

Reinterpretation of Gender Concept and Its Influence on Preservation of Barong Show Performance in Blora

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Abstract

Barongan Blora is a traditional folk dance in Central Java that has existed since 1830. The passage of time brings up new social conceptions that influence the implementation of Barongan performances, particularly those relating to gender. This research aims to look into the gender roles of Barongan dancers and how they interact with social and cultural components of society. Gender interpretation aims to understand the social construction of men's and women's roles in society. These roles include male and female dancers whose motions express diverse traits while maintaining the performance's significant values. This study employs a qualitative research design with case studies on various Barongan groups in Blora, Indonesia. In May 2023, data was gathered through interviews, observation, and documentation. The results suggest that cat motions dominate the Barongan dance steps, which are supported by strong, energetic, and nimble characters. On the other hand, each character's movements are tailored to the roles and the dancers who portray them. Male dancers are cast as characters who appear strong and emphasize masculine attributes, such as Barongan, Gembong Amijoyo, Joko Lodro, Untup, and Nayantaka. Meanwhile, female dancers who play male characters, such as Barongan and *Jathilan*, must be agile, strong, and feminine. Gender distinctions in Barongan performance can be noticed in the movements created. Still, there are no substantial disparities in physical appearance between male and female dancers because both needed a physique corresponding to the characters being played. The Barongan performance also impacts society's social and cultural features. Regarding social qualities, Barongan embodies the populist traits of the Blora people, which are based on humanist principles. In terms of culture, Barongan Blora has evolved to keep up with changing times, yet it remains and can be appreciated by all levels of society. Due to its uniqueness, Barongan's preservation is still carried out in line with the times while maintaining cultural values and content in physical and non-physical forms.

Keywords: Barongan show; gender; preservation

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INTRODUCTION

The term 'gender' is often used in today's society, but many of us still do not fully comprehend what it means. Gender

is frequently associated with sex, even though gender is distinct from sex. In general, sex is used to distinguish distinctions in biological anatomy between men and women, whereas gender focuses on

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social, cultural, and other non-biological elements. Gender in the social sciences refers to differences between men and women that are not entirely biological but result from social forms (MacDonald et al., 1999). Thus, gender is a key phrase to refer to femininity and Masculinity, which are socially produced based on location and change through time. Gender differences create gender disparities, and gender differences cause numerous injustices in society. Gender equality issues have recently become more prominent. Meanwhile, gender equality refers to the creation of equal conditions for men and women to achieve equal chances and rights as human beings, allowing them to play a role and participate in all parts of life, including dance performances. Female dancers' engagement in dance performances is inextricably linked to economic needs, which drive women to take over the economy for family well-being. Women in Blora recently participated in the Barongan performance, playing equal roles on stage. This study aims to examine gender roles in Barongan dance performances.

Barongan performance is a prominent folk art in Blora, particularly in rural areas (Jazuli & Alam, 2020). Barongan reflects the traits and familiarity of the Blora people, such as spontaneity, kinship, simplicity, roughness, toughness, compactness, and truth-based courage (Jazuli et al., 2020). Barongan performances may be found in almost every region of Indonesia, including Central Java, East Java, Bali, North Sumatra, and Yogyakarta. Barongan Blora, following Reog Ponorogo, is the most well-known Barongan performance in Central Java (Gottowik, 2008). In Blora, the Barongan performance has nothing to do with *Jaran Kepang*; instead, it appears alongside *Gendruwon*, a figure in a black mask with a gigantic face, usually wielding a sword (Karyono, 2015). Because of its distinctiveness, the Blora Regency Government has designated the Barongan Blora show as an intangible cultural heritage since 2009 (Ibda, 2019).

Barongan is a form of dance that uses

a large tiger-shaped mask called *Singabaron* (Dewi et al., 2018). Conceptually, the story of the Barongan performance originates from Hikayat Panji, which is a story about the journey of Raden Panji Asmarabangun or Pujangga Anom from the Kediri Kingdom, who wanted to propose to Dewi Sekartaji from the Jenggala Kingdom (Jazuli et al., 2020). Barongan performances are in the form of group dances that mimic the mighty movements of a giant lion, accompanied by musical instruments such as *kendhang*, *gedhuk*, *bonang*, *saron*, *demung*, and *kempul* (Arisyanto et al., 2021). Karyono et al. (2015) revealed that initially, the Barongan was a ritual dance related to *totemism*, namely the belief in four-legged animals that were considered to have protective powers. Functionally, the Barongan performance is used in the rituals of *Bersih Desa*, *lamporan*, *murwakala*, *sedekah bumi* (almsgiving), as well as weddings and circumcisions because Barongan is considered to be able to get rid of the bad character of the *dhanyang* (evil spirit) of the village (Amboro et al., 2020).

Barongan is performed by two dancers known as *pembarong*, one in charge of the front as the head and the other as the tail (Junarto & Eny, 2013). The Barongan's leader, known as *caplokan*, is formed of a *dhadap* wood frame wrapped in tiger skin and dreadlocks, while the body is composed of a blacu cloth with a tiger skin pattern (Herly, 2017). The motions of the *barongan* are solely improvised, simulating the movements of a tiger and being carried out spontaneously by the *barongan* following the rhythm of the music that accompanies it (Utina, 2019). The range of motions in the Barongan performance can generate a dynamic, energetic, daring, and mystical impression on the audience, providing artistic value (Komariah & Wiyoso, 2017).

