

Power Behind Powerlessness

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Power Behind Powerlessness: The Myth of *Konco Wingking* in Javanese Culture

Abstract

Javanese people have long recognized the myth of *konco wingking*. This myth is inextricably linked to women's home roles as wives and mothers. This myth derives from the patriarchal ideology and feudal past that dominated Javanese culture for a long period. Because of this misconception, Javanese women have been oppressed and treated unfairly. A cultural heritage artwork known as Damar Kurung may be seen in Gresik, East Java. This tradition was passed down to an elderly artist named Masmundari from the 16th century. The Damar Kurung offer an overview of the function of women in the formation of Javanese society. This research will use visual ethnography to investigate the gender dynamics and ideology that pertain to Javanese women. There were two categories of data collected: visual data (observation and documentation) and verbal data (interviews and observation). Javanese women are not passive partners, according to Gramsci's ideology theory and Foucault's definition of power. Instead, with their feminine traits, calmness and willingness to suffer, Javanese women gain equality with men. Gender relations in Javanese society are realised in an asymmetrical relationship.

Keywords:

Damar Kurung; Javanese; Myth; Traditional Painting; Women

Introduction

Modernisation is slowly making local beliefs extinct. However, Javanese people still hold on to local traditions and myths. Myths in Javanese culture are oral traditions that contain moral values and social agreements. Myths are further strengthened by local beliefs (Piliang, 2008, p. 108). Izzuddin defines myth as folklore about the narrative of a community's cultural history (2022, p. 2). Meanwhile, Endraswara defines myth as a symbolic narrative that tells real and or fictional events about an incident, stories of the gods, divine powers and human identity (2003, p. 193). Agreeing with these statements, Widiyanto mentions that myth is an oral tradition that is unique to Indonesian culture, especially Javanese culture. Although myths are oral narratives, they contain moral values and are considered as collective ideals and social imagination of a certain group of people (Wibowo, 2021, p. 1).

Endraswara (2008) identifies four aspects of Javanese myths: Firstly, they are sacrosanct and associated with individuals who are respected and believed to have supernatural powers. Therefore, rituals and offerings are necessary to pay homage to them. Secondly, myths exist

only within the imaginary realm and not in the reality of everyday Javanese life. Thirdly, many myths in Java refer to significant natural events or occurrences. Javanese culture holds that myths are not bound by human logic and therefore their accuracy is not considered relevant. While these myths are often seen as strange, fictitious, and absurd, they still serve as a reference point for truth. In order to establish a cohesive and structured socio-cultural system and preserve Javanese knowledge, communal oral and inherited narratives are interwoven to produce myths in Javanese culture.

There exist many interpretations and characterizations of Javanese philosophical principles regarding femininity. The construct of a Javanese woman's identity is intrinsically linked to her interpersonal interactions and expressive qualities. This intergenerational transmission establishes a stable ideological framework. The idea of being a Javanese woman can be observed within various art forms, such as ancient literary works and *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) performances. In Javanese culture, a *Konco wingking* is a term used to refer to a woman who heavily depends on her husband for her welfare. However, it is important to note that Javanese women were not always portrayed as helpless, foolish, or naive. In Islam, both men and women are regarded as servants of God and caliphs on earth (Suhandjati, 2018, p. 195), obligating them to be accountable for their responsibilities before God. As caliphs, both men and women bear responsibility for promoting the prosperity of the earth and ensuring its sustainability.

The myth of *konco wingking* has been assimilated into Javanese society. The phrase "*wong lanang nang ngarep, wong wedok nang mburi*" (men in front, women in back) is often associated with physical space, whereby the front represents the public sphere and the back denotes the private sphere. One element of prior scholarship's marginalisation of gender has been the assumption that women living in rural areas during historical periods were socially isolated and primarily confined to their domestic spaces. This belief could have contributed to their being placed into a subordinate role in particular oral storytelling traditions (Magnúsdóttir, 2021, p. 98). The domestic sphere encompasses household responsibilities, including cooking, child-rearing, serving the husband, cleaning the house, and other domestic duties. This symbolic division of labour has endured in Javanese society to this day. The Javanese

acknowledge and uphold this differentiation. Javanese individuals learn to comprehend and fulfill their unique responsibilities through familial life. Females are predominantly allocated domestic responsibilities while males carry out public duties such as economics, politics, education, and religion. This division has been a central factor contributing to the belief in the superiority of men, leading to women being deemed inferior. This has occurred in the past and continues to persist today. The division of roles is often reinforced by various ideas and articles that prescribe and encourage women to remain in the home.

