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GADJAH MADA



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Zurich<sup>uzh</sup>

# WORK AND DAILY LIFE IN INDONESIA

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## Introduction

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The Covid-19 pandemic has profoundly affected the work and life of people across the world. Yet, not everyone was affected in the same way. The pandemic not only deepened existing inequalities but also gave rise to new forms. This collection of student essays addresses the multitude of ways that the pandemic has transformed – and continues to transform – the daily work lives of people in and around Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The publication is an output from the third edition of the International Summer School “Southeast Asia in Motion”, held at Gadjah Mada University in the summer of 2022, and attended by 39 students from Indonesia, Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and Switzerland<sup>1</sup>. Combining state-of-the-art research with an innovative teaching format, the summer school provided students with the opportunity to practice ethnographic research and gain an anthropological insight into the afterlives of the Covid-19 pandemic in Yogyakarta.

Well known as a hub for both education and tourism in Indonesia, greater Yogyakarta has experienced a major shift in its local economy in recent decades. The city’s economic infrastructure has shifted from a focus on agriculture toward the industry and service sectors. National statistics data indicate that in 2019, 71 percent of the labor force was employed in these latter two sectors, which contributed significantly to the local economic growth in the region (Lazuardi, 2020). The situation changed, however, when the Corona pandemic hit Indonesia. Due to

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increasing numbers of Covid-19 cases in Yogyakarta in mid-2020, the local authorities, as an extension of the national government, declared a state of emergency in the hope of reducing transmission rates by applying so-called large-scale social restrictions (or in Indonesian: *Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar – PSBB*). This policy required all residents to stay at home, while various religious and cultural activities that could potentially trigger crowds were prohibited, schools were closed, teaching was moved online, and economic and tourist sites were temporarily closed. Thus, economic activities experienced a major downturn, affecting especially those who depended on the tourism sector.

Inspired by the book “It’s a Living: Work and Life in Vietnam Today” (Sasges 2013), we engaged with the question of how the pandemic has affected the work and life of Indonesians living in peri-urban Yogyakarta. Summer school participants started by attending an intensive week of lectures and then engaged in a collaborative empirical research project. Using a variety of (multimodal) methods, small groups of students each portrayed an individual and their relation to their work, dealing amongst others with questions of social status, economic (in)security, but also affective engagement, imagination and aspiration, and the impact of the pandemic. Participating students were able to gain experience working in an international learning and research setting and had the opportunity to practice ethnographic methods collaboratively (Schlehe & Hidayah, 2014). Supervised by lecturers from both UGM and UZH, students carried our research in pairs consisting of students of different national (and sometimes disciplinary) backgrounds. This approach encouraged students to scrutinize their own ethnocentric biases, sharpen their understanding of their own positionality, and strengthen reflexivity in research.

The empirical research projects resulted in 19 short essays, out of which 10 were selected to be included in this joint publication. The essays deal with a wide range of professions, from teachers, (social) entrepreneurs,

bakers, massage therapists, and construction workers to more localized professions, such as traditional dancers, traditional make-up artists, coachmen, and graveyard caretakers.

Without denying the economic impact of the pandemic on many of the work-lives portrayed, the essays successfully show that work is not about economic considerations alone and that socio-cultural and political dimensions are crucial in shaping an individual's relation to their work. The essays delve into the trajectory and meaning of a profession for each interlocutor and show that the pandemic has had very different (and unequal) impacts on the people portrayed. While some lost their source of income as a result of the lockdown, others were hardly affected, could adapt to online activities, or even benefit from new opportunities. By paying close attention to these very individual work and life stories, this collection of essays helps throw new light on the diversity of experiences in the afterlife of the pandemic.

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## CONTENTS

Introduction.....	i
The Special Needs Teacher: Educating in Extraordinary Circumstances .....	2
The Elementary School Teacher: Between Dreams and Reality.....	7
The Social Entrepreneur: Breastmilk for a Better World .....	13
Between Passion and Economic Opportunity: The Home Baking Business	20
The Massage Therapist: In Search of Independence .....	25
The Construction Worker: Brick by Brick and Site to Site .....	30
Between Two Poles: A Traditional Makeup Artist ( <i>Dukun Manten</i> ) in the Modern Day.....	39
The Classical Javanese Dancer: Dancing for Life, Not Dancing for a Living	46
The <i>Kusir Andong</i> : A Carriage of Culture .....	53
The Graveyard Caretaker ( <i>Kuncen</i> ): Praying for the Dead and Serving the Living .....	59



# The Special Needs Teacher: Educating in Extraordinary Circumstances

Amanda Diva Nareswari and Kurt Vinzenz Zurfluh

In a small neighborhood on the outskirts of Yogyakarta, the bright green wall surrounding the school compound is immediately noticeable. On the inside, a colorful schoolyard with rich floral decorations invites children to play. Apart from the sign language alphabet hanging on a wall, nothing much indicates that this is a *sekolah luar biasa*—literally, “an extraordinary school” that attends to the needs of physically and mentally impaired children.