Several distinct individuals appear in the Barongan Blora performance, including *Gendruwon*, *Nyantaka*, *Untub*, *Pak Genthung*, *Mbok Bong*, and *Belot* (Mangundiharjo, 2019). Barongan dancers (*pembarong*) are chosen based on their talent in motion methods and popularity as *pemba-*

rong (Slamet, 1999). In general, a man plays the barongan, even though the weight of the *barongan* can reach 30 kg. Furthermore, the male *pembarong* can describe the characteristics and character of a tiger, such as strong, ferocious, savage, agile, and mighty (Dewi et al., 2018). Female *pembarong* can now be easily encountered, particularly in the Barongan Samin Edan group. Female *pembarong* are distinguished by their ability to dance the Barongan mask, which is deemed sufficient. Furthermore, a feminine woman's basic character can perform the Barongan movement, which is forceful, dashing, and violent (Sarastiti et al., 2022). Barongan performances that use female *pembarong* are usually not tied to trance, so the dance's nature is only entertainment (Septiyan, 2021).

Adelita (2017) researched the factors that influence changes in the role of Jathil dancers in Reog Ponorogo. There is a phenomenon of dancer gender transition in Jathilan art in Ponorogo Regency occurs because of *gemblakan* practices, and the longer the dance movements performed by male Jathil dancers become feminine so that Jathilan art dancers in Ponorogo Regency are danced by f Another study, by Dewi et al. (2018), shows features of female contractors' appearance, such as talent, abilities, and means / media. Meanwhile, Rapoport (2021) says that the transition in the role of *Jathil* dancers from male to female is due to the audience's desire for a more artistic presentation that is no longer mysterious and magical. The female *Jathil* dancer is thought to have a specific appeal to the audience. As a result, the study on gender roles in dance focuses on Jathil dancers. Even though it is still one unit with the Barongan dance, the gender change in *Jathil* dancers is limited to one character. Meanwhile, research into gender change in the Barongan dance remains restricted. Therefore, the researcher was interested in examining the gender roles in the movement and character of the Barongan dancers and their relationship with society's social and cultural aspects.

Men and women have different roles

in the barong dance. Men are frequently thought to be more macho, whereas women are thought to be more feminine. The concept of feminine characteristics, according to Thesander (1997), covers features, traits, or qualities that are traditionally defined as typical or commonly associated with women. However, it is crucial to realize that these perspectives are strongly dependent on individual cultures and social situations, resulting in differences in the interpretation of feminine features from one country or community to the next. Some characteristics of feminine traits commonly associated with women are gentleness, kindness, empathy, sensitivity, humility, and the ability to communicate well (Hekman, 2014). However, it should be noted that not all female individuals exhibit these traits, and there is debate as to whether they should be considered exclusively female qualities. According to Blair et al. (1994), , it is important to remember that views about gender and feminine or masculine characteristics have evolved over time and are still changing in modern society. Many people today argue that these traits should not be attributed exclusively to one particular sex or gender, as each individual can have diverse combinations of traits, independent of their gender.

If it is related to dance performances, feminine qualities are also needed. On this point, the media is essential in promoting Masculinity and femininity, which are not absolute for particular genders. In performances, the word cross gender refers to artists who have a man's personality but can appear as a woman at any time. Cross-gender dancers do not appear abruptly in culture or art. Still, cultural history demonstrates the existence of this phenomenon and its emergence in numerous places, such as Japan's theatrical arts of Kabuki, Takarazuka, and Nihon Buyo. Stree Vesham is a Hindu ritual. Dan Dan Nan Dan and Yueju Opera are popular in China. Commedia dell'arte is popular in Europe (Mahfuri & Bisri, 2019). Many dances in Indonesia are performed by men yet are feminine, such as the Bebancihan Dan-

ce in Bali, the Randai art in Padang, West Sumatra, the Wayang Wong art in Yogyakarta, the Warok Art in East Java, the Mask Dance in West Java, and the Lengger Lanang Banyumas Dance in Central Java.

Meanwhile, Masculinity is a very nuanced and dynamic concept. According to Connell (1998), Masculinity is influenced by various factors and is directly tied to socioeconomic standing in society. Masculinity is a type of gender commonly described in terms of identity, social roles, and forms of power and is generally, but not solely, associated with men. Men are taught in social circles to reject or shun everything associated with feminine; therefore, men tend to be tough and aggressive, repress emotions (other than anger), emotionally and physically remove themselves from other men, and seek competition, success, and power (Mankowski & Smith, 2016). According to Barker (2007), Masculinity does not emerge naturally as a gift from God but rather as a result of conflict with culture. As a result, society deems a man to fail in social life if he lacks male characteristics such as strength, action, control, solidarity, autonomy, and work. Vigority and Curry (1998) state that male qualities vary by culture. Societal, cultural constructions often mold Masculinity, particularly in eastern regions such as Indonesia. Men must demonstrate Masculinity by regulating their looks, how they dress, how they speak, the type of activity they engage in, how they handle problems, verbal and nonverbal reactions, and the accessories they wear.

