

***Transformation of Javanese Women's Role From Domestic to Artistic:
Interpretation of Kothèkan Lesung***

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The IAFOR International Conference on Arts & Humanities in Hawaii 2025
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

There is a paradoxical phenomenon related to the role of women in Javanese culture. First, the domestic role found in many proverbs is sexism, and second, the artistic role is evidenced by the presence of female musicians on strategic artistic industrial stages. This article aims to demonstrate the significant transformation in the cultural role of Javanese women that will be explored through an interpretation of *kothèkan lesung*. This research uses an interpretative qualitative method. Qualitative data was obtained from fieldwork studies on the *kothèkan lesung* performance in Turi Village, Magetan, East Java. Qualitative data collection was conducted by using techniques such as observation, interviews, documentation, and literature study. Data analysis was carried out using an interpretation approach. The expansion, a form of transformation of roles that occur can be divided into three phases, namely: 1) domestic role 2) aesthetic domestic role, and 3) artistic role. The result shows that *kothèkan lesung* which is a part of domestic roles "Masak, Macak, Manak" is a manifestation of artistic concepts. Thus, the domestic role of Javanese women in household life can also be translated into other forms such as "Composing, Decorating, and Creating." It is not surprising that nowadays there are emerging female Javanese musicians who are adorning the performance stage in Indonesia and even on the international scene, as culturally, this artistic role has been constructed in such a way.

Keywords: *kothèkan lesung*, Transformation, Domestic Role, Artistic Role, Javanese Woman

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Introduction

"*Masak, macak, manak*" are the ideal demands for Javanese women. These three moral demands represent the boundaries of domestic roles that are constructed by a patriarchal culture and transmitted from generation to generation (Imama & Reyes, 2021; Sinar, 2021). *Masak* means that women should be able to cook, prepare food, or ensure food security within the family. *Macak* means that women should be able to beautify themselves. *Manak* means that women should be able to bear children. The ideal domestic role of "*Masak, macak, manak*" still serves as a strong guiding principle for a segment of Javanese society.

One of the domestic roles of Javanese women is cooking. In supporting their domestic role, Javanese women use mortars and pestles. The husking tool is used by mothers who work during the harvest season in the fields to separate the rice from its husk. Subsequently, the rice that has been separated from its husk is winnowed using a winnowing basket, sieve, or flat basket until it becomes clean rice, ready to be cooked. The mortar is used daily by village mothers in Java, so the image of the mortar is closely tied to the existence of Javanese women themselves. The connection between the mortar and Javanese women can still be traced through the folklore of Dewi Nawang Wulan or Jaka Tarub (Primamona, 2020a).

The existence of mortar as a support for agriculture has become increasingly rare since its function has been replaced by rice mills. Additionally, the decline of the mortar is also due to the availability of superior rice seeds, the availability of fertilizers, advanced irrigation systems, and increasingly sophisticated agricultural technology. The transformation of the mortar as a tool for processing food into a musical instrument that produces sound has logical consequences for the domestic role of Javanese women. This transformation of the mortar's function results in the expansion of the role of Javanese women, from a domestic role to an artistic role. The romanticism of the past is revived in a performance referred to by the Javanese community as *kothèkan lesung*. Additionally, the *kothèkan lesung* is also indicated as an important artifact record for the history of *karawitan* music in Java. This means that the artistic role of Javanese women is not limited to simple forms of artistic performances but also extends to forms of art with more sophisticated orchestration (*rawit*).

The potential for the expansion of Javanese women's roles in the artistic realm is indeed constrained by certain norms. Javanese *karawitan* has so far presented women in the position of *sindhen*, who are given the same territorial limits as a wife at home, as "*kanca wingking*". In a performance of shadow puppetry, for example, the phrase "*Swargo nunut neroko kathut*" is revealed by a puppeteer. The sentence serves as an affirmation of the cultural position of *sindhen*, representing Javanese wives or women in general within the Javanese cultural landscape. The restrictions through the Javanese proverb are also found in the case of Nida Ria—a group of *qasidah* musicians consisting entirely of women. They released a song in 1992 on the album Vol. 7 titled: "*Swargo Nunut Neroko Katut*." Other example is how women are domesticated in popular culture as an object in the word phrase "*Blonjo Dasteran*" in a Javanese pop song "*Mendung Tanpo Udan*" (Dewi & Primasti, 2022). From this phenomenon, the inferiority of Javanese women can be understood. Inferiority is directed towards Javanese women through the construction of domestic roles and artistic roles. However, these forms of inferiority are also challenged by the presence of female Javanese musicians' figures in the current music scene, such as Desi Kartika Sari, Dewi Persik, Endah Laras, Fitri Carlina, Mustika Woro, Nella Kharisma, Niken Salindri, Peni Candra Rini, Sahita Group, Soimah Pancawati, Via Vallen, Waldjinah, Yati Pesek, and soon.