It is July, and the new school year is about to start. During the first three days at this *sekolah luar biasa*, children are expected to get to know each other, their teachers, and the surroundings of the school. After their parents have escorted them from home, they are cheerfully welcomed by the teachers, who help them carry their bags, take them to class, and invite them to talk. Among all of the teachers, one in particular stands out: Ibu Narti<sup>1</sup>. With her warm, open demeanor, she brings a smile to the face of every child, colleague, and visitor. On this Monday morning, wearing a brown state uniform with a matching hijab, she briefly presents the profile of the school and then invites students to introduce themselves. Using sign language, she slowly spells each student’s name, so that it is easy for everyone to follow.

Ibu Narti has been a special needs teacher for twenty years, or half of her life, as she jokingly points out. From a young age, she decided to follow the example of her mother, who had also been a teacher at a school for children with special needs: “If not us, who will teach these kids?,” she asks. Clearly, one does not become a special needs teacher to make money, as Ibu Narti explains; she herself was not being paid at all when she started her career. Nowadays, Ibu Narti is a civil servant—*pegawai negeri sipil (PNS)*—and hence,

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<sup>1</sup> In order to protect the anonymity of our research participants, all names used in this text are pseudonyms.

earns more than the average wage, but she still thinks that being a special needs teacher is all about dedication [*pengabdian*].

In fact, apart from being able to teach, teachers in special needs schools are required to do many things, such as fixing school facilities by changing lightbulbs and helping students to drink, tie their shoes, carry bags, walk, and use the bathroom. Even when school is over, teachers wait with pupils who have not been picked up yet, accompanying and entertaining them, and trying to comfort those that are crying while waiting to be collected by their parents. Ibu Narti thinks that special needs teachers “have a very close relationship with the children.” This changed with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In March 2020, schools across Indonesia were closed to curb the spread of Covid-19, and they remained closed for practically two years, until early 2022 (Heyward 2022). In the interim, teaching moved online, and children were expected to learn from home. For teachers of the *sekolah luar biasa*, but also for the children and their parents, the pandemic was a great challenge, Ibu Narti recalls:

Some families had little experience with the internet, limited cellphone credit and, especially when they were living in more remote areas, limited network coverage. Parents also had to go to work and left their children at home, without anyone to supervise them when studying. My colleagues and I had to rack our brains so that we could continue providing a good learning environment for the children.

Looking for alternative ways of staying in touch with the children enrolled at their school, Ibu Narti and her colleagues communicated by telephone with the parents and their children and asked parents to come to school to take the children’s assignments and send pictures of the completed assignments to the teachers. They also designed a home-visit-program, whereby they regularly went to see the children at home. According to Bu Narti, “Teachers and parents have a crucial role to play in fostering children’s motivation to learn.”

Despite all their efforts, Ibu Narti feels that the pandemic has negatively affected children’s education, especially in the case of children with special



needs. In video calls, for instance, sensory elements, such as touch, are lacking. But for children with special needs, “direct touch between teachers and children is very influential for [their] motivation to learn,” Ibu Narti explains. Because of this, she feels that teachers’ relationships with their students have become strained. Even now that face-to-face teaching is back after two years, many children have forgotten a lot and do not yet recognize their teachers and friends. “We have to re-acquaint and rebuild the chemistry between us,” Ibu Narti explains.

Despite the many challenges that she faced as a teacher during the Covid-19 pandemic, Ibu Narti still emphasizes the joys of being a special needs teacher. She likes coming to school every day, because she knows that it will bring new experiences. To her, a mother of three young children, coming to school is also a refreshing change from all the household chores back home. Most importantly, she enjoys seeing the progress that students make:

The thing that makes me very proud is when I see the development of children on a regular basis. From them not being able to write the number zero, to being able to write the number zero, and now being able to write fluently into a whole sentence. It is true that children’s abilities do not develop significantly but accompanying them in this process makes me proud and happy.

In society, Ibu Narti feels that special needs teachers do not get adequately recognized. When walking with the children in the streets, she senses that passersby often feel uncomfortable and do not know how to react to them. When she mentions her profession, she gets comments like: “You are teaching crazy people, right?” To her, it is important “not [to] put anyone down, especially a child with special needs.” Becoming a special needs teacher has also made her more attuned to other people in general. “For instance, if I see a blind person who wants to cross the street, I will just help them right away.”