In every area, including dance, this hierarchical structure produces different body spaces for men and women. According to Hallensleben (2010), a dancer's attributes and movements are a sign of identity, such as culture, history, emotional state, and gender. Dancers' conscious or unconscious signs are social creations so that the dancer's body becomes a performative that reflects the culture in a society. Both male and female dancers must do some dances in this case. The dance, on the other hand, can be regarded as gen-

dered. That is, the dance itself might be assigned as feminine or masculine (Ikeh et al., 2020). Masculinity in the Barongan dance signifies robust, strong, well-built, and skilled male fighters. Masculinity can also be observed in the show's qualities. In this scenario, dance as a traditional medium can help to direct a clear view of society's gender stereotypes. According to Wahyudi and Gunawan (2020), several dances in Indonesia include male characters but are performed by female dancers, such as the Angguk Dance, Reog Dance, Teruna Jaya Dance, Wiranata Dance, and Panji Semirang Dance.

Several earlier studies on gender in traditional performances have been conducted, such as Adelita's (2017) study on the phenomena of gender transition in *jathil* dancers in *reog* art in Ponorogo Regency. According to this study, there are elements that influence changes in the role of *Jathil* dancers in *Reog* Ponorogo. Sarasititi et al. (2022) also address the function of female *pembarong* and humanistic values in the performance of *barongan* *samin edan* in Semarang. Dewi et al. (2018) additionally discussed female *pembarong* in the *barongan* *samin edan* group. No one had expressly examined gender roles or themes in *barong* dance in earlier research. As a result, in this study, we will go over the gender roles in *barong* performances for both men and women in greater depth. The debate focuses on character roles and gestures in the performance that reference masculine and feminine characteristics. It also addressed the impact of *barongan* performances on the social and cultural aspects of the surrounding community.

METHOD

This study uses a type of qualitative research. Creswell (2013) states that qualitative research is a process of scientific research that is intended to understand human problems in a social context by creating a comprehensive and complex picture presented, reporting detailed views of sources of information, and carried out in

natural settings without any intervention from researchers. This research was conducted on May to June 2023. This research focuses on examining the role of gender in the Barongan performances, as well as the correlation Barongan among social and cultural context. Data collection was carried out by observation, interview with modern Barongan group, and documentation methods.

Data collection technique used was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information, and is a way of identifying and selecting cases that will use limited research resources effectively (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this research, there were 7 respondents, such as: two Barongan dancers both female and male, two Joko Lodro dancers both female and male, one Jathilan dancer, and two Bujang Anom dancers both male and female. The instruments were used observations sheet and questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to collect data from the dancers.

The analysis used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes and to develop interpretations of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The analysis in this study consists of an analysis of the Barongan Dance visualization, the role of men in Barongan Dance, the role of women in Barongan Dance, social context, and cultural context. The data gathered during the research are organized in order and classified based on different characteristics and types. Interviews with Barongan dancer were conducted to obtain information regarding the role of each dancer in Barongan Performance, especially the different between male dancer and female dancer seen from physically and mentally. Observations were made by observing the movement and visualization of each figure in th Barongan Dance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Barongan Dance Visualization

Every character in the Barongan per-

formance has distinct visual traits. The gender of the dancer who performs the character also impacts this depiction. Therefore, the concept of gender in barongan needs to be reinterpreted in order to understand each character. Makeup and apparel are important in creating an appealing visualization for each dancer. Female dancers' makeup and costumes are more elaborate than male dancers. Female dancers' visuals are also more attractive to certain spectators since they are seen to emanate beauty. Meanwhile, the depiction of male dancers is simplified but powerful.

Barongan dancers, also known as *pembarong*, dress simply. Wide red or black trousers, a black short-sleeved shirt, and a headband are worn (see Figure 2.). *Pembarong* apparel is simple and only consists of t-shirts, intending to make the dancers feel at ease while entering the Barongan. An additional *jarit* is tied around the waist of some female dancer, coupled with decorations on the body and gold bracelets on the hands. Nonetheless, there are no set criteria for *Barongan* dancer. The Barongan mask's outfit is constructed entirely of white material with a pattern mimicking a tiger's body, with body and leg patterns in orange and black. *Pembarong's* makeup is simpler than that of a *Jathilan* dancer. Female *pembarong* were given varying makeup; some were given full cosmetics, while others were merely polished with powder. The goal is to provide the dancers with a genuine impression. Meanwhile, no makeup is required for male *pembarong*. The visual movement perceived by the Barongan dancers starts with a simple dance in which the barongan's body looks graceful to the right and left (see Figure 1a). The dancers then try to match their motions with the music rhythm, elevating their legs and swinging their bodies (refer to Figure 1b). Following that, the Barongan begins to demonstrate movements - *macanan* or cat movements - by moving freely and initiating the whipping scenario done by the handler, particularly in the traditional Barongan group (see Figures 1a and 1b).



