

The Power of Javanese Women in Damar Kurung Painting

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Abstract. The Damar Kurung painting by Masmundari has a variety of objects and themes, one of which Masmundari often paints is the activity of women. Masmundari's Damar Kurung painting can be a vehicle to re-recognize oneself, especially as a Javanese society as well as a Javanese woman, such as his work entitled "*Mbok Omah*" (housewife). This cultural studies research focuses on a critical approach by a qualitative exploration of the expression of Damar Kurung's painting and its meaning in the search for the meaning of maternal power in Javanese society using the *Bahasa Rupa* method. The results of this study reveal that (1) the father is the head of the household who is wise and acts as a strong protector for his wife and children. Father provided a livelihood and became a strong support for the family. However, in Damar Kurung's painting, it is clear that the mother has a more important, strong, and dominant role. Mother Java is the center of the family. Mother is the manager who has control over the household. (2) The ideology of familialism places the father in the main role as the main ruler of the household who has the greatest privileges and authority in the family. This dominant gender ideology defines Javanese women as both mother and wife, releasing men from domestic obligations in the household, and being more involved in more prestigious public activities. This ideology is institutionalized in everyday life, legitimizing the absence of the responsibility of men to raise children and care for the household, while still justifying the highest authority in the family.

Keywords: *Damar Kurung; Javanese; Power; Women, Introduction*

1 Introduction

Traditional painting is a work of art that is regional in nature, developed by the traditions of a particular society. Traditional painting is not purely intended as an artist's self-expression, but also has a social function, communication suggestion, ritual, and sometimes does not mention the name of the maker [1]. The media for traditional painting are diverse, not only on canvas, but also painted on glass, bark, leaves, boards, stones, cloth, and so on. There are many examples of traditional Nusantara paintings, including the *wayang beber* that developed in Central Java, the *Kamasan* painting in Bali, the glass painting in Cirebon, and the Damar Kurung painting from Gresik, East Java.

Sriwati Masmundari (1904-2005) is a woman from Gresik who spent her old age developing, producing, and preserving Damar Kurung. Damar Kurung is one of the traditional arts from Gresik, East Java. Damar Kurung is in the form of decorative lanterns. Drawing on paper and assembling it into Damar Kurung has been done by Masmundari's brother and uncle from generation to generation. Scenes in everyday life that become the source of ideas and expressions of her work. Masmundari initially made Damar Kurung only to fulfill the needs of daily life by selling her work in traditional markets. However, since November 1987, when Bentara Budaya Jakarta exhibited Masmundari's works for the first time, the general public began to pay more attention to this Gresik-style art.

Masmundari's distinctive feature of Damar Kurung lies in observing the cultural development of the Gresik people which was drawn spontaneously. Masmundari's Damar Kurung painting has a variety of objects and themes, one of which Masmundari often paints is women's activities in various aspects of life, ranging from religious activities, arts, culture, education, to economic activities. Masmundari, who is illiterate, uses his skill in brushing on paper to express his artistic creations. Masmundari's Damar Kurung painting is means to re-recognize oneself, especially as a Javanese society as well as a Javanese woman, such as his work entitled "*Mbok Omah*" (housewife).

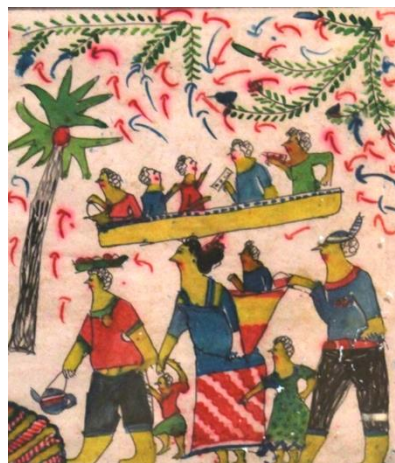


Figure 1 Damar Kurung painting entitled "*Mbok Omah*" (Source: Omah Damar Collection, Gresik).

Previous studies on the status and role of mothers in Javanese culture have drawn various conclusions and tend to be divided into two conclusions. This is due to differences in perspectives and approaches in observing gender relations and the dynamics of interaction in Javanese society. The results of previous studies on the role of Javanese mothers can be grouped into two different views [2]. The first view suggests that Javanese mothers have great power and high status, both

in the family and in society. The position and role of the mother is achieved because of the bilateral family structure, which states that men and women are complementary creatures. The second group's view denies that Javanese mothers have high power and position. Javanese mothers actually have a double burden because they have to act as wives, mothers and as workers who make a living. Mothers are required to complete most of the domestic work so that Javanese women are more likely to be the targets of a hegemonic gender ideology and lead to subordination of women. Researchers with a second perspective state that there are still various cultural and institutional obstacles that Javanese mothers have to face.