As a special needs teacher, Ibu Narti hopes that children at the *sekolah luar biasa* can grow into independent individuals that can make a meaningful contribution to society. “This includes being able to help themselves, their family, and to independently support themselves, whether it is through

employment or entrepreneurship.” In the future, Ibu Narti also hopes the school will be able to get better facilities; blind children, for example, should have a mobility orientation room and guiding blocks, she explains, but there are none in her school. When it comes to access to higher education or work, children with special needs should be given equal opportunities, Ibu Narti argues. Even though Indonesian government regulations encourage companies to employ people with special needs, this is not yet happening. “Equal rights are very important”, Ibu Narti explains, “also because it shows [people with special needs] that they are accepted in society.”

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TRAIL RUNNERS  
PUSATKABATA

M. NARIF GIRI  
IMOGIRI

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# The Elementary School Teacher: Between Dreams and Reality

Dihan Amiluhur and Thi Ha Tram Vu



Figure 1: A student in a sports class during Covid-19

“When I grow up, I want to be a teacher.”

A message from one of my students resembles my childhood dream. Why did I decide to become an elementary gym teacher? As I recall, it did not happen overnight. Before I became a teacher, I worked in the automotive industry from 2015 to 2016, because I graduated from *SMK*, a vocational high school focused on the automotive field. While I was working in the automotive industry, I glimpsed my dream job as a sports teacher. I remember my elementary sports teacher looking very comfortable. He played sports with the children and did not seem burdened. Like most men, I also had a great passion for sports that began in childhood. Therefore, I was motivated to pursue a higher degree in sports education for elementary school and quit my

job in the automotive industry. In 2016, when I took the university entrance exam, I asked my friends to help me apply, and I got accepted. I graduated in July 2020, and shortly after that, I got a job as an elementary school teacher at a nearby Islamic school. I was relieved that I would need to spend less time commuting to the school where I work.

In Indonesia, there are two types of teachers: there are permanent teachers,<sup>3</sup> who have obtained a document called a “government employment agreement certificate” at the institution where they teach, and then there are semi-permanent teachers,<sup>4</sup> who have a private employment contract with the institution. The main difference between these two types of positions lies in their working hours and salary. The salary for permanent teachers comes from taxes, while the salary of the semi-permanent teachers comes from the institution where they teach and can vary from school to school. The working hours for permanent teachers are also more tightly controlled. On the other hand, semi-permanent teachers have much more flexible working hours, depending on the institution. To become full-time teachers, semi-permanent teachers need to take specific exams administered by the ministry of education. However, the school where I teach is an Islamic school under the Ministry of Religion. Therefore, I could not take the exam, because most of the promotional exams were given by the Education Ministry, not by the Ministry of Religion. It is unlikely that the Ministry of Religion will offer a test to promote semi-permanent teachers to permanent teachers.

I got hired as a semi-permanent teacher and get paid by the hour. At first, I felt very relieved, because this job was like I imagined it would be. Being a sports teacher is very comfortable, because I like sports and enjoy most of the activities. However, there were also several other things that surprised me. As a sports teacher, it is difficult to get a lot of working hours, because most sports classes only happen in the morning from 8:00 to 10:00. I manage to cover a total of seven classes for a total of about 28 hours per month and get paid around 15,000 rupiah (around 1 USD) per hour. In total, I can earn about 420,000 rupiahs per month. For comparison, the Yogyakarta regional

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<sup>3</sup> *Guru P3K (Pegawai Pemerintah dengan Perjanjian Kerja)*

<sup>4</sup> *Guru Tidak Tetap.*



standard minimum wage is around 2,150,000 rupiah per month, and my salary as a full-time teacher is less than a quarter of that. Because my wage as a semi-permanent teacher is not enough to cover my daily expenses, such as food, internet, and other necessities, I must find another profession to support my livelihood. One of my other jobs is as a swimming teacher at the pool club. At least three times a week, I teach at the pool and can earn around 300,000 rupiah per week. I also provide private lessons for 50,000 rupiah per session for extra income. Because the gym classes usually end at 10:00 a.m., I can go to the swimming pool in the afternoon before school even closes. Apart from that, I also work at a batik business that belongs to my aunt. It has very flexible hours, and because of that, I can manage my schedule both at school and at the swimming pool. I mainly dye fabrics and can make around 100,000–150,000 rupiah per cloth.

