Inventing the Reinvention? Tradition and the Body of Dancing Women

Yusti Dwi Nurwendah
Pascasarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga
Yogyakarta

Corresponding Author:
Yusti Dwi Nurwendah, email: yustidwi95@gmail.com, Jl. Marsda Adisucipto, Papringan, Caturtunggal, Kec. Depok, Kabupaten Sleman, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta 55281 - Indonesia

Abstract: Dance practice has long been associated with complex social and political historical functions. There is a lot of evidence showing the centrality of dance in society, and it has become an inseparable part of the historical process. At the same time, dance became a site associated with women. Based on Hobsbawn's idea of the invention of tradition, this paper investigates the Jathilan Obyog tradition in Ponorogo concerning the dominant elite and the role of Jathil women. To facilitate the investigation, this paper is conducted by a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach that includes participant observation, interviews, and documentation adapted to context and needs to reach the research objectives. This research applies the concept of the invention of tradition, which was first initiated by Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger as the center of analysis. Finally, this paper argues that in a hegemonic endeavor that attempts to 'discipline' the tradition, Jathil women have succeeded in determining the power to reinvent tradition in picturesque ways, especially through the body and massive support of media to create a process of reconstructing social memory and imagination.

Keywords: Jathilan; women; body; the invention of tradition


Kata Kunci: Jathilan; perempuan; tubuh; penemuan tradisi
A. Introduction

Throughout history, tradition has always been involved in two binary opposition models; little vs great, high art vs fine art, rural vs urban, or village vs court. Such a dichotomy has always implied a hierarchy, one showing as high and the other as low.¹ In the New Order social engineering project, this dichotomy has been used to suppress traditions in the context of performing arts that are considered 'threatening'. Traditions that did not conform to the nationalist discourse were classified as 'low' and, at the same time, disciplined to be 'high'. The more submissive a tradition is, the higher its value will be.

Meanwhile, women and dance are two things that are equally difficult to grasp as historical realities. Contrasting conditions with men where they become architects who are always active in the political and social order, women are far powerless and invisible.² Dance requires the body in its realization,³ while the body is associated with the power mechanism.⁴ Individual bodies have become operational sites for various powers,⁵ where power does not only manifest in the form of authority but has spread in every web of relations.⁶ Dance has become an attractive and enchanting tool for women to introduce themselves in maintaining or removing desired boundaries (Hanna 1998; Brooks 2007). An important transformation has occurred in the Jathilan dance tradition through the performative changes of the dancers who undertake to remove the long-time reputation and memory of the dancers and the Jathilan (obyog) dance as a 'low' into a prestigious site. Women in surprising roles through dance discovered a power not previously captured as reality due to a constantly suppressed and controlled presence.

There has been a lot of creative participation from previous scholars who have indeed studied the *Jathil* dance from various points of view. If mapped, there are three main trends in this study. First, scholars who focus on the issue of gender transition (from Gemblak (male) to *Jathil* (female)), which Wasrinda (2017) claimed as a result of the feminine tendencies of male dancers,⁷ Putri Lestari (2021) viewed the issue of homosexuality as the main cause,⁸ both of which trigger the transition as a result of not being in line with the social and political norms of the New Order era, while Anis Mega (2018) contended it as the impact of internal (interest and motivation) and external (family, social, governance) factors.⁹ Second, they who concerned about the perspective of *Jathil*’s role and image, in which Wardani (2020) has specifically explored the negative and positive image of *Jathil*,¹⁰ while Ardyana (2016) examines it from the community’s point of view.¹¹ Third, others who examine the values and meanings of the *Jathil* dance, which has been studied a lot from various focuses, such as Wirabrata (2018), who considered the meaning of *Jathilan* from the point of view of documentary film,¹² or Nurwendah and Nugrawiyati (2021) from the point of view of the value of gender roles and peace education,¹³ and Pratiwi (2012) which explored the symbolic meaning of the presentation of the dance as a brave warrior.¹⁴ However, so far, no research on *Jathil* examines it

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from the concept of the invention. Thus, this paper offers a different approach that has not been explored previously. Assigning the concept of the invention of tradition, which was first initiated by Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger as the center of analysis, with ethnography as an approach, this paper attempts to examine the *Jathilan* dance tradition to investigate its relationship to the historical context and women in a broader sense.

**B. Method**

This research is a qualitative type of research. Qualitative research is naturalistic since it examines natural conditions, where the researcher acts as a key instrument.\(^{15}\) The results of this study are descriptive data in the form of written and spoken words from the object being observed.\(^ {16}\) While the approach used is ethnographic. Ethnography refers to a set of qualitative research practices that include participant observation, interviews, and a variety of other techniques adapted to the context and needs of a particular research project. It involves direct and ongoing contact with human agents in the context of their life (culture) by observing what is happening, listening to what is being stated, asking questions, making written notes about the human experience being studied, and acknowledging the role of theory and the role of the researcher.\(^ {17}\)

This research takes place in Ponorogo, East Java. The data collection technique used in this research is observation. Interviews and documentation. Determination of observation and participation is carried out randomly, considering the uncertain schedule of the *Jathilan* performances. The researcher attended and involved herself in the *Jathil Obyog* dance performance. It is used to directly observe the conditions and behavior of the Jathil dancers and all activities that occur during performances.