Figure 1. Visualization of Barongan Dancers

Visually, the movements of the *Jathil* dancers are described as a group of horsemen with the mighty nature of a knight. The movements are firm and powerful. Starting with the movement of riding a horse with legs widened and (2a), then the legs are raised as if to fight (2b), then the dancer's body faces 90°(2c), then forms a wide formation to welcome *Gembong Amijoyo* (2d). The makeup used by dancers *Jathilan* uses makeup of cosmetic tools in the show. The makeup of the *Jathil* dancers is adapted to the character of *Jathil's* movements which are feminine, agile, *kenes* (cool), and firm. The *Jathil* dancer's eyeshadow uses dark colors such as dark blue combined with brown and pink, aiming to give an elegant impression but still look feminine. The lipstick color uses bright red to represent *Jathil's* assertive movements and to make it look more masculine. At the same time, the eyebrows use brown with a black combination to give the impression of a feminine character. Meanwhile, the *Jathil* dancers wear black tayet pants knee-high, green/red *jarit* with white motifs, black *stagen*, pink camisole, red headband and *sampur*, and a black and golden yellow belt with a pattern of *kace* and shoulder plate (see Figure 2). Additional accessories include glass and golden yellow tassels, wristbands patterned with *kace*, and black anklets.

Furthermore, the dancer *Bujang Anom* is the bodyguard of the character *Joko Lodro* in the Barongan performance. Usually, the presence of the *Bujang Anom* figure always accompanies the *Bujang Garum* figure. Visually, the *Bujang Anom* dancer is seen wearing black shorts, a red velvet vest, a red and yellow scarf tied around the waist, a black belly girdle, black wristbands, and

also a mask with a *singo barong* image (see Figure 3). The *Bujang Anom* and *Bujang Garum* dancers do not use makeup. Meanwhile, the resulting movement is the agile waddle dance following the strains of *gamelan* music (see Figure 3a), then the *Bujang Anom* dancer performs somersaults (see Figure 3b). The *Bujang Anom* and *Bujang Garum* dancers performed a front roll attraction and jumped very agilely.



(a)



(b)

Figure 2. Visualization of *Jathilan (masculine)* Dancers

Joko Lodro is the main character in the Barongan dance, he is described as a *mandraguna* who is powerful and can transform into a giant. In the Barongan performance, *Joko Lodro* fights with *Singo Barong* so that *Singo Barong* can be conquered, but in the end, *Singo Barong* can live again because he has almost the same supernatural powers as *Joko Lodro*. *Joko Lodro's* dancers and *Joko Lodro's* character shadow dancers wear white knee-high trousers created with black lines, red fingers, *stagen cinde*, belts, and black, yellow, or red straps tied around the neck, shoulder plates made of motifs with pants, and wrist and ankle bracelets (see Figures 4a and 4b). It's just that the costume for the shadow dancer of *Joko Lodro's* nature uses a black and white striped velvet vest which

is created with yellow gold stripes at each end. Joko Lodro's costume design depicts the role of a warrior who is dignified, courteous, and wise. Joko Lodro's form of shirtless clothing was made to support Joko Lodro's character as a knight who is calm and intelligent. The attire of Joko Lodro's shadow figure is not much different from Joko Lodro's attire. The difference lies only in the vest and the properties of the mask/makeup worn. The visualization of Joko Lodro's movements and Joko Lodro's shadow begins with a dance by swinging the body to the right and left and gracefully moving the hands up and down. One hand is always on the waist, while the other hand is moved around (see Figure 4a), after which the dancer moves all over the stage with fast movements ending by lifting one leg and placing one hand on the leg that is being raised (see Figure 4b). Meanwhile, Joko Lodro's shadow dancer uses a black mask with the initial movement the same as the original Joko Lodro's. The dancers continue to sway around the original Joko Lodro, approaching the *jathilan* dancer by walking backward, making movements as if breaking his shoulder, and moving his stomach.

Meanwhile, the dancers *Nayantaka* and *Gainah* do not have a standard dress code. *Nayantaka* and *Gainah* are portrayed as simple and comical people. Hence in some Barongan groups, these two characters merely wear ordinary attire, such as negligee with masks in black, white, yellow, or cream. *Nayantaka's* figure, on the other hand, wears a black vest with a yellow gold beret, a black belt, an orange scarf knotted around his waist, a *jarit*, headgear, and a black mask in another Barongan group. While the character *Gainah* is seen wearing a kebaya, shawl, head cover, and a yellow mask, it is clear that this is a funny character. Visualizing the ensuing motions is usually spontaneous and improvised. Therefore, there are no regular movements in every performance.

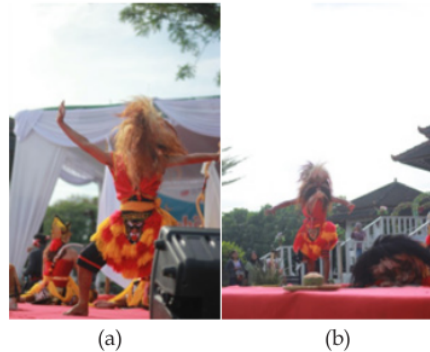


Figure 3. Visualization of *Bujang Anom* Dancers



Figure 4. Visualization of *Joko Lodro* Dancers and the shadow trait of *Joko Lodro*

Each character has its visual form based on the feeling it bears. In actuality, the image differs for each Barongan group, even if the visualization of each character is nearly identical to the standard Barongan group, in contrast to the character depiction in modern Barongan performances, which has evolved significantly. Creations were made to give a different impression to appeal to a wide range of audiences. This picture helps to realize how intricate the Barongan performance is. Every detail must be studied to create a strong visual impression and character. Using makeup and clothing is vital in creating realistic fictional characters. Dancers use makeup and costume as a form of expression to represent the characters they play. According to Vukadinovi and Markovi (2017), vision in dance is caused by supporting variables such as scenography, spatial dynamics,

physical characteristics of dancers, dancer motions, and choreography. Dance is typically able to transmit information to the audience about the physical and mental health of the dancer's character while on stage through this imagery (Brown et al., 2006). The visualization in the Barongan performance takes the form of tiger-like motions. Each character has a distinct movement that reflects the character's personality. Some characters move gracefully, yet other ones move quickly. According to Young-Mee and Jin-Young (2016), the visualization of dance affects the psychological elements of the dancers and the audience, as well as the physical motions of the dancers. The visualization of dance can boost motivation, and self-confidence, melt away tension and improve attention.