During the pandemic in 2020, I had to make some changes related to my teaching methods. Since most gym classes mainly focus on physical activity, it was difficult for me to do my job due to the many physical restrictions imposed during the pandemic. Teachers and students were not allowed to come to school. Therefore, I had to be creative in how I taught to give material to my students without meeting them directly. I mainly used my smartphone to take some videos of myself doing exercises and then distributed them to my students. My students needed to imitate the exercise material on the videos, record themselves doing the exercise, and then send the recording back to me. Because of the pandemic, every sector was affected, especially businesses. The swimming pool where I work was closed, and my aunt's batik store wasn't operating either. All my side jobs were put on hold during the pandemic. It was one of the hardest times I have ever experienced, because I only received a salary from school, which was insufficient for my living.

Aside from the five-month stipend I received from my school for internet access, I barely earned around 400,000 rupiahs per month for about 1.5 years. How did I still manage to survive in a rural area during the pandemic? It is an interesting question, the answer to which has to do with the fact that I live in a rural area. Because the bonds between the people in the village were so strong, when we had almost nothing to eat, our neighbors were always willing to help us, and we would do the same for them, too. No matter how hard the

conditions are, you will never starve to death in a rural area.<sup>5</sup> From my perspective, being a teacher in a rural area is a very respected occupation; my neighbors and elders always admire my profession as a teacher. “Being a teacher is a very noble and honorable profession,” many elders in the village say. However, my friends feel quite the opposite, as they understand and know the conditions of teachers in Indonesia. Most of my friends who know that I am a semi-permanent teacher just laugh about it. It is often said that “teachers are the unsung heroes,” and many believe that teachers do not need any rewards or recognition and that they work for charity.

How am I able to handle the children? It is a difficult question to answer. Most of the classes I teach are in the first and second grades, so it is harder to control their behavior, as they are still considered little kids. I think the key to managing the situation in the class is trying to be patient while also creating strong emotional bonds with the children. My students mostly scream and run around wherever they want, especially during gym class. It is very exhausting, but I try my best to handle it. Even though the students are sometimes stubborn and disobedient, they still like me very much and enjoy the class. One of my students even gave me a present at the start of the new academic year. I often get heart-warming messages from my students related to their dreams. “When I grow older, I want to be a teacher, like Mas Tono,”<sup>6</sup> said one of my students. It was very similar to my dream when I was still in elementary school. Sometimes I feel down when I think about the professions of my other friends who have higher salaries. It is unfortunate that I must work three jobs at a time and am sometimes still unable to cover my daily expenses while most of my friends only need one job to make a living. However, aside from the difficulties of being a semi-permanent teacher, especially the insufficient salary, I still proudly consider teaching my main occupation, although I am still hoping that the conditions for semi-permanent teachers in Indonesia will be much better soon.

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<sup>5</sup> “Bagaimanapun kondisinya, kita tidak mungkin kelaparan kalau di desa.”

<sup>6</sup> “Besok kalau sudah besar, cita-citaku pengen jadi guru seperti Mas Tono.” In order to protect the anonymity of our research participant, the name used in this text are pseudonym.

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## The Social Entrepreneur: Breastmilk for a Better World

Annaylafayza Azzahra and Lia Planzer

“In the first place, I am a businesswoman running a social enterprise,” Ibu Rina explains.<sup>7</sup> “This means that the profit I make as an entrepreneur is not only used for livelihood, to pay the salaries of my employees or cover the operational expenses of my company, but it is also allocated for social action—in my case, free lactation consultation and workshops for breastfeeding mothers.”

When we first meet Ibu Rina in July 2022, she is in her fifties and has been running her social enterprise *Kosmos ASI*—literally “breast milk cosmos”—for eight years (since 2014).<sup>8</sup> The enterprise consists of a shop selling breastfeeding utilities and clothes, the profit from which is used to subsidize the free lactation consultations that take place in an adjacent counseling room. It is in this calm, air-conditioned counseling room, surrounded by breastfeeding utilities and a set of plush breasts, that we sit down on a large pink couch to interview Ibu Rina about her work.

When I had my first child, I had difficulties breastfeeding. My nipples were scratched, swollen, bleeding, my baby was crying non-stop, but there was no milk coming out. And then I didn’t get any adequate help. I almost gave up and considered starting with formula. But in my religion, breastfeeding is an obligation [*wajib*]. And it is also the best in terms of health, I knew that. So, I knew the science, I knew the religious teachings, but technically I couldn’t do it. I was very frustrated by this. Luckily, I then got help from a

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<sup>7</sup> To protect the anonymity of our research participants, all names used in this text (including the name of the social enterprise) are pseudonyms.

<sup>8</sup> Social enterprises in Indonesia are not legally recognized or regulated as such but are often registered (and regulated) as conventional business entities (British Council and Indonesia Global Compact Network. 2017). In fact, according to Rina, *Kosmos ASI* Jogjakarta is a limited liability company, registered with the Indonesian Breastfeeding Association.

lactation counselor and through her, I discovered lactation counseling. I ended up being able to breastfeed. And so later, as a sign of gratitude towards God, I wanted to ... help other mothers to breastfeed. This was why I decided to become a lactation counselor. I then became a social entrepreneur in order to cover the expenses involved in lactation counseling.