Meanwhile, interviews are used as the most basic technique of this research, both structured and unstructured. In this case, the researcher prepared questions and adjusted them to the circumstances and answers from the respondents. The informants were selected in the interviews based on

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competence and relevance to the topics raised in this study. With the snowball sampling technique, informants are selected in turns (the initial informant chooses the second informant, the second informant selected by the third informant, and so on) to find information saturation. Interviews were conducted using an in-depth interview model,\textsuperscript{18} which means that the researcher formulated fundamental questions, but the application was more open. The subjects of this study used the \textit{Jathil} obyog dancers who were selected based on their level of popularity, education, and \textit{jathil} dancers, both active and inactive in the community of Reog Ponorogo. In addition, researchers also reached out to the \textit{Jathilan} audiences and the government, especially in this case, the Ponorogo tourism office. Finally, documentation is complementary research data, which can be written and unwritten documents, photos, pictures, reports, or memorandums.\textsuperscript{19} In this study, documentation was used to collect printed and non-printed data relating to the female \textit{Jathil} dancers in Reog Obyog.

The technical data analysis applied in this study was the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three steps.\textsuperscript{20} First, data reduction is used to summarize and sort out basic data and trim unnecessary ones. Second, data presentation is intended to display data in the form of descriptions to be organized into relationship patterns till the structure is understandable. Finally, drawing conclusions and verification, where the researcher searched for meaning based on the data obtained, interpreted it, and matched the evidence, reached a valid conclusion.

C. Discussion and Result

1. \textit{Jathilan} Tradition: Fluctuations and Transitions

\textit{Jathilan} is a traditional dance practice as part of a series of Reog, which is danced by "\textit{Jathil}" riding a braided jaran. In today's tradition, \textit{Jathilan} is played by 6-8 Jathil or more who dance with graceful movements to the music played

\textsuperscript{18} Sugiyono, \textit{Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif Dan RD} (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2006), 233.

\textsuperscript{19} Suprapto, \textit{Metodologi Penelitian Ilmu Pendidikan Dan Ilmu-Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial} (Jakarta: Buku Seru, 2013), 42.

\textsuperscript{20} Matthew B. Miles and A Michael Huberman, \textit{Analisis Data Kualitatif: Buku Sumber Tentang Metode-Metode Baru} (Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia Press, 1992), 16.
by musicians with movements that are more focused on hip movements (egolan).\textsuperscript{21} The dance is loose, without a standard groove, and often without a braided horse (jaran eblek). Jathil women will wear thick makeup, tight kebaya tops, and black pants above knee length. The musical accompaniment varies, ranging from Jaipongan, Campursari, to contemporary Dangdut music.\textsuperscript{22}

This condition is different from the old version of Jathilan, played by two men paired with each other by playing the hussars of the royal guards who were training on horses.\textsuperscript{23} In later versions, this male Jathil dancer is often referred to as gemblak, a handsome boy who was chosen and raised by Warok and deliberately groomed to become the Jathil. When these gemblak dancers were dancing, they were given a unique female property (cross-dressing). The dance moves are also adapted to the graceful dance moves of women. Their role is to tease Pembarong and provoke them to be more passionate and enthusiastic.

In the 1980s, male Jathil (gemblak) was primarily replaced by female Jathil. The development of the education sector is considered to have reduced boys' interest in becoming dancers and gemblak. This loss and lack of interest were then met with the government's need for jathil dancers to follow the Jakarta Fair agenda. This pressure prompted the government to recruit and train female dancers from SMK (Vocational High School) or SMEA (Economic High School) students. By time and time, gemblak tradition disappeared, shifted by a new tradition by women.\textsuperscript{24}

In today's Jathilan, female Jathil dancers are a striking symbol of the Reog artistry. People may be more interested in attending a Reog when seeing jathil poster displayed in good visuality and will be more excited about famous dancers whose popularity has been recognized. In a performance, jathil will


\textsuperscript{22} Implicitly in Wardani, Kasnadi, and Hurustyanti, 'Citra Jathil Dalam Kesenian Reog Obyog Ponorogo'.


\textsuperscript{24} Soemarto, \textit{Menelusuri Perjalanan Reyog Ponorogo} (Ponorogo: CV Kotareogmedia, 2014), 45; or read more in Yusti Dwi Nurwendah, Tubuh Perempuan Penari Jathil Dalam Jaring Patriarki (Studi Atas Eksistensi Perempuan Penari Jathil Reog Obyoh Dalam Lanskap Masyarakat Muslim Di Ponorogo) (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2021).
dance in two sessions; the first session will show the jathil grip dance in unison, accompanied by the sound of gamelan and screams of senggakan (hok’e). Afterward, they will dance according to their respective abilities without any standard movements. Gamelan beats will be played more dynamically with (usually) contemporary viral Dangdut Koplo songs with the accompaniment of senggakan. The composing group of pengrawit (a group of gamelan musicians) will receive song requests from the audience or the event sponsors.