Gender relations and analysis of the status and role of mothers in Javanese culture must be linked to cultural and historical contexts. Without consideration of the cultural and historical context, an analysis of the status and role of Javanese mothers can be misleading and partial. Thus, this study aims to find out about the status, role, and power of Javanese mothers as expressed by Masmundari's Damar Kurung painting. At the same time explain the consequences and contradictions that occur in the power of the mother in Javanese culture.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Damar Kurung and Masmundari

Damar Kurung is one of the arts from the east coast culture, especially in the Gresik Regency area. In a linguistic sense, '*damar*' means light/lamp/candle and '*kurung*' means cover. Overall, the term Damar Kurung has the meaning of a lamp that is given a hood or given a 'confinement'. Physically, Damar Kurung is like a chandelier or decorative lantern. The strength of Damar Kurung is in the paintings that decorate the paper of his cage. Paintings with figurative symbols without perspective depict the dynamics of Gresik's life, such as religious life, social life and customs. The technique of reading each scene is similar to the technique of reading temple reliefs and *wayang beber* [3].

Sriwati Masmundari was born on January 4, 1904 in Kroman Village, Gresik, East Java. Masmundari is the second of 4 children of the couple Sadiman and Martidjah. Sadiman throughout his life worked as a *dalang sinom* who was good at making Damar Kurung crafts. Since 1970, there have been no more than 10 Damar Kurung handicraft makers in Gresik, who are still relatives of the Masmundari family. Masmundari inherited the expertise to make Damar Kurung from his father. Even though he has reached the age of one century, Masmundari is still diligent in making Damar Kurung. Masmundari always upholds honesty in capturing the reality that occurs in his community. Curators and art observers

refer to him as a painting artist with a naive style, because of his childish and cheerful colorful painting style. In his old age, Masmundari achieved popularity and became the center of attention from various parties. Exhibitions on a local, regional, and national scale have been held between 1987 and 2005. Masmundari has also received several awards as an outstanding female artist.

2.2 The Concept of Power in Javanese Culture

According to Foucault, discourse and knowledge can be a tool for power. For Foucault, power and knowledge are two things that cannot be separated. Through the process of 'discipline' and 'normalization', the process of using knowledge, power has been applied in various aspects, including gender and sexuality. In general, people think that knowledge is a neutral field. The results of Foucault's thinking make people aware that knowledge contains power [4]. In this case, social institutions (starting from the family to the state) strive to continue to perpetuate power through knowledge. Thus, the form of struggle is not only against exploitation (capital) and domination (social, ethnic, sexual, or religious) but also against subjection, namely the form of submission of a person as an individual.

Javanese society is hierarchically organized and is often known to be undemocratic, due to its feudal roots. One of the reasons is that the Javanese cultural tradition is an absolute, centralized, and non-egalitarian royal tradition. Javanese society has a very different view of power from Western society. According to Anderson, Western society understands power as the ability to impose the will on others, to make people/groups of their subordinates take actions that the ruler wants [5]. Self-power is something abstract that will only become concrete because of a cause-and-effect relationship. Power can come from wealth, social status, formal position, weapons, population, and so on.

In contrast to Eastern society, which presents four characteristics of power, the first: power is concrete, not embedded in social relations, but has its own reality of existence. The power to be understood comes from unlimited energy (from God), something that is not easily understood and mysterious. Second, power is homogeneous and cannot be divided, it arises from only one source, namely from God. Third, the quantity of power that exists in nature is always constant. Consequently, the concentration of power is in one place or one person only. And fourth: power does not come from relations between humans, because it has no inherent moral implications, and there is no need to doubt its legitimacy.

Table 1 Differences in the Concept of Western and Eastern Power [6]

West Power Concept	East Power Concept
Abstract	Concrete
The source is heterogeneous	The source is homogeneous
Infinite	Limited
Need legitimacy	No need for legitimacy

The consequence of the Eastern concept of power lies in the power holder who must convince his subordinates/groups that he has been spiritually and divinely elected. The power holder will form his legitimacy so that the application of power can occur in absolute terms and demands absolute obedience from his subordinates/groups. This concept of power has been deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Javanese people.

The manifestation of this concept of power in relation to gender relations is represented through the concept of *kodrat* (conditions that have been given by God and must be accepted spiritually). '*Kodrat*' is a central concept in Javanese society which emphasizes the fulfillment of predestined obligations. This concept emphasizes the obligation to voluntarily accept all the consequences. The concept of power in Javanese society supports that male power comes from a position that has been determined naturally because it is naturally dominant and should not be challenged. The concept of Javanese culture assesses that gender differences lie in the spiritual rather than biological dimensions. The nature of men and women is assumed as *kodrat* (natural destiny or destiny) because it inevitably and inevitably leads to different social roles.