Ibu Rina started off doing door-to-door lactation counseling. In Indonesia, lactation counseling is not (yet) a registered profession but is rather considered a matter for continuing education, especially for healthcare professionals. Although she was not formally trained in a medical profession, Rina was allowed to start working as a lactation counselor after some education in breastfeeding counseling, because at the time, the demand for lactation counselors was much higher than the numbers of available counselors, she explains. “In the future, it might very well be that only medical professionals are allowed to do it,” she says, adding that she is not convinced that this would be a good solution. In fact, Rina argues that a medical consultation and breastfeeding counseling are two very different things: “Counseling takes time; it’s about talking, sharing experiences... In a medical consultation, you will be asked what is wrong, undergo examination, and be given medication. In counseling, it doesn’t work that way: it could take one hour before the mother stops crying. Then it takes another hour for her to share her experience. Which medical professional would be willing to take care of this? And how much would it cost?” This is an issue, according to Rina, especially in health facilities across Indonesia, where time is of the essence.

When she started off doing door-to-door counseling, Ibu Rina was regularly asked about breastfeeding products by the mothers she visited. This is how she got the idea to found her own social enterprise, which consists of the shop and the adjacent breastfeeding counseling services. While at first she took care of everything by herself, she ended up having five children and increasingly struggled to take care of both her company and her household. She then partnered up with a friend, and together, they recruited four employees to work in the breastfeeding shop and engage in breastfeeding counseling.

Rina firmly believes that, beyond helping individual women to feed their children, promoting breastfeeding has a wider medical, social, economic, and spiritual impact. First, breastfeeding is reported to be the safest way to feed a child, Rina points out, especially in a context where access to clean water is not guaranteed (see also Sofiyanti et al. 2019; Spagnoletti et al. 2018). It is also free, which allows families to save money, a point that is vividly illustrated in an article in *The Guardian*, in which Zoe Williams writes about Fifi, a young Indonesian mother who spends half her husband's monthly salary on formula milk (Williams 2013): "Even the cheapest brands punch a huge hole in a poor family's budget," Williams argued. The cost of formula can also lead to tensions in young couples, according to Rina, who was invited by the regional Office of Religious Affairs to give a talk about the ways in which breastfeeding can contribute to reducing divorce rates. Finally, as a Muslim, Rina firmly believes that helping others to breastfeed allows her to fulfill her religious duties: after all, in the *Al-Quran*, God invites Muslims to breastfeed their child until the age of two years (see also Spagnoletti et al. 2018).

Although we can hear the motorbikes rushing by on the street and the muffled voices from people in the breastfeeding shop next door as we talk, a calm and welcoming atmosphere fills the room. Looking around, we see media articles about the work of breastfeeding counselors that are pinned to one of the walls and a poster warning about the risks of formula milk. Although breastfeeding is seen as both an essential and impactful activity by counselors like Rina, it is indeed a highly contentious issue in Indonesia. For many years, multinational companies have invested in aggressive, large-scale campaigns to promote formula milk in the country, and some have even recruited medical staff such as midwives to promote their products to new mothers (Tomori et al. 2018; Williams 2013). Even though the World Health Organization's restrictions on the corporate selling of formula have existed for more than forty years (Williams 2013), multinational companies still make huge profits in countries like Indonesia: "Two thirds of their growth come from the Asia-Pacific [and] the Indonesia market is worth \$1.1bn (£708m)" (ibid). Hence, milk formula companies are a powerful lobby in Indonesia. Nevertheless, in recent years, there has been increasing resistance to milk formula companies' campaigns, and health workers, breastfeeding counselors, and religious leaders are now

actively promoting breastfeeding (Spagnoletti et al. 2018). In 2009, the Indonesian state itself directly legislated the matter by including an article on breastfeeding in the National Health Law:

Every baby has the right to be exclusively breastfed from birth up until 6 months of their lives unless otherwise medically indicated ... babies should be given only breastmilk for the first 6 months of life and be breastfed for up to 2 years (UU 36/2009, Article 128 cited in Spagnoletti et al. 2018, 23).