Sexual identity is a complicated phenomenon related to different aspects of human social life, such as identity, gender relations, gender roles, reproduction, family, marriage, etc. Gender identity is constructed based on particular views, beliefs and values which are often dominant views or values derived from influential sources, including religion, politics, economics, education, culture and the arts (Takovski, 2019, p. 150). Art can unveil the presence of myths. In Javanese culture, mythology is often presented in symbolic and aesthetic artworks. These stories are often used to teach moral lessons or to clarify specific phenomena. Although some people may consider these myths to be untrue or superstitious, they continue to be a significant aspect of Javanese society. According to Piliang (2018), it is necessary to include ideology when discussing mythology. If a myth is a narrative that employs language and is linked to rhetoric, then ideology is the significance encompassed within it (Piliang, 2018, p. 121). Javanese individuals are recognized as *wong Jawa nggone semu*, which implies that their looks are brimming with *sasmita* (indications/signs). Various obscure things are revealed through distinct signs or symbols, including traditional painting.

Traditional paintings in Indonesia adhere to specific patterns and regulations, and are passed down through generations across various materials such as paper, fabric, leather, glass, leaves and wood. These paintings often embody intellectual, spiritual, social, economic, and cultural principles alongside depictions of religious or communal values. The uniqueness and distinctiveness of traditional Indonesian painting is prominently notable. Many studies have been carried out on traditional paintings, including ones from Bali, specifically the *Kamasan* and *Pita Maha* paintings. Nevertheless, traditional paintings from Yogyakarta (Central Java), Cirebon (West Java), and Gresik (East Java) can also be encountered beyond Bali.

Based on historical literature, Damar Kurung painting was fashioned by diverse anonymous Gresik individuals as a customary art form. These individuals were not artists who were aware of the techniques and principles of aesthetics. The anonymous painters were ordinary individuals from Kroman Village, Lumpur Village, a slum coastal hamlet near the northern edge of Gresik, East Java. Kiai Untung, Sinom, Masriatun, Masehi, and Masmundari, who are still close family members, were among them. However, only Masmundari (see Fig. 1) was recognised as the maestro of Damar Kurung until her passing. Masmundari was the final female artist to continuously preserve Damar Kurung until she passed away in 2005 at over 100 years old. Masmundari does not sketch before painting. She creates her artwork by observing social phenomena such as market activities, *slametan* (traditional ceremonies), weddings, circumcisions, *padusan* (visiting ancestral graves), *macapatan* (traditional Javanese poetry), Independence Day celebration carnivals, Quran recitations, and other public activities that reflect the local culture of Gresik.

On 4th October 2017, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia declared Damar Kurung as a part of the nation's intangible cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage refers to folklore, concepts, technologies, methods, behaviors, traditional knowledge and conventions. A cultural legacy is an object that is considered a common property by a community, even if only certain people with specified qualifications are the creators or perpetrators (Sedyawati, 2003). Since then, Damar Kurung has become a spokesperson not only for the Masmundari people but also for the culture of Gresik and Java as a whole. Works of art are often considered part of the national heritage, some artists are declared national artists, and certain works are included in the national art canon. These procedures reflect professional and public understandings of art history and are usually retrospective. However, the discursive fields of the present and the past precede the creation of works of art. Such creations are always embedded in a particular socio-political environment, discussed in a critical manner, and can be supported or hindered by institutional, academic, and bureaucratic apparatuses. As a participating element, each artwork creates, challenges and comments on the aesthetic tendencies of its time. Each artwork functions in relation to their personality and part of their work (Kencis, 2015, p. 55).

The portrayal of women's activities is just one of the many themes in these paintings. The Damar Kurung paintings by Masmundari depict women in various aspects of their lives, including household chores such as cooking, producing batik, and taking care of children. Masmundari's artwork acknowledges her role as a wife and mother. Masmundari portrayed women's public activities, especially in market trading, in their paintings. The artworks depict women not only as buyers but also as sellers. The commodities traded in the Damar Kurung paintings include clothing, food, snacks, *tuak* or *legen* (traditional alcoholic drink), milkfish, and handcraft goods, which demonstrate that they are the result of women's household work rather than a factory enterprise.

Damar Kurung paintings gained popularity during the period spanning the 1990s and 2000s, a time when the authoritarian government of President Soeharto and the New Order regime were in power. It is notable that freedom of speech, politics, and artistic expression were all impeded during this period, with prescriptive prescriptions enforced by the New Order government on the conduct and demeanor of women (Tickamyer, 2012, p. 157-159). This ideology, known as Ibuism, stressed the role of women in their capacity as exemplary wives and homemakers in contributing to the advancement and development of the country (Suryakusuma, 2010, p. 89-99). As the state promoted a similar ideology, the myth of *Konco wingking* found greater acceptance and assimilation.