In Javanese culture, the highest goal of life is unity with God (*Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*). Unity is the goal of Javanese mysticism, the unity between self and God. The measure of inner growth is taste. The highest stage of inner growth is when one believes and realizes that life must be in sync with life. Magnis Suseno distinguishes the outer and inner aspects of humans and the tension relationship between the two, between the subtle and the gross [7]. Mind, the reality in man, is intrinsically subtle. Birth, the outer world, is rough. The more superior the inner aspect of man, the more refined it appears. However, what is characteristic of the Javanese worldview is that reality is not divided into separate and unrelated spheres, but that reality is seen as a unified whole. The benchmark of the meaning of the world view for the Javanese is its pragmatic value to achieve a certain psychic state, namely tranquility, tranquility and equanimity. For the Javanese, a worldview can be accepted if all its elements embody a harmonious, *sreg* (comfortable), and compatible unity of experience that is an indication of the absence of inner tension and disturbance. The more harmonious the elements are, the more subtle/calm it will appear.

Javanese people always try to maintain order and inner harmony. Therefore, every Javanese is obliged to maintain order and order by fulfilling the obligations that have been assigned to him. Denying *kodrat* means disrupting order and harmony which threatens the harmonization of inner and outer life.






3 Methodology

This cultural studies research focuses on a critical approach by focusing on a qualitative exploration of the expression of Damar Kurung's painting and its meaning in the search for the meaning of maternal power in Javanese society. Damar Kurung painting as one of the traditional works of art is a combination of aesthetic, symbolic aspects, and a series of stories. Thus, *Bahasa Rupa* is the right method to disassemble as well as analyze the pattern, structure, and visual type of Masmundari's Damar Kurung painting. In *Bahasa Rupa* there are contents of *wimba* (drawn objects) and *wimba* ways (how to draw objects) so that each image that is made blends into a storytelling painting. Moreover, Damar Kurung's painting is a representative painting that reflects the real object/subject and contains the dimensions of space and time. The power relation from Foucault becomes a theory to analyze the relationship of each visual element in Damar Kurung's painting in search of meaning about maternal power in Javanese society. According to Foucault, power cannot be separated from knowledge. Power produces knowledge and knowledge is shaped by power.

4 Result and Discussion

4.1 The Concept of Mother Power in the Family

Javanese culture is often known as undemocratic, because of its feudal roots. One of the reasons is that the Javanese cultural tradition is an absolute, centralized, and non-egalitarian royal tradition. In this context, it may be difficult to accept the concept of gender equality. However, it does not mean that in Javanese culture there is absolutely no concept of gender equality between men and women. Gender equality in Javanese culture actually places women and men in an unbalanced and asymmetrical position. Geertz in the *Keluarga Jawa* states that the position and role of women, especially mothers, are considered important in Javanese society because of their function not only to raise and educate children and accompany their husbands, but are also allowed to go out of the house to carry out economic activities [8]. Mother is the center of the family, the center of the household that gives rise to symptoms of matrifocality, namely the dominance of women through networks that occur within the nuclear family and between families.

<i>Isi Wimba</i>	<i>Cara Wimba</i>	<i>Tata Ungkapan</i>	<i>How to Read Bahasa Rupa</i>
Human (Mother) 	Stilation Naturalist	Stating important	Reveals the most important figures, zoomed in, side view and whole
Human (Father) 	Stilation Naturalist	Stating important	Reveals important figures, side view and whole
Human (Kids) 	Stilation Naturalist	Stating important	Reveals important figures, side view and whole
Plant 	Stilation Naturalist	Declare outdoor	Revealing the dimensions of space
Arrows 	Decorative Expressive	Expressing motion and outdoors	Reveal the motion of the wind/air

Damar Kurung Masmundari's painting depicts the contents of the *wimba* in a distinctive way, where the mother is drawn in the center of the field with a larger size than the other figures in the painting. The enlarged size of the figure in the Visual Language method reveals the importance of the figure. Masmundari paints the mother figure as the center of the family and has an important role (holding children, holding children, even bringing several children on her head at once). The father is drawn in very contrast and is a smaller size than the mother. Dad appears without specific gestures/activities. According to this description, the father is the wise head of the household and acts as a strong protector for his wife

and children. Father provided a livelihood and became a strong support for the family. However, Damar Kurung's painting explicitly shows that the mother has a more important, strong, and dominant role. Mother Java is the center of the family. Mother is the household manager (who is in control).