With this law, according to Zoe Williams, Indonesia has “the strictest breastfeeding law in the world” (Williams 2013). In fact, anyone hampering babies being exclusively breastfed for the first six months “could be fined 100m rupiah or spend a year in prison” (ibid).<sup>9</sup> Spagnoletti et al. have argued that this legislation is problematic insofar as it prioritizes infants’ rights over women’s rights (Spagnoletti et al. 2018, 23) and moralizes the question of (exclusive) breastfeeding. In her ethnographic research among young mothers in Yogyakarta, Belinda Spagnoletti found that breastfeeding has become an increasingly moralized matter in Indonesia, as state, religious, and advocacy discourses tend to celebrate breastfeeding as a woman’s maternal duty and silence possible barriers to breastfeeding (2018, 28). During our participant observation at *Kosmos ASI*, we were confronted with one such barrier to breastfeeding when a woman who came for counseling reported that she was not able to exclusively breastfeed due to her job. The counselor did see the problem, and although she did not really approve of leaving out breastfeeding, she encouraged the mother to breastfeed as often as she could and showed the parents how the father could give the baby pre-pumped breast milk while the mother was working. Rina herself is aware of breastfeeding challenges. She tells us that she does not always agree with mothers’ decisions regarding (not) breastfeeding and that she seeks to encourage them to breastfeed as much as

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<sup>9</sup> It is necessary to point out that the law seems to have had a limited impact so far: “nobody has been jailed for misdemeanours and it is noticeable that only civil charges could be brought against the formula companies, while individuals could face criminal charges” (Williams 2013).

possible. But she also says that, as a counselor, she has learned that it is very important not to judge: “We all face problems, and we are not allowed to judge others—let alone a mother who breastfeeds; psychologically, this can be a very vulnerable time. I learnt not to judge.”

Ever since recruiting employees, Rina herself is less engaged in counseling and is mostly busy running her social enterprise, “supervising employees, [and] managing the finances.” Having experienced high employee turnover since starting with her social enterprise, Rina shares that dealing with employees—human resource management—is one of the main difficulties of running an enterprise: “As an entrepreneur, you need to have a big heart. Being an entrepreneur with a company is a very different thing than simply selling goods: when you sell, either your goods get sold or not. That’s it. With an enterprise, the scope is broader. You need to think of your employees, of your customers, so the management is much more complicated—especially human management.” Being a social entrepreneur comes with new responsibilities: “I want to improve society, but I need to prioritize the wellbeing of my employees first.” Rina and her business partner earn the same wage as their employees, and over the last eight years, all the profit went into financing the social enterprise. She explains that she would love to pay her employees better salaries, because at present, she pays them a wage only a little above the Jogjakarta minimum wage. “I wish I could give a lot more to my employees, two or threefold the minimum wage.” However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, it became particularly clear that Rina’s employees shared her idealism and were not just working for the money. As the pandemic badly affected the finances of the social enterprise, Rina had to lay off her employees two months into the lockdown, because she was no longer able to pay their salaries. With a heavy heart, she sent them letters of dismissal. “But the next day, they showed up at work as if nothing had happened,” she recalls. “I was confused. ‘Never mind,’ they told me, ‘We just become volunteers, you don’t need to pay us.’” With the help of her employees, *Kosmos ASI* then made some innovations, for instance, by changing the strategy of the retail shop, going online, and producing more Instagram videos. After a while, orders rose again, and Rina could employ her employees once more.

In the future, Rina would love to expand her social enterprise by opening branches across the country “so that all Indonesians can feel its benefit.” As a social entrepreneur promoting breastfeeding, it is the conviction that she is making “a contribution to the nation and the country” that keeps her going every day.

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## Between Passion and Economic Opportunity: The Home Baking Business

**Rimayanti Utami and Pham Mai Phuong Dinh**

The weather is pleasant, with a blue sky, soft sunlight, and a cool breeze carrying the rich and sweet aroma of freshly baked cakes wafting from a charming white house. This one-story building features windowpanes adorned with flowery curtains. As we gently knock on the wooden door, we are welcomed by a middle-aged woman dressed casually in a light blue handmade beanie and a black apron dusted with white flour. “Good morning,” we greet the woman with whom we had an appointment. She kindly takes our hands and responds with a cheerful and warm smile, inviting us inside. Upon entering, we are greeted by a small mountain of beautiful golden-colored muffins neatly packed in plastic wrap, reminiscent of those found in professional cake shops.

The woman’s name is Ibu (Mrs.) Winah. She is 48 years old and, like other housewives her age, she is still very energetic. Three years ago, she made the decision to resign from her previous job at a company in Semarang City and start this business. She says, “I worked in that company for fourteen years. But as my husband moved to work in Yogyakarta and I have to take care of my mother living in Yogyakarta, I had no option but to resign from working.”

### **Baking**

Every morning, Ibu Winah wakes up at four a.m. She starts her day by preparing breakfast and lunch for her husband, daughter, and mother, and then attends the morning prayer. Afterward, she bakes various cakes ordered by customers one day in advance through WhatsApp. Although she does not have a special kitchen for baking, she has all the utensils she needs: a table for kneading the dough, an oven, two mixers, spatulas, muffin pans, a pastry brush, and many other tools.