This ideology, known as Ibuism (ibu means mother), stressed the role of women in their capacity as exemplary wives and homemakers in contributing to the advancement and development of the country (Suryakusuma, 2010, p. 89-99). Paintings often portray women as objects from a male perspective. This is not the case with Masmundari's Damar Kurung paintings, as the subject of the painting is based on the women's own perspectives. The uniqueness of Damar Kurung paintings inspires this study to disclose and describe the gender ideology at work behind Masmundari's visual representation of Damar Kurung paintings. How does the myth of *konco wingking* influence Javanese women's gender relationships with men and women? Does the myth of Konco Wingking cause oppression, weakness, and control over Javanese women, or is it a means by which they obtain power?

Methods

The aim of this study is to investigate how the *Konco wingking* myth operates within Javanese society in relation to gender, and to ascertain its true meaning within Javanese philosophy. Visual ethnography is the method employed to attain the desired outcomes, with data being divided into two categories: visual and verbal. Visual data was collected by documenting Damar Kurung paintings created by Masmundari in the 1990s and 2000s from museums, galleries and collectors. The selection of the visual data was based on its relevance to the examined myth. Additional visual data was obtained from individuals depicting the lives of Gresik people in the 1990s and 2000s. Verbal data was collected through observations and interviews. To obtain thorough and precise analysis results, it is essential to combine both verbal and visual data. Creswell (2010) provides a definition of ethnography as "a research technique aimed at exploring a cultural group in their natural environment for a specific time frame, to gather data through observations, interviews, and primary sources." The significance of images in research processes arises from their widespread existence in our imagination, technologies, texts, and dialogues, as well as their direct impact on people's personalities, narratives, lifestyles, cultures, and societies. Images in research initiate dialogues that may trigger memories of events, which are an inevitable aspect of the environment in which we reside and study (Barrantes, 2019, p. 2). Ethnography is an appropriate method as it recognises each person as an individual who actively searches for meaning, often conveying it symbolically both as individuals and in groups to give their lives significance. This process can be unique and dissimilar to that of other groups (Lena, 2019). Additionally, since Indonesian society is diverse, knowledge is not homogenised. Ethnography is a well-suited method for conducting research in which subjective evaluations are to be avoided; it enables exploration of the distinctive views that each tribe holds regarding gender relationships (Pink, 2020). Additionally, it is essential to introduce technical term abbreviations when first used. Ethnography affords sufficient scope for exposure to varied experiences of Javanese women while being comprehensive and logically structured. The data analysis results are then utilised to comprehend the importance of the *Konco wingking* myth in Javanese culture, as portrayed in Damar Kurung paintings via the behaviours, values and practices. This is in line with Antonio Gramsci's ideology theory and Foucault's power.

Results and Discussion

Women, Slametan and The Rewang Tradition

Javanese individuals employ diverse symbols to amplify and thereby materialize a phenomenon during rituals. Actions are frequently taken without explicit motives, necessitating the use of additional rituals. Due to these cultural beliefs, rituals have been passed down from one generation to the next (Wibowo, 2021, p. 1). Geertz presents *slametan* as a Javanese religious ceremony, belonging to the *abangan* group, who primarily work as farmers and adhere to animism (1991, p. 64). This short and simple ritual is extensive and intricate in its practices of traditional medicine, magic, and the supernatural. Despite its apparent informality, the execution of *slametan* is remarkably formal and serves to support the mystical and social unity of the community's participants. In addition to the living members of the family and community, the spirits of ancestors, local spirits, gods, and goddesses also gather at the *slametan* to cooperate and provide assistance. The purpose of the *slametan* is to diminish ambiguity, anxiety, and strife. The ritual of *slametan* represents religious beliefs through symbolic expression, with a lasting objective. In Javanese society, symbols take the form of offerings and sacrifices related to the community. Wibowo (2021, p. 2) notes that Javanese people use symbols unconsciously, reflecting their cultural values. The people interpret the ritual, which involves many myths, as a religious symbol. It should not be regarded as a mere complement to a *slametan*.

Javanese individuals hold *slametan* in response to various occasions that require celebration or sanctification, including conception, birth, circumcision, marriage, harvest, illness, changing names, rejecting bad luck, nightmares, launching a business, moving house, and political aspirations. Depending on the purpose of the event, a specific meal menu is served during the *slametan*. Islamic prayers and speeches in *Kromo Inggil* (the highest level of Javanese) are recited during the event. When the sun has set or immediately following the *maghrib* prayer, a *slametan* is often conducted. A *slametan* can only be held on days specified in the Javanese calendar.