The Role of Men in Barongan Dance

No precise regulations govern the number of dancers appearing in the Barongan performance. The dancers in the Barongan act are usually in groups of 4-8. The number of dancers is typically varied based on their activity. The number of dancers is regulated to the budget of the people who perceive Barongan Art, especially at amusement occasions. The greater the economic level, the greater the number of dancers in the Barongan Arts. *Barongan*, *Jathilan*, *Bujang Anom*, *Pentul*, *Nayantaka*, *Gainah*, and *Untup* are the figures of Barongan art. The dancers in the Barongan character are usually performed by four people, three of whom are men and one of whom is a woman. Male dancers typically do Barongan performances (see Figure 5a). This is inextricably linked to the community's idea that male dancers represent power, so male dancers play a more dominant role than female dancers. This is also inextricably linked to community concerns about men, who find it easier to carry Barongan masks than women because the

weight of the masks surpasses 30 kg. Male *pembarong*' body contours are tighter and firmer, revealing the *pembarong*'s body muscles. There was also a brawl in the middle of the show between Joko Lodro and Barongan, who *Jathilan* dancers surrounded. As a result, the male Barongan dancer must have a muscular body to be ridden by Joko Lodro's shadow during the war scene. The Barongan movement, which is played amid the performance, is marked or accompanied by *Ponoragan* music.

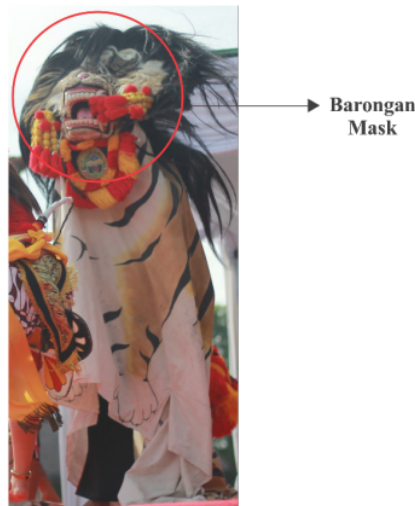


Figure 5. Male *Pembarong*

Bujang Anom is played by a male dancer in the Barongan performance. *Bujang Anom* and *Bujang Garum* are the two *Bujang Anom* figures. The characters are amusing, agile, and powerful. Dancers in this character are attractive dancers who can perform front somersaults, wheel poses, cartwheels, front rolls, and back rolls. Men perform all of the *Bujang Anom* character dancers. The mask's character and the musical accompaniment affect *Bujang Anom*'s movement. The only moves displayed are somersaults, forward rolls, and reverse rolls.



Figure 6. Male dancers as *Bujang Anom* characters

The next role is as a character dancer *Joko Lodro*. There are 5 *Joko Lodro* figures, 1 is the original *Joko Lodro* character, and 4 are shadows of *Joko Lodro*'s character. *Joko Lodro*'s character is described as having a firm, strong, dignified, and courteous personality. All of the dancers who play the character of *Joko Lodro* are male. *Joko Lodro*'s dance moves and shadows use pure movements or *wantah* movements, namely movements arranged to obtain an artistic form.



Figure 7. Male dancer of "*Joko Lodro*" character

The next role is as the character *Nayantaka*. Together with the character *Gainah*, the character *Nayantaka* has a humorous and humorous personality. Usually, the *Nayantaka* character is played by men, while women play the *Gainah* character. But this is not a standard, *Gainah* can also be played by men dressed as women. There is a possibility of a dual role in the *Pentul* character because this character functions to entertain the audience with his funny moves.

Meanwhile, *Gainah* is an old fema-

le character that a man can dance. In her dances, *Gainah* is usually accompanied by *Untup* and *Nayantaka*. *Untup* and *Nayantaka* are two characters wearing black masks and white masks. The mask's shape is unique because it does not cover the entire face, so the beards of the dancers will be visible. The existence of *Gainah* and *Untup* characters symbolizes femininity in the *Barongan* performance. The movements of the two characters are also made like the body movements of a woman who is graceful, flirtatious, and waddling. This is a challenge for male dancers because they must portray characters differently from their daily lives. The male dancers who play the two characters are required to be able to sound like women, wear older women's costumes, and act like women.

As indicated above, masculinity is represented by strength, agility, and muscularity. According to Connell (1998), masculinity refers to traditional or societally accepted attributes of men, such as courage, assertiveness, physical strength, independence, logic, ambition, domination, competitiveness, and lack of emotional expressiveness. The objects and qualities of *barong* dancers are more focused on the male gender role, which is macho.