The ingredients she uses for baking are surprisingly simple, such as flour for bread or cakes, cocoa powder, chocolate paste, roasted almonds, chocolate

chips, margarine, and cheese. Ibu Winah informed us that she buys these ingredients from a nearby market. Despite their simplicity, the cakes tasted delicious when we sampled them. She explained that good and tasty cakes do not necessarily require expensive ingredients; rather, it is the combination of fresh ingredients and the skill of the baker that matters.

We are initially skeptical of her claims, but our doubts vanish as we witness the process firsthand. Ibu Winah pours the flour, eggs, and yeast into the mixer, but not all at once. The timing and quantity of each ingredient varies depending on the type of cake she is making. Afterward, the dough is allowed to rest before being baked. When the cakes emerge from the oven, they look as if they represent the word “happy.” It is evident that Ibu Winah puts in great effort to create beautiful and delicious cakes. She enjoys decorating the cakes with various types of toppings, proving that one doesn’t need a fancy kitchen to make exquisite cakes.

Ibu Winah offers several types of cakes, including brownies, comb bread, torn bread, banana bread, muffins, sandwiches, and donuts. Sometimes, customers request a cake she has never made before. Instead of seeing it as an obstacle, she views it as an opportunity to improve her skills. Recently, she has been experimenting with making birthday cakes, various snacks, and traditional cakes. She runs this business entirely on her own, from preparing ingredients to baking and selling. She does not have any employees, although her mother occasionally helps with light tasks like counting or wrapping.

### **The Present Situation and Hopes for the Future**

Currently, most of Ibu Winah’s customers are her neighbors. Her cakes are mainly consumed during three types of occasions. First, her family enjoys them frequently on a relatively small scale. Second, neighbors with food stalls purchase her cakes for resale. Third, her cakes are in demand for gatherings ranging from extended family meetings to religious events and Quran recitations. The increasing popularity of cakes and bakery products in rural areas of Java reflects what Pingali and Rosegrant (1998) refer to as the Westernization of Asian diets. This growing preference for wheat-based

products indicates not only an improvement in people's income but also the influence of modernization and Western culture.

Despite being situated in the countryside, this small-scale business relies on social media for promotion. Ibu Winah easily informs her neighbors about available cakes and pre-order options through platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram. This approach helps to reduce potential losses due to unsold products and allows her to focus on specific cakes she intends to make. Although the scale and revenue of her business are relatively small, this type of business offers a high degree of flexibility that allows her to adapt to uncertain and unexpected market conditions. For instance, during the Covid-19 pandemic, many larger businesses were forced to close down, but household-based enterprises like Ibu Winah's flourished. The lockdown meant that people had to stay at home and couldn't enjoy cakes outside, which led them to purchase food from nearby sources. This is why Ibu Winah's business was relatively unaffected by the pandemic. When we discussed her motivation and reflection on the business, she said calmly,

Although this business was started from a hobby, I also have an economic motivation. If I can make money from this business, then why not? We certainly need money. My husband's job in a private company is not secure. He could be laid off at any time. That is one of the things that I have to anticipate as a housewife. I also have the thought that if my husband died first, who would provide for the family? So those ideas made me even more determined to run this business. To make savings and to be financially independent to ensure our future.

Amid the growing local market for bakery and cake products and her family's precarity, Ibu Winah hopes to turn her baking passion into a more professional business. She envisions having a physical stall and hiring employees, among other improvements. Her aspirations align with the local government's official recognition of such businesses as micro, small, and medium enterprises (UMKM). This recognition provides her with a greater chance of securing a loan from the bank at a lower interest rate. However, she acknowledges that achieving this dream will be challenging, because her role as a housewife puts her in a less favorable position, given her significant responsibilities in caring

for the family. Balancing her time and workload between household duties and the business requires major adjustments.

In this modern era, many women worldwide aspire to engage in fulfilling work that provides mental, social, and economic rewards beyond their roles as homemakers. Ibu Winah's dedication to her baking business and her family serves as an inspiring example. It is as if she were silently saying: "No matter what kind of work you are doing, do your best and expect the best from it."

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# The Massage Therapist: In Search of Independence

**Sophie Conus and Syahira Faidha Rachmawati**

It was four o'clock in the afternoon on Monday, July 11, 2022. After a heat-filled day, we finally arrived at the Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah, located in the southern part of Yogyakarta. Through the entrance, we got a glimpse of a beautiful courtyard where our interlocutor Bu Siti was already waiting for us. After exchanging warm greetings, we followed her into the courtyard.