Based on the analysis and categorisation of Damar Kurung paintings, it is noted that the theme of traditional rituals (*slametan*) is often depicted by Masmundari. In Javanese culture, *slametan* is connected to numerous stages of human life, including the *mitoni* ceremony (marking the 7th month of pregnancy), the child birth ceremony (*brokohan* or *tingkepan*), circumcision, marriage, and death. Geertz argues that *slametan*, a part of traditional rituals, in fact unifies the Javanese people's entire communal existence (1991, p. 65).

The *Tingkepan* Masmundari was created on paper in 2003 using a combination of watercolours and markers for an exhibition at Bentara Budaya Jakarta in 2005. This serves as one of the sources of inspiration for the *Slametan* ritual, which is held to pray for pregnant women who are entering their seventh month of pregnancy. During *Tingkepan*, prayers and praises are offered to ensure the health and safety of the mother and baby until birth, protecting them from diseases and disasters. *Tingkepan* is not held arbitrarily; it must occur on a propitious day as determined by the Javanese calendar and rules. There are numerous events that colour this ritual, but the focal point that endures is a communal prayer followed by a feast. The painting represents both the *tingkepan* and *brokohan* settings. *Brokohan* is a traditional ritual undertaken immediately following a baby's birth. Attended by relatives and immediate family, it expresses gratitude for the arrival of the baby and seeks protection for its future.

Masmundari's *Tingkepan* painting has dimensions of 40 x 50 cm and depicts three episodes. Each scene unfolds within an interior, with triangular or trapezoidal figures crowning each segment, reminiscent of the design of a house's roof. The lowest sequence depicts the bustling environment surrounding the preparation of *slametan*, where six adult women dominate the cooking process, assisted by young boys and girls. The adult female figures are depicted preparing food, including grinding materials using a *cobek* and *ulekan* (is a set of two simple tools used in the Javanese kitchen to prepare ingredients or substances by crushing and grinding them into a fine paste or powder. The *cobek* is characteristically a bowl, usually made of hard stone such as granite), stirring dishes on the pan and stove, carrying food ingredients on their heads (*nyunggi*), and shredding coconut. Cooking is typically carried out in the kitchen or at a location provided by the host for communal cooking (usually on a neighbor's terrace or in the backyard of a sufficiently spacious property). In this sequence, a range of

kitchen appliances is visible, such as pots, cauldrons, rice cookers, oil burners, ground stoves, baskets, fish, and fruits. *Rewang* or *mbiyodo* are terms used in Javanese culture to denote the communal cooking method for preparing *slametan*.

All figures in the middle series comprise of women, including 8 adults and one youngster. The atmosphere appears calmer and cleaner in the middle sequence in comparison to the bottom sequence. Several women are seated in front of a table, serving food and drinks. Other female figures can be spotted standing on both sides, presumably as guests arriving and departing. Meanwhile, several women are seen cradling and tending to a newborn on a bed. Meanwhile, the uppermost segment has two distinct activities: females on the right side are preparing dishes while males wearing pecis and sarongs are sitting in a solemn position of prayer facing a *tumpeng* (is an Indonesian cone-shaped dish of rice with side dishes of vegetables and meat, which originated in the Javanese cuisine of Indonesia). *Tumpeng*, a meal that epitomizes *slametan* in Javanese culture, symbolizes harmony and gratitude. A man is standing and serving food/drinks on a tray. After the prayer, the dishes prepared by the women are consumed by the males, as per the Gresik tradition. The *slametan tingkepan* painting's overall appearance is mainly women-dominated, with only 5 male figures being present in the prayer scene.

The execution of *slametan* is split into two phases: preparation and prayer. The preparation stage occurs in advance of the actual *slametan*, taking place during the day or over a period of several hours or days. Masmundari's Damar Kurung artwork features predominantly female figures within a *slametan* setting. The femininely-inclined preparation stage features two stages, namely the front and back stages (Permanadeli, 2015, p. 101). In contrast, the prayer phase is typically conducted only by men. The 'rear preparation' stage involves laborious and challenging tasks such as the slaughter of goats, the shredding of coconuts, cooking rice on rudimentary cookers, and stirring food in sizable pots.

The tradition of voluntarily assisting the host in preparing for a *slametan* ritual with the help of neighbours, relatives or other women is known as *mbiyodo* or *rewang* in Javanese culture (see Fig. 2). The Javanese term "*rewang*" signifies a helpful act. The purpose of *rewang* is to

support the host in arranging the food and beverages for *slametan*, which involves a significant amount of culinary preparation. The ceremony preparation usually lasts for only a few days. This passage examines the social participation and solidarity of Javanese women through the traditional practice of *rewang*. This ritual represents the principles of *gotong royong* (communal work) and is carried out deliberately in accordance with Javanese culture. Typically, *rewang* is performed in the kitchen or a communal space, such as a temporary portable kitchen set up for a *slametan* event. These gatherings are typically held in the backyard of homes or even in a neighbour's yard. The preparation kitchen, known as the 'public kitchen,' is not a space where Javanese women are excluded from developing their identity as women. Through connecting with their social environment in this traditional ceremony setting, women build many things, including their female identity. Cooking, as one of the domestic tasks in Javanese culture, is not an insignificant job. Cooking and preparing food can have spiritual significance as it is a means of aiding others. Additionally, it can assist the husband in performing religious activities, such as prayers (Suhandjati, 2018, p. 210).