Through the opening presentation, it can be understood that there is a paradoxical phenomenon related to the role of women in Javanese culture. First, the domestic role is found in many proverbs, and second, the artistic role is evidenced by the presence of female musicians on strategic artistic stages. This article aims to demonstrate the significant transformation in the role of Javanese women. The paradoxical role of women in Javanese cultural traditions will be explored through an interpretation of the art of *kothèkan lesung*.

Transformation or change can occur in all fields, including social, cultural, and art (Astara, 2011; Fakihi, 2013; Gunawan, 2018; Ihsan, 2022; Laksmiwati & Ayu, 2011; Orlova, 2019; Schüler, 2013; Sharonova, 2019; Subiyantoro, 2019; Ulianovskii, 2016; Voss, 2021; Wahyudy, 2019; Watts, 2012). Based on the literature review, in the process of transformation, there are factors of replacement or change that can be observed from the change in form. Changes in form can be seen in both concrete and abstract forms. Besides, a few researchers focused on the musical concept, meaning, social interaction, and the function of music in social and cultural life in society (Aesijah, 2007; Astono, 2002; Fitria, 2019; Hanif, 2017; Kartomi, 2017; Laksono, 2020; Primamona, 2020c, 2022; Primamona & Nofer, 2019; Suharto, 2014; Wahyudiarto & Kusmayati, 2003; Wahyudy, 2019; Widiyanto, 2009; Yunita et al., 2019). There is no researcher focused on the social transformation of Javanese women. Therefore, this research focuses on examining the social transformation of domestic roles as dictated by the saying "*Masak, macak, manak*" into the artistic roles of Javanese women through the art of *kothèkan lesung*. Therefore, this research aims to: 1) describe the domestic role of "*Masak, macak, manak*" for Javanese women; 2) interpret the roles of Javanese women between the two domains of domestic and artistic within the art of *kothèkan lesung*; and 3) present the artistic potentials of the performative *kothèkan lesung*.

This research uses an interpretative qualitative method. Qualitative data was obtained from fieldwork studies on the *kothèkan lesung* object in Turi Village, Magetan Regency, East Java, in 2015, and continued from 2018 to 2019. The object of the *kothèkan lesung* is considered capable of representing other types of *lesung* art on the island of Java. Qualitative data collection was conducted using techniques such as observation, interviews, documentation, and literature study. The qualitative data obtained includes: events, statements, documentation, and references about the *kothèkan lesung*, as well as the growing phenomenon of performances and compositions by Javanese women. Data analysis was carried out using an interpretive approach. Interpretation is often referred to as an understanding that involves imagination, fantasy (intuition), creativity, or other forms of spiritual productivity (Ratna, 2010, pp. 306–307). Interpretation can also be seen as the dialectic of explanation and understanding (Ricoeur, 2012). Interpretation in this writing is used as a method to understand reality comprehensively.

Body

Expansion is a form of transformation. The expansion of domestic roles into artistic roles observed in Javanese women can be examined through the phenomenon of *kothèkan lesung* music. The expansion of roles that occur can be divided into three phases, namely: 1) domestic role; 2) aesthetic domestic role; and 3) artistic role.

Mortar and Domestic Role of Javanese Women

The domestic role within the patriarchal system for Javanese women is paradoxical, restricting movement yet simultaneously providing freedom for Javanese women. A woman's

personality is considered ideal if it meets the criteria stated in the proverb, "*Masak, Macak, Manak*" which means cooking, beautifying oneself, and giving birth or providing descendants. When a woman in Java can fulfill these three domestic tasks during her lifetime, she is considered complete or ideal. On the contrary, if one of those three domestic tasks is not performed, a negative social stigma will arise.

In Javanese cultural civilization, the existence of the mortar is very significant. The mortar does not only serve as a tool or device to support agrarian life but also becomes an accommodation for domestic roles or tasks. It helps Javanese women to actualize cultural and moral demands in society while carrying out their domestic tasks. Therefore, the contribution of the mortar can be traced in supporting domestic tasks "*Masak, Macak, Manak*" through the following interpretation.