This representation of the concept of gender leads to an examination of characters who are suited for playing based on their gender. The role of men in the *Barongan* performance is, of course, more than that of women. Of all the characters in the *Barongan* performance, 70% are performed by men. Apart from being strong, men can play all the characters well. Even characters that women should play can also be played by men. In this case, the nature of femininity appears in the male dancers who sway on the stage. Even so, this trait is carried out as a form of the totality of male dancers towards their work.

6 The Role of Women in the *Barongan* Dance

In the past, the *Barongan* dance was only performed by male dancers because men were considered to have the power

to imitate Barongan movements. Gender reinterpretation makes the roles in Barongan performances more varied. However, currently, the Barongan performance is not only limited to male dancers, but women also take part in playing the characters in the show.

Women in Barongan performances can also act as Barongan dancers. The Barongan character is strong, brave, and agile, but the female Barongan can perform Macanan or cat movements spontaneously and improvisatively (see Figure 8). This is unique because not all women can imitate the movements of the Barongan well, especially the Barongan mask, which can weigh up to 30 kg. Of course, it is not an easy thing to control the mask while dancing. To lift the Barongan mask, female dancers are trained with physical and spiritual exercises to use the strength of their teeth and neck muscles. But there is a difference between Barongan played by women and Barongan played by men. If the male Barongan dancers are required to be able to lift the Barongan (*Dadak Merak*) mask, which weighs up to 30 kg, the female Barongan dancers only use the usual Barongan mask. To be able to portray the character of Barongan in totality, sometimes there are special rituals that must be carried out by the female bridegroom before the Barongan performance begins, one of which is the “*Buka Klambu*” ritual, where the female baron who the shaman likes must have intercourse with the aim of transferring energy from the shaman to the *pembarong* so that when the performance begins, the barbarian becomes strong and invulnerable to sharp objects. Physical training is also needed so that female *pembarong* has a muscular body and can demonstrate the Barongan well on stage. Even so, there was no difference in the movements or costumes used between the female and male *pembarong* on stage.

The figure of *Jathilan* (figure 4) is generally played by 5-9 female dancers and is danced in groups. *Jathil* dancers are, on average, 20 to 24 years old. It is suspected that an odd number of dancers is used to

create a symmetrical spatial composition so that, generally, there are only 7 *Jathilan* dancers. In the past, *Jathilan* dancers were played by men, but now *Jathilan* dancers are fully played by women. This aims to make *Jathilan*'s movements look more streamlined, increase the attractiveness of the audience, and build a lively atmosphere. There is an aesthetic expression that *Jathilan* dancers want to show to the audience that male dancers cannot express. *Jathil* dancers have a sassy, cool, agile, and energetic character. The expression of a dancer shows talent and skill in fighting on a horse. In the show, the *jathil* dancers pair up with each other. *Jathilan* dance movement is a meaningful movement (gesture) with a specific meaning or purpose and has been stylized. This shows that the *Jathil* dance moves are included in the representative movement category because the *Jathil* dance moves are the movements of a soldier riding a horse which shows his soldier side.

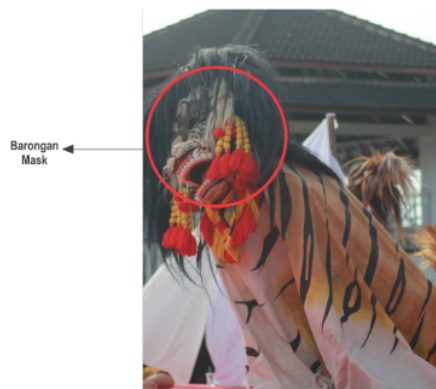


Figure 8. Female *Pembarong* in Barongan performance

The warrior's movements make the female *Jathilan* dancers appear more masculine since they stress nimble and well-built attitudes and a body form similar to a man's. Figure 4 shows that the *Jathil* dancers do not waddle but instead demonstrate their strength by riding a horse. These male characteristics do not appear independently; rather, they require thorough training so that dancers may act like soldiers on stage.



Figure 9. Female *jathil* dancers in Barongan performance

The inclusion of female dancers in the Barongan Performance attempts to demonstrate an aesthetic impression emanating from the aura of women, particularly in Barongan art, which is intended for entertainment and spectacle functions.

Women's roles are also featured in the performance dancers to provide a more feminist impression, particularly for the *jathilan* figures. The character accentuates feminine movements that are thin, cool, and agile. This implies that there must be a female role in this barong performance. Some characteristics of feminine traits commonly associated with women are gentleness, kindness, empathy, sensitivity, humility, and the ability to communicate well (Hekman, 2014).

Furthermore, a societal shift is causing fewer and fewer male dancers in the Barongan Show. To get around this, female dancers are an alternative as part of the regeneration of Barongan dancers. This is contrary to the situation in the past, where female dancers in Barongan performances were considered unethical, so men mostly performed the role of Barongan dancers. The female *pembarong* gives a distinct impression compared to the male *pembarong*. The characteristics of masculinity, movement techniques, and appreciation of the roles performed by female dancers in Barongan do not have the effect of alienating the audience. From this explanation, it is necessary to reinterpret the concept of gender in *barongan* performances so that the performance can run more optimally.