The *rewang* practice carried out by women in preparation for *slametan* not only regulates the social behaviour of its members but also offers practical and economic benefits. The *rewang* tradition allows the community to complete the work swiftly and accurately, relieving the host. This is because family members and neighbours have assisted the host in holding the *slametan*, and have been willing to do so. Additionally, the *rewang* tradition enhances family ties, both between families and among individuals in the community. The *rewang* tradition is characterized by a shared commitment to egalitarianism and cosmopolitanism; there is no sense of either the host exploiting neighbors/relatives or the reverse, as all participants have the same aim as well as mindset, which is concord and harmony. Nevertheless, the *rewang* tradition has declined progressively in recent years, due to the expanded availability of catering services, which provide food to customers quickly and efficiently. The use of such services may save both time and space for the host. As a consequence, the host, as the event organiser, should be advised to not depend on relatives or neighbours for assistance. *Slametan* has shifted from being publicly orientated with family nuances to being more of a private and individual affair without any third-party involvement.

The prayer stage is carried out by all male territorial members of the community, including neighbors and close relatives living near the host (see Fig. 3). If the women are in the *mburi* (back), the men will sit cross-legged on mats in the *ngarepan* (front), performing the ceremony, singing prayers, and eating the meals provided by the women. Similar to the concepts of *yin* and *yang*, *ngarepan* and *mburi*, the male praying stage is dependent on the preparatory stage carried out by women. Without the careful arrangement by women, males would be unable to offer their prayers to God. Women exert authority over the vertical relationship between man and God during traditional ceremonies.

Javanese Women: Between Work and Household

Masmundari's paintings depict women engaged in household chores such as cooking, batik-making, and childcare. It appears that Masmundari does not reject her role as a wife and mother. Nevertheless, her other artworks show women occupying public spaces, specifically in market trading. The painting of "*Pasar Malam*" illustrates typical Gresik commodities, including milkfish, *pudak* (traditional snack), *tuak* or *legen* (traditional alcoholic drinks), local dishes, cakes, *batik*, and Damar Kurung handicrafts. Women are portrayed in the painting as both buyers and sellers. The numerous goods depicted in Damar Kurung paintings show that these goods are not the product of factory industry, but of women's domestic labour.

The concept of professional employment and salaries, typically found in the industrial and office sectors, is not applicable to the work of women in Damar Kurung paintings who are involved in food production, batik making, crafts, fish vending, and market trading. This is because their labor lacks a defined production timeframe, does not necessitate a specific level of intelligence or skill proficiency, and has no fixed wage scale. As a result, work for Javanese women is not outcome-driven but rather centred on maintaining involvement in society and creating social networks.

In Javanese culture, work has more importance as a symbol of social engagement than as a means of production. When work is viewed as a social activity, the mental images of labour that can be formed become quite varied. Women are expected to be capable and willing to exert effort in all areas. The household is the focal point of informal economic activity, as

depicted in Damar Kurung's artwork. Therefore, women's social duties are essentially an extension of their domestic responsibilities. Initially, informal work was neglected in the calculation of national income owing to its informality and inability to be identified as part of the production system's economic structure. However, currently, the Indonesian economy has advanced and grown due to this unstructured sector. There have been efforts towards developing the creative industries that are entirely home-run, resulting in progress. As a result, it can be deduced that the influence of women's domestic roles extends to the wider social community.

Women's studies that analyse gender relations from a Western perspective usually classify the six categories of gender injustice that affect women as: (1) economic marginalisation, which is the process of becoming economically impoverished; (2) subordination, which is the assumption of insignificance in political decisions; (3) the formation of women stereotypes, which happens through negative labelling; (4) violence against women; (5) disproportionate workload, which is longer and more burdensome; and (6) gender inequality in employment (Fakih, 2007, p. 12-24).

The perpetuation of patriarchal ideologies is most typically achieved through the application of stereotypes to women, portraying them as only capable of performing domestic duties (Budiman, 2013, p. 79-92). Domestic labour is frequently viewed as non-employment because it does not produce economic income, rendering it unproductive work. As a consequence, women working in the public sector often have the added responsibility of household chores such as cooking, preparing family meals, looking after their partners and children, and other domestic duties. Women in the public sector are required to simultaneously perform two tasks.