In this session, the hips and hand movements will dominate the dancers’ movements. They continue to improvise as long as the song’s rhythm continues to provoke the audience’s enthusiasm. In one scene, Jathil will perform an edreg movement. One by one will walk towards the Pembarong and tease him with nodding head movements. The dancers will be flirtatious and wiggle their hips in front of the half-sitting Pembarong (squatting); often, the hip sway hits the Pembarong in the face. Comedy elements are also included, including Bujangganong and Jathil as the actors. The theme highlighted in that comedy revolves the most around romance issues. Sometimes, they also show scenes full of intimacy covered with comedy to provoke audiences’ laughter.

In another part, we will find saweran momentum. The women will dance to highlight their skills, and the audience will approach, vote, and give an amount of money to dance with Jathil they want. At this moment, we know that the beautiful appearance of the dancer, the body, and the provocative movements are the most important elements that will determine the electability of Jathil. After being selected and given some money, the woman will dance with or offer a song to sing. The dancers will highlight each other’s abilities more to hypnotize the audience.

However, I did not find any sources stating exactly where the Jathil dance came from. Sources released by the local government of Ponorogo district at the end of the 20th century stated that Jathil is the oldest type of dance on the island of Java. In another source, it is noted that it is a horse braid dance originally from Ponorogo. However, Jathil Ponorogo looks different from most Jathil dances in other areas. In Yogyakarta, Central Java, as well as other areas of Java, is known as the Kuda Lumping or Jaranan Kepang. The striking difference is the presence of mystical elements in the Jathil dance, which requires the dancers to

25 Soemarto, Menelusuri Perjalanan Reyog Ponorogo, 47.
be involved in a 'possession' ritual which will perform extreme scenes such as eating leaves, flowers, or glass, to scenes of cutting body parts such as arms.\textsuperscript{26} Meanwhile, these ritual elements do not participate in the contemporary \textit{Jathilan} tradition in Ponorogo.

\section*{2. The New Order and Disciplined Traditions}

The period of the 1980s seems to be an important marker for the turmoil and history of art in Java. I have noted and attempted to relate—in those years—arts and especially traditional dance in many areas have experienced unusual symptoms but similar. For example, a report by Soemarto noted that the art of Reog in that year showed an extraordinary significance for development, along with the many changes that occurred in the body of Reog. As seen, the figures of Kelono Sewandono, Potro Tholo, and Potro Joyo were abolished, and female Jathil shifted Gemblak.\textsuperscript{27} As Lyslof reported during this period, the Lengger tradition in Banyumas Central Java experienced a serious revival as an implication of the official recognition of the state and the success of its commercialization. Lengger’s music was revitalized with a combination of other musical genres being adapted, and performers of the Lengger underwent a major change. The ‘new’ Lengger body began to be recognized as a ‘decent’ tradition and art.\textsuperscript{28}

Connecting this period, what seems explicit is the undeniable correlation with the 1965s, when Indonesia was transitioning to the New Order. The political upheaval that occurred mainly after the G30S/PKI incident had an impact on the situation of performing arts in the regions. In the performance of Reog, for example, has experienced divisions caused by the contestation of party groups and religious groups who take it as a political instrument.\textsuperscript{29} The concrete manifestation of the split is embodied in the costumes worn by Jathil

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dancers. They wear costumes aligned with the symbolic and identical colors of the party copes them. Symbols or images of political parties are often installed above the heads of the Dhadhak Merak. The ongoing discord and disintegration within Reog’s body eventually led to the show being stopped altogether.

Hefner’s notes which focus on the art of Tayuban in East Java, also seem to underline the same period. He found Tayuban’s 'unique' fluctuations. Tayuban, identified as an offering ritual involving women’s dances that are 'abusive and sexual', has been fiercely opposed by many political and religious organizations since the beginning of the independence period. The PNI (Partai Nasional Indonesia) and PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia) criticized Tayuban mainly because of the cost and the freedom of its sexuality. Urban Muslim reformers, such as Muhammadiyah and Masyumi, were vehemently against it and banned the performance altogether because it was seen as merely exposing false sacredness, indecency, and an act of extravagance. These efforts have been successfully implemented in urban areas but have not been successful enough to be implemented in rural areas. NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) is a bit problematic because, on the one hand, its top officials respond critically, but at the same time, NU leaders in rural areas tolerate it. However, in the 1970s, NU officials finally participated in intensive efforts to abolish Tayuban and succeeded in bringing it into decline. The divisions between reformists and traditionalists were eventually quelled.