On the contrary, the audience is fascinated by the existence of these cross-

gender roles. This innovation of transition between male contractors and female contractors is called *Tunner* in Sarastiti et al. (2022) as a liminal stage (threshold) or unusual events (anti-structural). Women's Barongan performance art has a rich meaning regarding cultural, social, and welfare aspects. The definition of culture is the preservation, revitalization, and development of local cultural traditions. The social significance is linked to an improved sense of community among activists and the creation of artistic creativity spaces for women. Well-being refers to increased well-being, including spiritual and material gratification from creative activity. In the performance of Barongan, the gender change that occurs in female *pembarong* appears to communicate an implicit message about the prevalence of gender equality and humanist values in society (Durkheim & Muzir, 2003).

Based on Table 1, there is no significant difference between the movement, physical form, and character of the male and female Barongan dancers. Even so, there is a slight difference between the two. The movements of male and female dancers in the Barongan performance use many of the Surakarta dance styles, namely *ulap-ulap*, *ngrayung*, *ngithing*, *ngepel*, *mendak*, *mbaya mangap*, and *junjung nekuk*. However, the movements of each character in the Barongan performance played by men, such as *Joko Lodro*, *Barongan*, and *Bujanganom* are more violent, frightening, and attractive than the movements of the characters in the Barongan performance played by women. In contrast, the movements are more spontaneous, smooth, and soft. Then, female and male dancers must have strong and well-built bodies, except *Jathilan* dancers, who women specifically play due to their feminine, sassy, and graceful features. While the character of each role played by both female and male dancers is the same, the character does not alter just because a male or female plays it. Therefore, the dancer must adjust to the character being played.

This is consistent with the notions

Table 1. Gender roles and the movements of each character

Gender	Character	Movement	Physically	Characteristics
Male	Barongan	Using Surakarta dance style movements, namely <i>ulap-ulap</i> , <i>ngrayung</i> , <i>ngithing</i> , and <i>ngepel</i> . While the foot movements use somersaults, <i>junjung</i> , <i>ngaklak</i> , <i>senggot</i> , <i>gebyah</i> , <i>dekeman</i> , <i>kucingan</i> , <i>geter</i> , <i>thathakan</i> , <i>glundungan</i> , <i>mbekur</i> , and <i>thapukan</i> . Overall, the movements of the male Barongan dancers are wilder, more attractive, and more powerful.	Strong, stocky body	Spontaneous, strong, mighty
	Joko Lodro	Using Surakarta dance style movements, namely the <i>junjung nekuk</i> , <i>ulap-ulap</i> , <i>bapangan</i> , and <i>ngepel</i> movements. Overall, Joko Lodro's movements are more frightening by showing the movements of a soldier who is ready to kill Singo Barong.	Strong, stocky body and strapping	Violent, firm, energetic
	Bujang Anom	The movements used are <i>ngrayung</i> , <i>ngepel</i> , and <i>mendak</i> . Be more attractive by doing somersaults, wheel poses, and front rolls.	Stocky body and strong	<i>Celelekan</i> , lively, strong, attractive
Female	Barongan	Using the movements of the Surakarta dance style, namely <i>ulap-ulap</i> , <i>ngrayung</i> , <i>ngithing</i> , and <i>ngithing</i> movements. While the foot movements use cartwheel, <i>junjung</i> , <i>ngaklak</i> , <i>senggot</i> , <i>gebyah</i> , <i>dekeman</i> , <i>kucingan</i> , <i>geter</i> , <i>thathakan</i> , <i>glundungan</i> , <i>mbekur</i> , and <i>thapukan</i> . Overall, the resulting movements are softer and not too crazy on stage. Generally, movements are only done in one place.	Must have strong and strapping	Spontaneous, strong, mighty
	Jathilan	More feminine but still shows the movement of a warrior on horseback who is mighty and tough	Graceful and elegant, but her soldier side remains seen	Feminine, lively, energetic, timid, and <i>kenes</i> .
	Joko Lodro	Using Surakarta dance style movements, namely the <i>junjung nekuk</i> , <i>ulap-ulap</i> , <i>bapangan</i> , and <i>ngepel</i> movements. Overall, the resulting movement is simpler but still authoritative.	Must have strong and strapping physique like a warrior	Authoritative, strong, and dashing warrior
	Bujang Anom	The movements used are <i>ngrayung</i> , <i>ngepel</i> , and <i>mendak</i> . Overall, the resulting movements are elegant and attractive, but a little bit of extreme acrobatic movements	Stocky body and strong	<i>Celelekan</i> , lively, strong, and a little bit attractive

of feminine and masculine. Visser (2002), defines feminine qualities or characteristics as traits or characteristics that are typically associated with women. Gentleness, sensitivity, empathy, and elegance are examples of such qualities. These characteristics are frequently related with emotions and care for others. In the meantime, masculine refers to attributes or characteristics that are typically associated with men. Courage, physical strength, aggressiveness, and independence are examples. Characteristics: in barong performances, males will play characters with more masculine features, while women will play characters with more feminine characteristics. This is done to give the character a more heartfelt appearance.