Early studies on Javanese society and women's roles, such as Hildred Geertz's *The Javanese Family* (1961) and Robert Jay's *Javanese Villagers* (1969), demonstrate the significance of Javanese women in the home, family and dominant parenting style. Furthermore, Reid (1988), Alisjahbana (1961), Koentjaraningrat (1967), Willner (1961) and additional research papers emphasise the elevated status of women in Javanese society. In contrast with women in other

developing countries, Javanese women allegedly have more substantial financial self-sufficiency, the autonomy to work outside of their homes, higher societal status, and more considerable access to resources. These benefits are attributed to their unique bilateral family structure, shared beliefs that male and female roles complement each other, women's active participation in the economy, and their management of the household economy.

The ultimate aim of Javanese spiritual life is to achieve the union between humanity and God (*Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*). This objective is accomplished through daily inner-growth practices aimed at reaching a state of balance and harmony. Once a Javanese woman acknowledges that harmony is an essential aspect of existence, she attains the pinnacle of internal growth. Achieving a state of psychological calmness and tranquility is highly valued by Javanese people. For Javanese women, achieving their goals is indicated by a harmonious unity of experience between all household and public elements. Compatibility between elements and the absence of friction are key factors.

Masmundari's painting, Damar Kurung, portrays the activities of women both outdoors, such as in the market and by the sea, as well as indoors. This highlights the presence of women's movements within the household as well. The interaction that women engage in with males in their daily lives within the family space reflects Javanese consciousness. The household serves as the pivotal center of Javanese women's activities. The household serves as the primary context in which Javanese women come to recognize their role in society, primarily as wives, mothers and workers. Based on observations of social phenomena in Gresik, it is evident that women are responsible for both household economic resources and community resources.

According to Koentjaraningrat and Geertz (1976, p. 66), Javanese women play a substantial role in family and domestic matters. According to Denys Lombard, women have a pivotal role in Javanese culture. Their influence, though often concealed, is paramount and drives the growth of both the household and wider society (1990, p. 92-95). Despite being perceived to occupy a 'back seat' position within the home, their contributions have a notable effect on the wellbeing of the family and community. As per Denys Lombard's (1990, p. 92-95) research,

it is reasonable to view women in Javanese society as puppeteers (*dalang*) who control the puppet (*wayang kulit*) plot on the stage. Javanese women have historically held a notable and prominent position, even in backstage settings where they hold considerable authority. Rogers noted that in Javanese society, male dominance is limited to ideology and dissipates when confronted with the truth, thus restricting male power to myth. Rogers suggested that male authority in Javanese society is primarily limited to ideology, as it fails in the face of reality. Conversely, Javanese women possess authentic and practical dominance vis-à-vis men (Sullivan, 1991, p. 76-77).

Women within the family may attend to their husbands and children while simultaneously earning wages, emphasising that domestic duties do not restrict women. The household is not a separate entity from the world in which women create social networks to broaden their sphere of relationships. The household is not a separate entity from the world in which women create social networks to broaden their sphere of relationships. Domestic work extends beyond the household. It serves as a link within society's social chain. The presence of Javanese women in the household is only considered in relation to what exists outside of it. The home's openness and flexibility imply that women are free to move around actively and have the same opportunities and capacity as men to select their place and build their social space in society. However, women must prioritize and determine which areas they should be in and when. So, Masmundari's depiction of women's roles in Damar Kurung paintings implies the necessity of a balance between domestic tasks and societal responsibilities in society. The Javanese household can be viewed as a scale. To maintain balance, women merely have to add or subtract weight from one side.

In this context, it is established that a woman can engage in social activities only if she fulfils her obligations towards her family. This stands in opposition to Western culture, where the household is viewed as a private domain that is separated from the public sphere. Conversely, in Javanese society, the household represents a domestic space that is not isolated from the social sphere, but rather integrated. For Javanese women, the family represents more than just a personal retreat that separates individuals from their community.

The establishment of gender roles is inextricably linked to the cultural norms of a society. Typically, role distribution is determined by a person's sex, which is commonly linked to physical and psychological attributes. Women are considered to have weaker physical and mental constitutions than men, and are therefore traditionally positioned to take on household roles. In the agricultural industry, women are often assigned roles deemed "feminine" which demand precision and patience, and are perceived as not too physically demanding. This can lead to lower wages for female workers (Anggaunitakirantika, 2022, p. 2). However, the visual painting data's findings emphasise that female employment is a means for Javanese women to achieve financial independence without having to leave the domestic realm. While working is necessary to meet economic demands, it does not require women to relinquish their position in the household. Ultimately, employed Javanese women have dual roles to fulfil. The building of this dual responsibility is validated in Javanese culture as a representation of social achievement rather than a burden or even a form of oppression.