The first domestic task is *masak*. *Masak* means that Javanese women can manage or concoct the results of hunting or farming into food that can be consumed by their families. The mortar and pestle serve as tools that can be used to process rice into cooked rice. The way it works is that the harvested rice is placed in the mortar and then pounded together by the village women until the husks and stalks are separated from the grains. The rice grains are then collected and winnowed to make them cleaner and free from chaff and pebbles. Once the rice is completely clean, it can be cooked into rice and served alongside side dishes and vegetables. These cooking skills are what women use to maintain food security within the family.

The second task is *macak*. This means that Javanese women can beautify themselves. The beautiful appearance of a woman can captivate and awaken the desires of men. Being beautiful has become a natural trait for women in Java. In a Javanese wedding ceremony, there is a ritual called *panyandra*, which is meant to express the beauty of the bride (Gunawan & Lubis, 2017; Kurwidaria, 2015; Utami & Lestari, 2021). An example of a woman's beauty expression is "*Alise nanggal sepisan (wulan tumanggal)*," which means her eyebrows are like the moon, and "*Irunge ngudhup mlathi (ngrunggi)*," which means her nose is sharp or pointed. "*Macak*" has a general meaning of beauty through its visual manifestations. "*Macak*" also has an aural manifestation through the beauty of sound or music. Javanese women can express beauty through the vocal form or sound of musical instrument performances. Javanese women who work daily as rice pounders have the potential to manifest aural beauty using the pestle as an instrument. The *gending* is played together, creating the beauty of intertwined sounds from a specific rhythmic pattern (Hanif, 2017; Jazimah, 2013; Miftahulasyad, 2018; Nagara & Machfauzia, 2020; Primamona, 2020c, 2022; Salim, 2014; Suharto, 2014; Suprpto & Kariadi, 2018). Javanese women are not only capable of beautifying themselves with makeup, but they also possess artistic skills or abilities that are quite appealing.

The third domestic task is *manak*. The word "*manak*" means to give birth or to have descendants. In their culture, married Javanese women are considered perfect if they can give birth, especially to male children. With these domestic duties, Javanese women are expected to have a fertile reproductive system. Good reproduction is at least related to physical and spiritual aspects. In the play of mortar, those physical and spiritual aspects can be accommodated. Playing the mortar is a physical activity that supports both physical and mental vitality. The birth or arrival of new life must also go through the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. So, there are several traditional repertoires related to the metaphor of the human reproductive system, such as the *gendings*: *Kupu Tarung*, *Bengah*

Singo, Asu Gancet, Bluluk Jeblok, Kutut Manggung, and Ngudang Anak. The *gending Kupu Tarung* is one of the repertoires that depicts sexual intercourse between a man and a woman, metaphorically represented through the butterfly (Primamona, 2020c).

Javanese Women Play a Performative Domestic Role in Kothèkan Lesung

In Turi Village, *kothèkan lesung* consists of five *panjak* (players), all of whom are women (Primamona, 2020c, 2020b). They are Saminem, Mainem, Sutirah, Rukmini, and Sainah. Just as batik is one of the cultural products of rice-farming communities, rich with strict rules in its creation and usage (Sumardjo, 2006, p. 183), so too is the connection between the mortar and women, as two identical pairs that cannot be separated. In several art artifacts from the pre-modern era, objects with the shape of hollow containers are always connoted with female characteristics (Sumardjo, 2006, p. 184). Women are constructed by culture for a role in social and cultural life (Primamona, 2020a, p. 29). In farming, men are responsible for preparing the land for planting and during the planting season, they manage irrigation, while women are tasked with sowing, planting, scaring away birds, and during the harvest season, women have the primary duty of transforming rice into rice grains (Peters et al., 2003, p. 159). The task of converting rice into rice grains certainly requires a tool or device, namely a mortar and pestle. In other words, the mortar and pestle represent all activities related to women.