The Javanese world view of the purpose of life is *manunggaling kawula gusti* whose actual expression is manifested in a harmonious unity of experience, where the elements are increasingly compatible with each other. The more a person is able to control himself not to get involved in conflict, the more he can concentrate his power. The Javanese mother's effort to gain power is more of an effort to conquer the physical world, master her passions and self-interest, so that the development of the inner world occurs [5]. That is, the effort is more of a continuous refinement and deepening of taste. The Javanese mother who wants to gain power must be able to subdue the complexities of bodily conditions that are ego and lust, by dealing with them and reducing them to a level where bodily tendencies will not disturb harmony. Damar Kurung's painting by Masmundari shows that mothers have to be strong to bear many burdens but still stand upright.

Power is the ability to live/give life. Mother Java's power lies in infertility, prosperity, and order. From a powerful mother flows the energy of calm and prosperity to all family members so that there will be no chaos. Fertility and order are the simplest manifestations of power, as in the idea of *titi tentrem raharja*.

The character of Javanese women is very synonymous with Javanese culture: soft-spoken, calm, calm, avoid conflict, emphasizes harmony, upholds family values, is able to understand others, has high self-control/control, endurance to suffer, plays an economic role and is loyal [6]. Mother Java can accept any difficult situation even the most bitter. They are the best at hiding suffering and good at interpreting it. They are strong and endure suffering. The idea of *cancut tali wanda* is a Javanese conception that describes an attitude of being willing to suffer not for self-interest, but for the benefit of others: husband and children. The extraordinary endurance of women is no hyperbole of the imagination. The endurance of women who are better than men biologically and psychologically is the character of women in general, not only Javanese women. Gottman and Levenson in Handayani (1988) show that men are more physically reactive to stressful stimuli than women. Because they have high resilience to suffer, women's ability to adapt is also high and tactical in critical situations. Women are ready to become wives who accompany their husbands and children in life.

4.2 Contradiction of Mother Power in Javanese Culture

Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony provides a powerful tool for understanding the process through which ideas hegemony, and repression are

neutralized and internalized, thereby explaining the persistent contradictions of gender relations in Javanese society. Ideology is a reality that is distorted and fragmented but can continue to survive and be normalized because it becomes part of everyday thinking. Through ideology, the special interests of strong dominant groups are accepted as public interest and accepted voluntarily by subordinate groups [9]. As a result of the influence of this hegemonic ideology, the contradictions faced by Javanese women are actually represented and justified as one of the components needed by women and Javanese society. In this context, ideology is defined as the natural presence of a structure, institution or character formed by culture [10].

The ideology of familism is an ideology that emphasizes the role of women around the household, as mothers and wives [11]. Ideology has been socialized and internalized in Javanese society for centuries through a complex historical process. The ideology is socialized and tries to be realized in every activity and formal social institution. So that this ideology is accepted as a common sense and natural idea. The phenomenon of the embodiment of this ideology states that mothers in Javanese society play the main role as housewives who must give their energy and attention to the interests of the family without expecting anything in return, respect or power [12]. While the father (and children/male relatives) in the familism ideology occupies the main role as the main ruler of the household who has the greatest privileges and authority in the family. This dominant gender ideology defines Javanese women as both mother and wife, releasing men from domestic obligations in the household, and being more involved in more prestigious public activities. This ideology is institutionalized in everyday life, legitimizing the absence of the responsibility of men to raise children and care for the household, while still justifying the highest authority in the family.

The ideology of familism which is reproduced in various forms of discourse has become an important force in making women aware of their domestic roles. Families, social institutions, and even paintings in this ideological process play an active role in affirming the position and role of mothers who are always related to household, children, cooking, clothing, beauty, parenting, and beauty.

These contradictions simultaneously emphasize the importance of mothers in Javanese society, but at the same time place their status in the second class. This contradiction continues to be maintained, reproduced and repeated in the daily experience of Javanese society. Every woman who has become a mother is constantly required to tolerate this contradiction and value it as something natural.

For Javanese people, contradictions are not seen as problematic but become part of the life's laws of life. Even the ability to accommodate contradictions or opposing considerations is understood as a sign of power in Javanese culture. An

individual in a strong Javanese society should be able to syncretize and harmonize contradictory elements. This contradiction has created social pressures on mothers to carry out dual roles in the public and domestic spheres in harmony. A mother in Javanese society is required to carry out her responsibilities as a good wife in accompanying her husband, raising children well, and being a good member of society. The emphasis on nature is very difficult for Javanese mothers. This really makes the Javanese mother run out of time, energy and resources because of her great responsibility.

5 Conclusion

From the visual expression of the Damar Kurung painting by Masmundari, it can be seen that Javanese women occupy an important position in the family and society. But on the other hand, women do not get the prestige, opportunity, and power comparable to men. This contradiction should be an awareness for the community that the development of self-identity and gender relations is the result of learning, the formal and informal environment, all must play an active role in developing values that support the development of a positive and more equal female identity.

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