However, in the 1980s, the New Order regime made a seemingly controversial stance. They support traditional arts and positively defend Tayuban, which is claimed as a regional and national identity while recognizing its potential as a good tourism object. Golkar officials even criticized the intervention of Muslim reformers because they were considered to have attacked established traditions. However, a few years later (around 1985), Hefner reported that many officials had begun to support the call for the abolition of Tayuban and confirm the Muslim argument. In the same year, Tayuban was called upon to be abolished altogether or allowed if only by banning alcohol consumption or specific restrictions. Sponsors also decreased.

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drastically.\textsuperscript{32} Tayuban, usually held for 3 nights, was cut down to one, while the other was filled up with competitions of reciting the Quran.\textsuperscript{33} Regardless, Hefner explains this attitude change was influenced by the Islamic orthodoxy which is developing in East Java and not based on the product of Golkar’s strategy.\textsuperscript{34}

Hefner’s final argument, however, seems ambiguous. Suppose the turmoil in Tayuban, as Hefner views, is the effect of increasing Islamic orthodoxy and not an implication of the New Order regime’s strategy. In that case, we need to look at his claim that the increasing belief in Islamic orthodoxy among Muslims results from Golkar’s suppression through education, media, and government which encourages people to take religion more seriously. The religious promotion was then welcomed by a generation of village youth with a crisis of faith which seemed to be getting restless with their old traditions and beliefs.\textsuperscript{35} If so, it is undeniable that the change in Tayuban dance represents a network of relationships linking traditional art activities with New Order politics.

Larasati (2013) elaborated on the issue of the relationship between the New Order and changes in traditional arts cases. She reported the New Order regime under Suharto was the most responsible for the disappearance, suppression, and imprisonment of the bodies of female dancers and their families. Larasati openly stated that the bodies of female dancers that cannot be controlled would be eliminated and replaced with new bodies that have been indoctrinated and trained. Along with the old forms practiced by those who were eliminated, innovations were made and perfected according to the country’s targets.\textsuperscript{36} Sunardi’s notes (2009) seem to relate. She highlighted cross-gender dance performances in East Java and emphasized that Suharto and his military regime –especially from 1965-1966– had a great influence on the state of performing arts, including musicians and dancers. Various terrors of murder or imprisonment imposed on artists automatically threaten the show’s stability, almost extinction. Women’s political organizations and activities were

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{32}Hefner.
\bibitem{34}Hefner, ‘The Politics of Popular Art: Tayuban Dance and Culture Change in East Java’.
\bibitem{35}Hefner.
\end{thebibliography}
denounced and forced to submit to state control. Dancing women considered a threat to the New Order’s ideology will be tortured, imprisoned, or killed. However—again—like most art sustainability in Java, in the 1970s to 1990s, a new generation began to initiate the revival of performing arts with a more cautious approach.37

What the period lines manifest seems to lead to a parallel argument. The New Order regime was involved in a massive process involving changes in the body of performing arts in Java. A power to impose discipline on traditions that ‘considered potentially endanger’ the government stability. While Sutton has gone so far as to define it as a process of crystallization, where art is objectified and formalized through a transformation process that involves the creation of authoritative texts, Lysloff defines this as the creative process of reinvention by referring to Hobdbawm and Ranger. However, I—in this case—trail Lysloff engaging the concept of reinvention to describe the series of symptoms as the focus of this research.

3. The reinvention of Tradition and Hegemonic Potential in Jathilan Tradition

In the discussion of tradition, the term invention has been widely involved and has become a dominant presence in related studies. The term was first introduced by Hobdbawm and Ranger (1983), who claim that traditions that are often thought of as ancient heritage are, in fact, new and sometimes ‘invented’. The invention of tradition is defined as a set of practices, usually governed by rules that are accepted openly or tacitly and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to instill specific values and norms of behavior through repetition, automatically implying continuity with the past.38 Continuity is often fabricated by absorbing references to ‘old’ situations to respond to ‘new’ concerns or constructing the past by imposing repetition.39 In short, it includes performance practices that take on ancient attributes to meet new goals.

39 Hobdbawm and Ranger, 2.
In revealing tradition, Hobsbawm rejects the theory of modernization, which states modern society is a discontinuation of tradition. Instead, he found that tradition still has a place in modern society and is not limited to traditional societies. According to him, the main characteristic of traditionality in modernity manifests in the discovery of traditions deliberately created to fulfill various social and political interests. The emergence of movements that maintain or revive tradition indicates discontinuation with the original. The old tradition does not need to be revived or re-created when it is still alive. It can be seen here that the concept of finding tradition is related to a specific 'purpose or use'.

Scholars from various disciplines have applied Hobsbawm's concept of invention tradition through very varied perspectives. From a religious point of view, for example, Lewis and Hammer (2007) examined historical phenomena and religious traditions created in certain contexts and are understood as deliberate falsifications. Palmisano and Pannofino (2017) claimed that there is a paradoxical relationship between religion and contemporary traditions involving the creative process of rearranging religious texts produced and interpreted by the experience of religious reformers, which they then legitimized from God’s guidance. Oberholtzer has exemplified a more extreme point of view regarding trust and marketing (1995), capturing the reality of dream catcher products being re-adopted and marketed expansively as icons of belief and spirituality.