Figure 1: Late Mainem as One of the *Panjak* (*Lesung* Musician) in Turi Village and Her *Lesung* and *Alu*



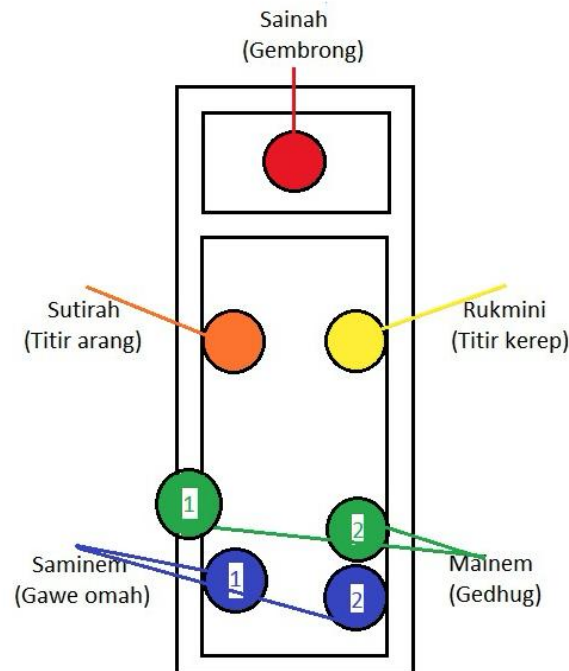
Source: Dea Lunny Primamona, 2021

The mortar is used by women as a tool for pounding rice into grains and also as a sound-producing instrument in various contexts. On one hand, the mortar tells the story of how difficult it is to be a Javanese woman who must manage the kitchen and food needs from the results of farming in the fields. On the other hand, the mortar conveys that women have the potential to be entertainers, stress relievers, and creators of beauty through the songs presented to accompany the men working in the fields.

Each role of the *panjak* (musician of the mortar) has different task tendencies. The role of the house worker is to open the song with an introduction or prelude. The role of the *titir arang* and *titir kêrêp* is to provide consistent beats after the initiation from the housework drummer. The role of the *gending* is to carry the melody in several typical rhythmic patterns. The role

of the *gêmborong* is to serve as a marker for the end in each section (usually on even counts or on the fourth count).

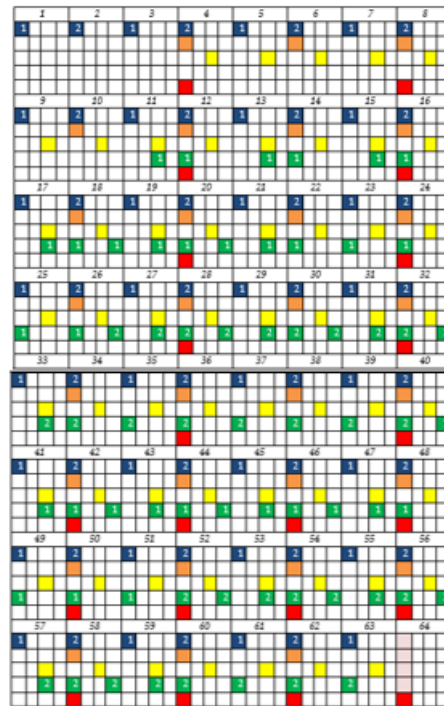
Figure 2: The Position of the Performers According to Their Roles in the "Wayangan" *Gending*



In essence, the concept of traditional music is very closely related to the concept of life in a natural way. The orientation of music reading is very contextual to its social and cultural conditions. Therefore, the character of each *panjak* role represents the tasks or social roles in society.

First, the role of the *gawe omah* (house builder) is associated with the activity of constructing a home. A house holds significant meaning for the Javanese people. In East Java (Jawa Mataraman: Pacitan, Trenggalek, Madiun, Tulungagung, Kediri, Blitar, Nganjuk, as well as the Tengger and Osing tribes), there is a tradition called *adeg omah* or establishing a house by considering auspicious days, with the hope of avoiding disasters and ensuring that the home brings good fortune (Sutarto, 2011, p. 1). In this context, "house" means a building for living in. In Javanese culture, a family is considered perfect if they have a house or a place to live. In Javanese philosophy, there are five requirements for a household to be considered perfect, namely: 1) *Garwa* meaning wife; 2) *Wisma* meaning house; 3) *Turangga* meaning horse or vehicle; 4) *Pusaka* meaning weapon or tool for self-defense; and 5) *Kukilo* meaning pet as the utmost source of joy. If contextualized within that philosophy, the role of the housekeeper is indeed vital. The task is to describe the character of a leader in society who is responsible for initiating the continuity of life. In the structure of music, the *panjak gawé omah* is considered the leader who initiates the song with a specific rhythmic pattern.

Figure 3: Tablature Notation of the *Gending* “Wayangan”



The blue colors in columns 1, 2, 3, and 4 in Figure 3 indicate the introductory part or opening played by the *panjak gawé omah*. The course of a *gending* greatly depends on the *wiwitan* or opening created by it.