Dual Roles of Javanese Women are Not a Double Burden

We can gain insight into the socio-cultural conditions of Gresik through the examination of Damar Kurung paintings. Masmundari's depiction of the roles of Javanese women in Damar Kurung illustrates their efforts to enhance neighbourhood and household economies. How do Javanese women successfully manage their dual responsibilities in both the domestic and societal spheres? The busy and industrious behaviour of Javanese women in both domestic and non-domestic arenas allow them to multitask effectively. Working enables women to achieve financial independence, facilitating the creation of a world that acknowledges the need for change while not alienating Javanese women from their traditional roles as wives and mothers.

The impacts of female dominance among Javanese women are not confined to the household, but may extend to society at large, creating a network of women's empowerment (see Fig. 5). Women collaborate to exert their influence, building a robust and effective network. In this context, Rogers argues that male dominance ultimately loses its grip on ideology; when faced with real-world challenges, it becomes a mere fantasy. In contrast, female dominance serves more practical and tangible functions (Sullivan, 1991, p. 76-77). White and Hastuti in Sullivan

suggest that women possess a hidden strength and power in decision-making about ideology and the practical world, while males rely on their public domination (1991, p. 78). However, Javanese women may still employ their femininity to sway decision-making.

Gender relations are often intertwined with the establishment of a distinct division of labour in the allocation of social roles and responsibilities between men and women. In such arrangements, women typically assume the responsibility for domestic tasks and maintenance of the home, including the role of motherhood (Çötök, 2023, p. 182). Women's involvement in the productive and economic sectors has a lengthy history in Javanese society. Notably, women dominated in the field of trade, especially in the market. As demonstrated, it is apparent that work in the public arena and labour in the domestic sphere are not necessarily contrasting worlds. Interestingly, in today's context, many domestic tasks that were typically seen as trivial present great economic opportunities. For example, cooking activities can become culinary businesses, while the fashion, makeup, and beauty industry in general is undoubtedly highly profitable nowadays. These examples illustrate that domestic work, which has been historically undervalued, possesses significant value. Work activities for Javanese women in their everyday lives do not detract from their cultural responsibilities. Although such activities demand additional duties and time management, working merely extends the domain of the family, which has traditionally formed the foundation of the female realm. Working does not allow Javanese women to avoid home duties or to establish an autonomous, public workspace within their culture. Instead, Javanese women enhance their strength as homemakers by working and earning a living. Their decision to work is an initiative to maintain balance in the Javanese world.

The role of Javanese women is vital in maintaining balance and harmony in both the family and society. The household is the core of Javanese society, where women play a significant role. Their stillness and tranquility represent their inner attitude towards *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, the main objective of Javanese spirituality. The concepts outlined above illustrate that Javanese women execute their roles in society with full social consciousness, rather than merely playing a part as other individuals do. Women are able to influence the public sphere through their contributions in the domestic sphere. Javanese women are often

considered to have a double burden due to their roles in the domestic and public spheres. The concept of double burden given to Javanese women has a negative connotation, as if women are burdened with extra responsibilities. In fact, the two areas controlled by women provide opportunities for women to develop initiative and rationality so that all their obligations can be fulfilled properly and in balance (Anggaunitakiranantika, 2022, p. 10). Javanese women dominate household affairs while being actively involved in the social community.

Power Behind Powerlessness: The Myth of *Konco Wingking* For Javanese Women

Discourse and knowledge can be wielded as instruments of power, according to Foucault. Power and knowledge are intertwined and cannot be disentangled, in his view. Gender and sexuality have been subjected to "disciplining" and "normalizing" processes, which rely on knowledge and authority. Although commonly perceived as neutral, knowledge also carries power, as Foucault has shown (Mateo, 2022). Social institutions, ranging from the family to the state, strive to maintain power by means of knowledge. Hence, the struggle is not solely against exploitation and control by capital, but also against subjugation, which subordinates an individual.

Javanese society, owing to its feudal origins, has historically been hierarchically structured and is often viewed as undemocratic. One reason for this is that Javanese culture has a legacy of absolute, centralized monarchy that is not egalitarian. Western civilization and Javanese society have different perspectives on power. Anderson states that, in Western civilization, power is the ability to impose one's will on others and to compel subordinate individuals/groups to perform the actions requested by the ruler. Power is an intangible concept that can only become tangible through cause-and-effect relationships (1982, p. 177).

Wealth, social standing, official positions, military might, and numbers of people can all be sources of power. However, in contrast to Eastern countries, which have four qualities of power, the first is that power is tangible, not enmeshed in social interactions, and has its own reality of existence. Power is thought to be derived from boundless energy (from God), which is difficult to comprehend and enigmatic. Secondly, power only comes from one source, namely God, and is homogenous and undivided. Thirdly, the same amount of power exists

in nature at all times. Consequently, power becomes centralised in a single individual or area. Fourthly, as power does not stem from personal connections, its moral implications are absent, and its legitimacy is beyond question.