Perhaps the more specific, including the relationship between dance and invention, was explored by Firenzi (2012), who found the use of dance in the African Zulu community as a mechanism used by the authorities for the sake of

40 Hobsbawm and Ranger, 5.
41 Hobsbawm and Ranger, 8.
order (instrument of political and social control).\textsuperscript{45} In the same context of national dance set in Iran, Meftahi (2014) found conditions in which women's dances are ideally created as a 'high art form' for the concern of realizing the ideas, aesthetics, and ethics of nationalism and at the same time modernity in Iran through the creation of historical imagination, literary texts, folk culture, and ancient symbols.\textsuperscript{46} Meanwhile, an equally exciting finding was revealed by Gilman (2004) about women's political dances in Malawi, which have an effect on the hegemonic potential of the political elite. Gilman succeeded in tracing women's dances which were initially used by government authorities for power consolidation, in the later period, becoming a fundamental element in Malawi's political culture. A political practice that is traditionalized and applied through repetition is finally accepted as a normative practice and, at the same time, an 'inherited tradition'.\textsuperscript{47}

Although the concept of Hobsbawm's invention is phenomenal and has become a source of open interpretation, it has not escaped criticism and debate. Post (1996), for example, revealed that the idea of discovering tradition has a lot of ambiguity which has the potential to accept a rather 'demeaning' context regarding the practice of historical falsification or manipulation.\textsuperscript{48} Plant (2008) also mentions a similar note that the concept has created ambiguities that are often misunderstood, such as the emergence of false connotations if a traditional invention is found to have no clear historical source. There is a clear gap in the approach to historical sources due to the limitations of past sources; therefore, the ability to trace genealogies and historical continuity is a problem itself.\textsuperscript{49}


For Hobsbawm, the main characteristic of the invented tradition is the existence of discontinuity, a ritualization process that operates in a vacuum. He underlined the invention of traditions often involves an intentional element; when old ways are rediscovered, the reason is not that they are no longer available but are deliberately not adopted.\(^\text{50}\) However, as Paul Post noted, it would be too shallow to use the concept of 'invention to merely trace the alleged authenticity or manipulation of traditions from the past.\(^\text{51}\) In connection with Linnekin’s argument that all traditions and customs are created and constructed symbolically for contemporary purposes, not just passively left behind. Assessing the authenticity of tradition is such a dilemmatic act.\(^\text{52}\) Instead, this concept is important to critically question how to deal with history, why the need for change arose, and what patterns were involved.\(^\text{53}\) I, therefore, involved, as suggested by Hobsbawm, that the investigation of the discovery of tradition becomes a bridge to see the symptoms of a more complex and broader historical shift.

Focusing on the Jathilan in Reog, I intend to describe how the show underwent a process of rediscovery after being in a coma due to political turmoil. Some practices that are removed, replaced, or interpreted in a new way – as stated by Hobsbawm – indicate discontinuation with the old chain of traditions. This involves processes that include creating, remodeling, and rearranging past patterns and images. The model of formation, symptoms, and goals of the situation becomes the focus of this discussion.

As I mentioned earlier, the 'original' Jathilan characters of the past were danced by the male, which the female later replaced. The implementation of the dislocation has been widely disseminated due to the reluctance of boys to become gemblak as an implication of the expansion of the education sector in rural Ponorogo. While going beyond this view, I will go far to involve the political and religious conditions around the practice.

Since the 1950s, Reog’s body, especially its Warok, has been recruiting communist and nationalist parties. Reog, which can attract the masses on a

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\(^{50}\) Post, 'Rituals and the Function of the Past: Rereading Eric Hobsbawm'.

\(^{51}\) Post.


\(^{53}\) Post, 'Rituals and the Function of the Past: Rereading Eric Hobsbawm'.
large scale, is used as a perfect political vehicle. But under the New Order, those suspected of being affiliated with communist groups would directly suffer expulsion and massacres. Somehow, many Reog and Warok artists managed to escape the 1965 massacre. However, the New Order regime continuously tried eliminating Warok's role, especially as a sinister political force.54

Warok is known to have a kind of spiritual knowledge that requires him to stay away from sexual relations with women. This made him raise a gemblak to serve his daily needs and, at the same time, train him to become a dancer. Regardless, their relationship was problematic in line with the ongoing issues of homosexuality. Reformist groups and Kyai of pesantren urged the government to bring Reog in line with the orthodoxy of religious teachings. The government even claimed that the relationship between the two was not following the nation's moral standards, which was unacceptable.55 Education under the state also played an active role in disseminating gemblakan as a negative and ancient culture.56 This situation may explain the change in the attitude of boys who are reluctant to be gemblak and prefer to go to school.

