expectations are reassembled under changing social conditions. Recent research likewise shows that communities actively interpret the authenticity, identity, and contemporary meaning of intangible cultural heritage [37].

Institutionalization also shapes this negotiation by influencing which elements become publicly visible as cultural heritage. Government-facilitated festivals and documentation increase the visibility of *Bagarakan*, while some activities have also featured the selective reintroduction of earlier *tetabuhan*. This does not establish the existence of a specific government policy to revive older percussion. Rather, it demonstrates how institutional contexts can provide particular historical elements with renewed public visibility [38]. Institutionalization therefore does more than sustain an existing practice; it participates in framing which elements are displayed as representative of the tradition.

Sound constitutes another site of negotiation. As discussed above, amplified popular music has generated differing views about appropriate sonic practice during Ramadan, while earlier *tetabuhan* have been selectively reintroduced in some activities. This contrast demonstrates how technological change can transform previously ordinary sound-producing objects into markers of historical continuity and local distinctiveness.

These differences reflect what Tunbridge and Ashworth describe as heritage dissonance, in which groups assign different values to the same cultural past [39]. In *Bagarakan*, this appears less as open conflict than as differing views concerning bridal performers, amplified music, *tetabuhan*, and public presentation. Comparable festival research likewise shows that transformation can coexist with continuing negotiation over authenticity, cultural value, and sustainability [40].

The coexistence of male-male and male-female bridal pairings, *tetabuhan* and amplified music, and community-based and festival formats demonstrates that the transformation of *Bagarakan* is not linear. Instead, its persistence is produced through negotiated continuity: communities repeatedly determine which elements may change, which should remain recognizable, and which become contested. Recent research similarly shows that tensions

between innovation and authenticity can become sites of community agency rather than simply evidence of cultural loss [41]. In *Bagarakan*, religious considerations prompt adjustments, gender roles are reinterpreted, senior practitioners defend remembered conventions, younger generations assign new meanings to participation, and institutions frame particular elements as heritage. Contestation is therefore one of the mechanisms through which continuity is produced. The movement from a *sahur* wake-up practice to cultural performance remains an ongoing process in which legitimate and meaningful forms of performance continue to be negotiated.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the transformation of *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* in Indragiri Hilir is best understood not as a simple process of cultural assimilation or technological modernization, but as a gradual shift from a practical Ramadan wake-up activity into a layered cultural performance. The earliest remembered form relied primarily on collective movement, vocal calls, and improvised tetabuhan to wake residents for sahur. Over time, Mamanda-related costumes and character conventions were incorporated into *Bagarakan*, contributing to the emergence of visually distinctive king-queen and later bride-groom figures. Megaphones, recorded music, amplified sound systems, and bass-heavy popular music subsequently changed the acoustic scale and entertainment character of the procession. Festivalization and governmental involvement further repositioned *Bagarakan* as a publicly displayed form of cultural heritage involving limited economic activity and institutional heritage representation. These transformations have not produced a single consensual form. Differences over gendered performer roles, amplified music during Ramadan, older percussion, and festival presentation demonstrate that continuity is negotiated among performers, audiences, generations, religious expectations, technology, and heritage institutions. The persistence of *Bagarakan* therefore lies not in preserving an unchanged cultural core but in accommodating adaptation, disagreement, and selective reinterpretation.

The study is limited by its ethnographic scope in two villages, the relatively short fieldwork period during Ramadan 2024, and its reliance on five key informants whose accounts represent different degrees of first-hand experience and retrospective oral memory. It also did not systematically examine the perspectives of religious leaders, local business actors, or wider audiences, nor did it measure the economic consequences of festivalization and sound-system use. Future research should therefore investigate the local economy surrounding sound-system rental, bridal costumes, make-up services, vendors, and festival activities; conduct comparative soundscape studies on how amplified music is negotiated within religious festivals and Ramadan public spaces; and examine more closely how different generations and religious actors interpret gendered performance, sonic intensity, and cultural authenticity. Longer-term and comparative ethnographic research could also clarify how digital circulation, government heritage policy, and commercialization reshape the meanings and ownership of *Bagarakan Pengantin Sahur* beyond Pulau Palas and Sungai Luar.

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