The individual in power must persuade their subordinates that they have been divinely and spiritually chosen, in line with the Eastern concept of power. The power holder will establish their legitimacy to exercise complete authority and demand unconditional obedience from subordinate individuals or groups. This concept of power is deeply rooted in Javanese society's collective consciousness. In Javanese culture, male dominance is attributed to a naturally defined position and therefore considered inherently dominant, and not open to challenge. Javanese cultural norms view gender distinctions as spiritual, rather than biological. The nature of men and women is commonly believed to be inherent, leading to inevitable societal roles.

Gender ideology in Javanese feudal-aristocratic culture has undergone modifications and redefinitions. However, the fundamental ideals of gender ideology are still present in Javanese culture today. Domestic and home duties are presumed to be the primary responsibilities of women, with work in the manufacturing sector or the public realm regarded as secondary duties. Indeed, Damar Kurung paintings exhibit the potency and vigour of femininity within Javanese women, which is influenced by their domestic responsibilities.

Gender inequality is not a universal aspect of Javanese culture, as men and women follow long-standing traditions that have been widely accepted, and no group feels undervalued by the other. Both genders have equal opportunities to express themselves, and there is no superiority in productive activities. In Javanese culture, gender roles are not strictly separated between home and public since women exhibit strength in both areas. This is especially evident in Javanese societies of farmers, fishermen, and traders, where women effectively balance their domestic duties with earning a living.

Manunggaling Kawula Gusti, the Javanese concept of life's purpose, is best embodied through a harmonic unity of experience, whereby elements become more harmonious with each other. The ability to abstain from fighting leads to greater concentration of one's power. The highest level of personal development is attained when an individual acknowledges and understands that life must align with other life forms. One can achieve this by accessing the truth directly from God without any intermediaries, and by being liberated from external influences. For Javanese women to ascend to positions of authority, they must control the complexities of ego and physical desires, confronting them head-on until they no longer impede harmony. Javanese women occupy a central place in society, displaying both poise and preparedness to take on domestic and public roles. The text is already well-written and coherent, and requires no further improvement.

The dominance of Javanese women is founded on the concepts of procreation, welfare, and structure. The serenity and affluence exuded by a woman playing the role of a mother extends to all members of the household, thereby ensuring stability. Man is advised not to be attached to the world but to detach his heart from it. Man is advised not to be attached to the world but to detach his heart from it. This entails breaking away from his desires and self-centeredness, while refraining from isolation from the outside world. As a result, he is capable of fulfilling his duties to contribute to the maintenance of civilization. The Javanese woman acknowledges life's challenges, yet utilises them to attain spiritual liberation and union with God.

In the past, many women with remarkable psychological and physical fortitude resided in Gresik. They were accustomed to strenuous physical labour, such as farming, carrying stones and trekking long distances while transporting *dodolan* (goods). As Masmundari discovered when she started working as a stone labourer in her old age and regularly fasted (even before creating Damar Kurung paintings), the restraint of external desires aims to develop the will and maintain internal equilibrium, allowing for behaviour in accordance with the requirements of societal concord. That Javanese women in Masmundari's Damar Kurung paintings can attain power through the use of their femininity, composure, and ability to endure hardships rather than through masculine, active, or progressive qualities.

Conclusion

To comprehend the status and function of women in Javanese society, cultural and historical context must be examined. An incomplete and inaccurate analysis of the position and function of Javanese women may occur without taking into account the cultural and historical background. Masmundari conveys her thoughts on the strength, status, and function of Javanese women, specifically as wives and mothers, through her painting Damar Kurung. Due to its feudal origins, Javanese culture is often seen as undemocratic. This is because the Javanese cultural heritage is characterized by centralization and a lack of egalitarianism. Acknowledging the concept of gender equality can be challenging in this context. However, it is worth noting that gender equality does exist to some extent in Javanese society, even though it places both women and men in an imbalanced and unequal position. According to Western feminism, Javanese culture is deemed unequal for genders. Conversely, in Javanese context, power can arise from weakness, oppression, and non-uniform dealings within male-female interactions. In Javanese society, women who undertake the roles of wives and mothers are the pivot of both the family and the home, and their function has an impact on the society. The skill to regulate one's ego is vital to retain inner balance and to act in a manner that fosters societal harmony. Through Masmundari's Damar Kurung paintings, Javanese women exhibit that they can attain power without being aggressive, masculine, or progressive. Instead, they can draw on their femininity, serenity, and ability to exercise restraint during challenging situations.

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