Secondly, the act of *titir arang* and *titir kêrêp* is often associated with the activity of giving a *titir* or a reminder. *Titir* means a blow that is delivered continuously. *Titir* is usually associated with the use of a bamboo tube at neighborhood security posts by the community to signal something specific. There are different patterns of beats produced by the *kentongan*, for example, patterns to signal a fire, the theft of a four-legged animal (livestock theft), and natural emergency events. The role of the *panjak titir arang* and *titir kêrêp* illustrates the character of a guardian in society, tasked with maintaining security, harmony, and the continuity of life. In the play of mortar, there are two types of *titir*, each with different sound colors and playing intensities.

Third, the role of the *panjak gêdhug* who is responsible for giving the beats. *Gêdhug* means a knock, and in the transformation of the word *gegêdhug*, it means leadership (for criminal groups or troublemakers). *Gegêdhug* is the element that fosters the potential for the growth of a great power that is feared. The role of the *panjak gêdhug* depicts the character of someone who possesses great power and is feared within society. Mainem, who played a significant role in the gamelan group at that time, was the oldest player (now deceased) and was respected by the other players.

Lastly, the role of the *panjak gêmborong* is to provide the final marker of a *gatra* (four beats). *Gêmborong* has another term, *buntar*, which means the tip of a spear or the very end. The role of a *panjak gêmborong* illustrates the character of someone who becomes a policy maker within the community. This role is not present intensively, but its presence is very important to mark the end of each even count. Every role of the *panjak* must produce a sound that is loud or an ideal strong voice.

The existence of the roles of *panjak* in the musicality of mortar music illustrates the essential human duties of the Javanese people within a social order. This means that Javanese women are aware that within a group, they have unique roles and skills and make a proportional contribution to the group. In addition to relating to the depiction of social tasks within society, the number five and the position of the *panjak* in this ensemble represent the actualization of the *mancopat kalimo pancer* paradigm. *Mancopat kalimo pancer* illustrates the relationship between the singular and the plural, where the singular is the center and the plural is its followers (Sumardjo, 2006, p. 172). This pattern is believed to bring the transcendent (divine and spiritual) into the immanent world (material, worldly, and human) (Sumardjo, 2006, p. 172). The movement towards the center is also known by the term “*Manunggaling Kawulo Gusti*” (Sumardjo, 2006, p. 173). In the philosophy of the rice field culture, unity and harmony are the foundations for doing everything. In the context of musical readings, the concept of *jumengglung* is seen as representing unity, while the concept of *lontas* signifies the potential individual strength of each *panjak* that must coexist together to fulfill that unity. In conclusion, without the sounds produced by each player in the musical achievements of the mortar music, it will not be able to present the transcendent during a harmonious societal system.

The Artistic Role of Javanese Women

The indication of the artistic role of Javanese women can be traced through the lecture notes of Mas Ngabehi Warsapradongga in 1920. The content of the speech is about the origins of the traditional music ensemble (gamelan). Warsapradongga argues that everything in this world certainly has its history, and thus he divides these origins into four chapters (Sumarsam, 2002, p. 192). The chapters discussed are: 1) the origins of rhythm; 2) the origins of melody; 3) the origins of gamelan; and 4) the origins of *gending* (Sumarsam, 2002, p. 192). This article will briefly discuss several important points that demonstrate an extraordinary development of artistic abilities.

Tatabuhan, according to Warsapradongga, is understood as: 1) sounds from nature, such as the trickling of water, the chirping of birds, the croaking of frogs during rain, and so on; and 2) originating from people who are pounding rice in the fields (Sumarsam, 2002, pp. 196–197). This opinion is quite interesting. He believes that food is the pillar of life, so the efforts of farming and pounding rice with a mortar are a means of sustaining life (Sumarsam, 2002, pp. 197–198). He explains that the consequence of pounding rice is the production of colorful sounds, some low, some medium, and some high (Sumarsam, 2002, p. 199). The uneven thickness of the mortar's wooden surface results in different sounds (Sumarsam, 2002, p. 199). Thicker surfaces result in higher sounds, while thinner surfaces lead to lower sounds (Sumarsam, 2002, p. 200). In line with Warsapradongga's opinion, in organology, it is explained that the thinner a surface is, the more vibrations it will produce. The number of vibrations that occur in one second is called frequency. Thus, the thinner a cross-section is, the more vibrations will be, and the higher the frequency and pitch produced. The different sound colors from the ensemble create a pleasing rhythmic pattern known as *kothèkan* (Sumarsam, 2002, p. 201). Based on Rahayu Supanggah, *kothèkan* refers to a beating technique complementarities between the two similar *ricikan* (instruments) or more at a distance wasp of half beat, but based on Abdul Rahman and friends, the technique can also be played with one instrument by one player only (Rachman et al., 2021; Supanggah, 2009). The mortar is played with the technique of some *panjaks*. The mortar and pestle used for enjoyment is featured in several social activities, such as during the celebration of the full moon in the harvest season and preparations for significant wedding events.