Commonly, the distinctive characteristic of the New Order government was to create order. As is the case with most traditions in Indonesia, Reog and Warok must be rediscovered to be recognized as traditional cultures. In this ambitious New Order project, the East Java Education and Culture Office recruited Reog as the official art of the Ponorogo district. Since then, the government and the religious organization NU have worked together to rid Reog's body of subversive elements, both politically and sexually. Elements of sacredness related to communication and worship of ancestral spirits were abolished, gemblak was prohibited, and recommended female dancers instead.

54 Warok ‘used to be’ a character in the Reog who had high spiritual strength and magic with invulnerability (it was even believed that they could escape the 1965 attack because of their invulnerability). Warok had a vital influence on the political conditions of the Ponorogo people and was respected by both the rulers and the villagers for his authority, so he became the link of power between higher and lower authorities. However, Warok is often considered a threat to the stability of power because it has mysticism and dangerous magical potential. In Ian Douglas Wilson, ‘Reog Ponorogo: Spirituality, Sexuality, and Power in a Javanese Performance Tradition’, Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific, no. 2 (1999), http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue2/Warok.html.

55 Sunardi, ‘Pushing at the Boundaries of the Body: Cultural Politics and Cross-Gender Dance in East Java’.

Reog performances are standardized to become high art with an effort to associate it with the legends of kingdoms such as the palace in Central Java. This is supported by the government’s steps in finding the Wengker royal site in Ponorogo as a legitimacy for the reform actions carried out and, at the same time, increasing the prestige of the city of Ponorogo as belonging to the ‘aristocratic’ class.  

Thus, the conversion of male to female can be categorized as one of the New Order government’s efforts to subdue Warok as a docile servant of the state and to eliminate Warok’s image as a spiritual leader or a threatening rebel. The emphasis of the New Order was quite successful, Warok was rediscovered by imitation of the ‘original Warok’ movement without presenting spiritual power and magical elements. The seizure of Reog’s body by the New Order cultural machine to produce a ‘clean’ version. This authoritarian project succeeded in overthrowing gemblak tradition, which continued in the jathilan dancer’s body adapted to the New Order’s political discourse; it is done by being shifted by the female.  

Jathilan, which has always taken place in open places such as fields, streets, or courtyards (known as Obyog), was standardized in such a way by the local government in 1992 and represented in a new form as Festival performances on stages. A great show that combines dance and drama with a standard motion and storyline. Standardization aims to produce performances with uniformity with high values and images as dances in Keraton. However, this did not enact it to disappear altogether. The artists continued to hold it cautiously to avoid conflict with the government’s ideology. This situation creates a quite striking gap and has implications for giving a dichotomous picture of Festival as high art and Obyog as a rural art.  

The cultural pattern emphasized by the New Order refers to the idealization of women’s dances as ‘high and noble’ as in Keraton culture, where elements of sexuality and humor are abolished.  

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57 Wilson.

as 'Javanese cultural brokering' dignified (high).\textsuperscript{59} Instead of maintaining a high status in Festivals, most female jathil choose to remain involved in Obyog. Material reasons behind the decision. However, this situation cannot be used to judge the failure of the New Order project. The reason is that although women do not leave Obyog and its sexual representations, they avoid elements that contrast with the government order, such as abandoning elements of spirit worship and drinking alcohol. Obyog, although, unlike the festival, which has been officially standardized, also continues to experience rediscovery that pivots on the New Order cultural model.

The next question is mainly related to electing females to replace male gemblak. This contradicts the prevailing practice in other areas in Java, where female dancers are suppressed and restricted. As Jasper’s report in Hefner reveals that the revitalization of religion in Java made women’s dances considered obscene because of the view that good women would not dance in public.\textsuperscript{60} However, the New Order’s insistence on recruiting women as jathil dancers to replace the gemblak tradition does not seem to run without reason. Women in this period were more easily subdued, and much evidence shows that Javanese women have a more refined nature and better self-control than men. \textsuperscript{61} A pattern that is in line with the New Order’s promotion of the idealization of the role of women who are domesticated and reduced to limited roles as wives and mothers. The practice of glorification is perpetuated for women who are 'obedient' to their husbands, are not involved in politics, and focus on taking care of the household. As Hughes-Freeland notes, the role of women is reproduced in emphasizing silence and silence as a sign of subordination, where women are only able to act as wives, not themselves.\textsuperscript{62}

The more women can be tamed, the more they will be considered to have a high social class hierarchy.

Such a situation can then be seen manifesting in the status of women as dancers. The female palace dancers, who are polite and obedient, do not


\textsuperscript{60} Hefner, ‘The Politics of Popular Art: Tayuban Dance and Culture Change in East Java’.

\textsuperscript{61} Hughes-Freeland, ‘Gender, Representation, Experience: The Case of Village Performers in Java’.

\textsuperscript{62} Hughes-Freeland.
emphasize sexuality and are materially oriented, representing women’s 'high' value. On the other hand, female dancers who contrasted with the criteria for Keraton dancers were identified as 'fringe, rough, or inferior'. This unique depiction of 'high' or 'bottom' can be seen in the representation of female jathil dancers. The female Jathil dancer’s failure to maintain a high position as a festival dancer has caused her to get the title of a lowly and cheap woman. The predicate dichotomy seems to have been successfully traditionalized and continuously inherited in women’s dance culture.