Social and Cultural Context of Barongan

Barongan has had a substantial societal impact on the residents of Blora. The Barongan performance incorporates moral and social ideals embody the Blora people's populist traits, such as kinship, spontaneity, simplicity, roughness, toughness, compactness, and truth-based courage. Barongan relationships regularly arise in the Blora area due to close affinity. Even though there are numerous Barongan groups, they all support one another. This is meant to be a type of cultural preservation done by the community to keep Barongan alive.

Changes in societal structure have an impact on Barongan performance. At its inception, the Barongan performance was solely performed by men. Patriarchal ideology, which elevates men's positions above women's, and gender stereotypes, which assign specific identities to men and women, are still deeply ingrained and ubiquitous in many aspects of people's life. However, in the context of this study, the findings suggest that the existence of a Barongan performance group is capable of serving as a socialization and change agent in the construction of men's and women's roles. Barongan performances are functionally viewed by all groups in society, from youngsters to teens to adults. For adults,

the Barongan performance is a source of enjoyment and belief in the story's validity and moral message. Barongan has been turned into an entertaining performance for teenagers and little children. The Barongan act is intriguing because it includes dances that form a formation and are performed by skilled and professional players.

Furthermore, the Barongan dance is backed with costumes, equipment, and music rich in local culture, piquing the interest of young people. Sundar et al. (2020) discovered that people are often educated indirectly by every barongan art performance because every work of art carries a message or meaning. A piece of art can serve as a teaching aid by providing stimuli. Barongan art is useful for guiding and educating one's mentality and behavior so that it improves and progresses. This is one example of how the Barongan performance can promote societal aesthetic and ethical values.

Barongan is a kind of cultural preservation practiced by the Blora people for millennia. Barongan Blora's long history distinguishes it from its original shape. Samin Surosentiko imported Barongan Blora from Sumoroto Ponorogo (Haryono, 2008). Barongan was brought to Blora as a medium to elicit sympathy from the Blora people for them to live more autonomously. Furthermore, when it first appeared, Barongan Blora served as a ceremonial medium in the *Ruwatan Murwakala* or *Ruwatan Wong Sukerta* rites. Because this tiger-shaped mask is considered to have supernatural powers and to be a guardian who is thought to be the incarnation of Batara Wisnu named Narasima against *Buta Kesipu*, the manifestation of *Batara Kala*, Barongan Blora can ward off evil spirits. This is a Hindu concept in which the tiger serves as the temple's guardian and is also known as the *Kalamakara*. This is a Hindu concept in which the tiger serves as the temple's guardian and is also known as the *Kalamakara*. Aside from that, Barongan Blora is thought to be a way of joining the spirit of the tiger totem animal, which the

Javanese refer to as Kyai. This is also related to the tiger being Prophet Sulaiman's favorite animal. Because of this, Barongan Blora is particularly connected to the Blora people's socio-cultural existence.

Barongan Blora has evolved from mystical rites or customs to become a common form of entertainment. The transcendental function of Barongan Blora allowed it to develop a more creative and appealing grip through changes in dance styles, performers' costumes, time of performance, and story plots. The appearance of the Barongan Blora mask in the play has also changed, particularly from an artistic standpoint.

Even though Barongan Blora has evolved into a kind of entertainment, it has retained elements of ritual or custom. After several Barongan performances in the Blora Regency environment, the public became aware of Barongan Blora's performances. Other versions do not have the qualities of Barongan performances. This demonstrates how the Barongan Blora show evolves and grows dynamically, beginning with the basic Barongan Blora presentation and progressing to the present day, full of innovations and variants or changes. Barongan Blora is unique, yet it must adapt to changing times without losing its essence and cultural values in physical and non-physical forms. As a result, all artists must innovate to address the changes and challenges of the times.

CONCLUSIONS

The dancer's role in the Barongan Blora performance has a distinctive and variable gender reinterpretation. This reinterpretation clarifies the actor's gender in relation to the character being performed. Although the figures' actions mirror traditional animal or human features, the redefinition of gender adds an additional layer to the play. In this setting, gender interpretation is crucial in portraying biological distinctions and delving deeply into the core of performance. Male and female

dancers in the Barongan performance have motions that express various traits, but without diminishing the performance's significant values.

The Barongan performance is one of the cultures that still exist in Blora today. Visually, each character in the Barongan performance has its characteristics. The movements that appear in the visualization of the Barongan dancer express the movement of a cat and mouse (*Macanan*). At the same time, other characters played by men are visualized with movements that are agile, dashing, and full of dexterity. Meanwhile, the female characters in the Barongan show are depicted with graceful and spontaneous movements. However, in general, there is no significant difference in the show. Barongan Blora has exceeded the boundaries of social construction in society. The dancers' roles are no longer grouped based on a certain type of gender but are more flexible. Overall, gender differences in the Barongan show are only seen in the movements produced. However, physically and in the characters played, there are no significant differences between male and female dancers because both are required to have the physique and personality according to the characters played.

The existence of the Barongan performance has also impacted the local community's social and cultural features. From a societal standpoint, the Barongan performance is accessible to all groups since it teaches humanism and populist principles held by the Blora people, such as courage, honesty, kinship, and mutual collaboration. In terms of culture, the Barongan Blora show has evolved, so today's Barongan is not only involved in mystical rites but also as an attractive and easily accepted entertainment medium by all levels of society. With its uniqueness, Barongan preservation continues to be carried out following the periods without compromising the substance and cultural values in physical and non-physical forms.

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