According to Warsapradongga's notes, the *kothèkan lesung* is one of the proofs of the artistic awareness of Javanese women. Javanese women understand the difference between high and low tones. The awareness of the differences in pitch inspired the birth of scales (Sumarsam, 2002, p. 205). Warsapradongga believes that harmony is created when the high and low sounds are recognized and arranged from the lowest to the highest and vice versa, from the highest to the lowest (Sumarsam, 2002, p. 206). The tuning system develops to the point of awareness of distance. Thus, according to Warsapradongga, the tuning system where the distance between each note remains is called *sléndrò*, and the tuning system that results from notes inserted into the *sléndrò* tuning is referred to as *pélag* (good) or *pelog* (Sumarsam, 2002, pp. 207–209). The presence of the barrel is increasingly developing and captivating. A song or melody is formed from the existing scale (Sumarsam, 2002, p. 2013). In this note, it is even written that "...the gamelan also draws inspiration from the mortar..." (Sumarsam, 2002, p. 213). Gamelan is a manifestation of the vernacular of its community. Initially, gamelan was made from materials that were easily found in nature, such as wood and bamboo, arranged according to the scales that had already been discovered. (Sumarsam, 2002, p. 2015). Thus, the *gambang*, *suling*, *gumbeng*, and *angklung* were formed (Sumarsam, 2002, p. 214). Gamelan serves as a good medium for songs or *sekar*. After that, the idea arose to create gamelan not only from materials easily found in nature, leading to the creation of gamelan made from *gongsa* (derived from the word *gasa*, a combination of the words copper and *rejasa*) (Sumarsam, 2002, pp. 214–215).). This gamelan is named gamelan *gongsa* (Sumarsam, 2002, p. 215). Then, more and more songs or compositions are created and accommodated by this gamelan. The increasing number of melodies is then arranged in such a way within a rhythm that a composition is formed (Sumarsam, 2002, pp. 218–219).

The notes from Warsapradongga's lecture illustrate that the mortars used to support domestic roles can stimulate the birth and development of Javanese musicality. Although it is not recorded whether a specific gender performed all these extraordinary things, this account proves that Javanese women have a close connection to artistic potential. As stated at the beginning, the presence of mortars is inherent in all activities performed by women. Thus, artistic sound activities are also carried out by Javanese women.

The process of developing Javanese women's musicality occurs in a back-and-forth manner or is not linear, so it does not completely erase previous traces. This is marked by the discovery of the term *gending* in the *kothèkan lesung* in Turi Village, Magetan (D. L. Primamona, 2020b, 2020c). According to Warsapradongga, *gending* is the final stage of the long development scheme of percussion, so *gending* in the *kothèkan lesung* can be assumed to be "taking a shortcut." The existence of eleven *gending lesung* in Turi Village, Magetan, such as *Dulènthèng*, *Kupu Tarung*, *Grajagan*, *Kutut Manggung*, *Slénthak/Sémplak Jaran*, *Ngudang Anak*, *Bléndrong*, *Titir Ilang*, *Bluluk Jêblog*, *Njojrog*, *Gambang*, *Madhung*, and *Wayangan* shows no substantial similarities with gamelan pieces. The existence of eleven or even more *gending lesung* proves the artistic productivity of Javanese women. The number of works that arise from composing is a manifestation of the amount of food ingredients provided in the cooking activity. The beauty that emerges from artistic activities is on par with the beauty or attractiveness produced by the act of self-make-up. All of those points to symbols of fertility, both physical and spiritual.

Conclusion

"*Masak, Macak, Manak*," is a manifestation of artistic concepts, thus the domestic role of Javanese women in household life can also be translated into other forms such as

"Composing, Decorating, and Creating." It is not surprising that nowadays there are emerging female Javanese composers who are adorning the performance stage in Indonesia and even on the international scene, as culturally, this artistic role has been constructed in such a way.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the promotor and co-promotor team, for the technical assistance. Thank you Puslapdik (Pusat Layanan Pembiayaan Pendidikan) and LPDP (Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan) for the financial material support.

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