In this case, I am trying to describe that the New Order has imposed the tradition of performing jathilan to be rediscovered with 'new' models following the ideology of the state. In such a scheme, I perceive that the appointment of women as a substitute for gemblak is not solely based on the consideration that women are easily subdued but involves another, more basic goal related to eliminating Warok’s authority as the most influential and at the same time the most potentially 'disruptive' figure. The plan, which is framed in such a way, aims to support the New Order’s social and cultural engineering projects and provide a submission model to the community.

D. Beyond the Dancing Women Body: Reinventing the Tradition?

The invention of tradition concept becomes a valuable starting point for tracing a series of phenomena that occur and are interrelated. In the process of discovery, especially discussions about history, aspects related to memory or 'remembering and forgetting' occupy a central and complicated position. A very influential process on the re-practice consideration of old elements for new contexts. It involves ways in which the traditions are alive today and are chain resulting from the ongoing transformation in their historical course. The conversions that usually occur and are realized slowly are often not well documented and even forgotten. The absence of sources may definitively explain the past, which raises what is assumed as historical amnesia.

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63 Post, ‘Rituals and the Function of the Past: Rereading Eric Hobsbawm’.
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In the last few periods, through massive interventions, including technology media, the tourism industry, and film, the transformation of traditional performances has become very prominent. The process of discovering tradition –unexpectedly– continues by involving a combination of spontaneous generation and the documented past. In the discourse of the Jathil dancer’s body rediscovery with a high form to display the national ideals and image of the New Order era (created as a virtuous character in nationalist discourse), the dance artists, do not necessarily leave the past regarding streets dance (Obyog). Obyog, however, provides greater opportunities for women in terms of economy, although at the same time ‘negative image’. However, this situation seems to have undergone important changes and transformations in the body of twenty-first century female Jathil. There is an attempt to rediscover the tradition that seems to be more creatively applied in the spirit of memory reconstruction and social imagery.

Ayu, a Jathil dancer whose beauty has become a source of admiration for many eyes, perhaps represents the image of a Jathil dancer who has succeeded in removing herself from the old image and reputation as ‘twopenny’ or (extremely) ‘whore’. In a site where a women’s agency is suppressed and men completely control her sexuality, she is not trapped and keeps on struggling with herself in the dangerous autonomy contest. In her dancing practice, she carefully takes advantage of her body and sexuality to challenge the old female dancer’s representation pattern, which is always perceived as the ‘inferior’, subordinated, exploited, and only able to survive since the ‘help’ of male agencies.

Ayu began her career as a Jathil Festival dancer on big stages and then expanded to Obyog. At that time, various obstacles emerged, such as families’ rejection, seniors’ contempt, to audiences’ disparagement due to her professional commitment. She challenged the norms and views of life –in general– society, and –in particular– the dancing women. She refuses to be involved in the common tradition of female dancers ensnared in negative stigmatization. The image of female dancers, generally portrayed gloomily, is brushed aside in a way that is not easy but consistent. In the climax, when she had a lot of appearances and the media started highlighting her name, people

67 The name of a Jathil dancer in disguise.
began to see her differently. Moreover, she became the first Jathil Obyog to complete higher education while most jathil dancers were women who had dropped out of school. This can be seen from an interview she stated:

"So, it was a challenge at first, in Reog Obyog, to take to the streets; people looked down on me. The challenge is how to maintain fame. There I tried to keep my attitude and care for everything so that people’s mindsets changed. And Alhamdulillah, that’s slowly changing. Well, I don’t know how people look at me, but I feel like I have played a role and fought there. Because I also don’t want to be a hypocrite if the seniors used to be like what people say, many cases of jathil get pregnant out of wedlock, drop out of school, taken everywhere with men, many are drunk the alcohol. So, it’s true what people say about the image of jathil; actually, it’s like it’s gloomy, it’s wrong to be someone’s mistress, and there were lots of them. That’s why I always thought, "Wow, this is a tough task", but the important thing is that I don’t want to continue my seniors’ tradition; I’m a professional dancer, I get paid, I’m done.” (NS 1/150920)

What distinguishes Ayu from previous Jathil dancers may be seen in her efforts to control her own body. In her dance moves, she is no less provocative than other dancers. Ayu did not hesitate to improvise her hip movements with totality during the performance. She wears tight clothes which reveal her curves, and her face is beautiful as most Jathil dancers. This shows that Ayu is also a female dancer who takes advantage of her sexuality. Sexuality in dance has functioned as a driving force of art, so dancers automatically project a sexual image while dancing. However, she never allowed 'others' to control her body. For her, people are free to see her dancing body but are never free to act on her body. She stated:

"In the past, people often called me "the stingy", because I didn’t want to be touched by men like most of my senior dancers. I refuse to be taken anywhere after dancing or have my body poked carelessly. My principle, I’m not a trashy dancer, I’m a professional, and I’m working. That’s why I always take my mother with me to shows. If I’m twopenny too, then there’s no point in me going to college.” (NS 1/150920)

Ayu may not be the only beautiful Jathil dancer who emphasizes sexuality, but she was the first who managed to get out of the snare of Javanese patriarchal society. The hierarchical view of gender relations represents women in depicting the wife as kanca wingking. Even when she was married and had a child, her popularity didn’t wane and skyrocketed. She is in the

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68 Hanna, Dance, Sex, and Gender Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire, 5–6.
spotlight of many media, plays in films, becomes a celebrity and model, and has a business in the culinary and beauty fields. This life and situation indubitably contrast with the lives of most *Jathil* dancers in the past. While after this success, as an educated Jathil dancer and able to control her own body, other *Jathil* dancers have emerged who share the same principles; dancing but able to take control of their bodies. As an informant stated:

"In the past, the majority of the audience was drunk (drinking alcohol), so when they give some money (saweran), they sometimes ask to dance together with the dancers and be close. For me, I always use the strategy of keeping my distance. Because I believe the only one who can take care of my body is myself. And Alhamdulillah, there is now a ban on drunkenness during performances. In the past, it was really bad; many dared to touch dancers' buttocks, and now it's gone, it's safe." (NS 2/150920)

When Ayu tried to rediscover the female jathil identity as a professional, we will be shown by the large role of the media in engendering a new category of 'dancer' in the *Jathilan* tradition. With such massive media support, Ayu gained her struggle's recognition for identity and, at the same time, succeeded in locking up the young generation's memories of *Jathilan*'s image, which is 'overreaching' and tends to be 'underestimated'. As a result, the young who had started to leave this tradition began to put new hope in it over again. In line with Dewall's argument, the notion of tradition in local, regional, or national contexts can be reshaped based on how and which historical events are remembered.

Memory fluctuations inherent in generations can certainly experience changes in conception, so when different generations construct different meanings, it will lead to submerged or forgotten reformulations. In that process of forgetting, the rediscovery of tradition takes place.

In her dancing body, she has at least given the image of being a 'high' without being like a palace dancer. She dismisses the general and old status of female dancers who are limited as sexual objects and male fantasies by representing the image of modern women as dancers who are professional,

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69 I don't mention commercialization in this case, because after all long before Ayu entered it, the *Jathilan* obyog performance had long been commercially successful – even though it was seen as having a negative reputation in some circles – but never really lost its fans, especially among the elderly and rural.

prestigious, popular, educated, and, at the same time, successful. Her figure has become popular among various groups, urban or rural, elite or proletariat, and the old or young, even among academics and Islamic boarding schools. After her success, many other women emerged as educated and 'professional' dancers. She has become a symbol of modern Javanese female dancers who reject forms of marginalization perpetuated on female dancers without losing the opportunity to street dance and be involved in public spaces. What Ayu represents at once (perhaps) undermines Wilson’s prediction regarding the politicized Warok tradition and will always be a vital force in the political and social cycle of the Ponorogo community.71 In practice, Jathil dancer has taken over this power through his body and massive support from the media.

E. Summary

Finally, after observing the Jathilan tradition, which has undergone various transitions and complex interventions, this paper argues that Jathilan tradition -instead of other traditional dances in Java- has been forged by the dominant elite authority to submit to national ideology. This situation forces this tradition to reinvent itself as a 'pure' tradition with a 'high' art form that can represent the nation's identity. However, in a hegemonic endeavor that attempts to 'discipline' the tradition, women Jathil dancer with her body has succeeded in determining the power to reinvent tradition in 'unique' and 'unexpected' ways. Instead of interpreting it as a site of struggle or contestation as Pemberton’s claim or the artist’s efforts to preserve the art, as Lysloff found,72 I interpret it more as women’s ways to redefine their imagery and role in Jathilan tradition. In a situation where women’s bodies are controlled in memory of 'high traditional forms' and the value of obedience, women dancers continuously reinvent themselves till they identify as 'own ones' and not as 'others'. Jathil women have succeeded in determining the power to reinvent tradition in picturesque ways, especially through the body and massive support of media to reconstruct social memory and imagination.

71 Wilson, 'Reog Ponorogo: Spirituality, Sexuality, and Power in a Javanese Performance Tradition'.
72 Lysloff, 'Rural Javanese “Tradition” and Erotic Subversion: Female Dance Performance in Banyumas (Central Java)'.

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However, dance can be eye-opening and, at the same time, increase understanding as a mechanism used by certain authorities in efforts to control. Although in the end, women’s bodies as subjects who dance enact it as a tool to reveal voices that have been silenced for a long time. What is emerging from the phenomenon above is the existence of a hegemonic discourse to reinventing traditions that are competed by other forces which continuously rediscover them in unique and creative ways. However, further investigation is needed into this issue.

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