Bu Siti is a fifty-three-year-old transgender massage therapist. With her black, mid-length hair and casual, pink dress, she looked younger than her actual age. As she told us as soon as we sat down, this is “because I prioritize myself, I take care of myself and highly value the free time I have. It is important not to overwork yourself, this is not a healthy lifestyle.” She indeed seemed relaxed and at ease with our interest in her work and life, also because, as she noted, “I am used to interviews; it is not the first time that students or other people come here to learn more about our life.”

We sat together for more than two hours, during which she occasionally played with her hair, smoked a cigarette, or scrolled through her phone. The atmosphere was quite warm, and we conversed in a mixture of English and Javanese.

Bu Siti's trajectory towards becoming a massage therapist was filled not only with obstacles and unexpected turning points, but also with joyful moments. She remembered how she already knew that she was born in the wrong body when she was in middle school. While she did not openly speak about it, she was very interested in the makeup and clothes of her sisters. Her behavior led to overt discrimination both from schoolmates and her teachers. When it became unbearable, Bu Siti decided to quit school. From that moment on, it became clear: “My main goal was to become an independent and free woman.” She highly values the moral support she has received from her parents and siblings. They seem to have accepted her identity.

However, it was not easy for her to find a way to make a living after she quit school. Bu Siti tried out different sorts of professions. She has worked as a traditional dancer and in the catering business. While she occasionally still performs as a dancer, she quit the catering business due to lack of demand when the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Since she had already completed professional training as a massage therapist, she decided to make this her full-time profession. Now she does not have to worry about demand anymore, because “people are always in need of massages with or without a pandemic.” She managed to make a name for herself and develop her business through personal connections and advertisements on Facebook.



Bu Siti serves both male and female clients. In the morning until approximately four p.m., she offers massages to her female clients. Usually, she heads to her clients’ houses with her own motorbike or orders one with the go-jek application. She serves her male clientele at her massage room located at the *pesantren* in the evening. The *pesantren* is an Islamic boarding school for transgender women, or *waria*—an Indonesian

term that combines the words for woman (*wanita*) and man (*pria*). The place enables transgender women to practice their faith in a safe environment. And, for Bu Siti, it is also a safe working environment. If she were to find herself in a difficult situation with male customers, she would get direct support from other people living in the shelter.

Bu Siti acknowledges her privileged position as a massage therapist compared to other transgender women who are engaged in sex work or busking: “Compared to other transgender woman, I enjoy more security, both from a financial and a personal level.” Unlike in her previous career in catering, she no longer has to worry about the lack of demand or financial insecurity. Not

only does she enjoy more independence and security, but she is also quite flexible when it comes to her working hours, as she is free to coordinate her appointments as is convenient for her. This flexibility gives her the opportunity to attend the religious classes and prayers that take place on Sunday afternoon at the boarding school. She highly values her free time, which gives her the opportunity to read the Koran and spend time with her friends.

Faith plays an important role in Bu Siti's life. In the Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah, she can practice her religion without the stigma that transgender people face in local mosques. The *pesantran* has received quite a bit of media attention and was even closed after it came under fire by a local hardline Muslim group (Varagur 2017). Yet, it reopened at another location to continue the weekly religious studies and provide social services to transgender people. When we asked Bu Siti how she feels about people who say that one cannot be both a practicing Muslim and a transgender woman, she answered clearly that she would not waste her time giving a thought to such people. The only thing she values is her own relationship with God.

Yet, as a transgender woman, she sometimes faces difficulties in her job, in particular with her male clients. Firstly, she does not always feel comfortable revealing her transgender identity to them, as she has occasionally experienced customers canceling their booking after finding out. Another difficulty is having to set clear boundaries regarding the range of services she offers. Some men assume that, besides regular massages, she will also provide sexual services. This is also because the profession of massage therapist has come to be associated with prostitution (Tayibnapis et al. 2019). Hence, some clients expect more than "just" a massage. Bu Siti often struggles to decline such demands: "It can be very tiring to always having to set limits." Another challenge she lists is related to the range of body types that she encounters. Especially in the beginning, it was hard for her to get used to bigger bodies or bodies with many scars. And during the pandemic, she sometimes faced difficulties when clients asked her to take off her face mask and did not respect the rule of social distancing.



But overall, Bu Siti enjoys her job, sharing small talk with her clients, and creating a relaxed atmosphere for them. More importantly, her job provides her with the financial means to live a free and independent life within the bounds of the opportunities she has as a transgender woman. In fact, she speaks of her work in terms of gratitude. When we asked whether this is the kind of job she imagined doing when she was a child, she answered: “I never had a specific job in mind, even as a child or teenager ... because even then, I simply wished to live independently and safely.” Her marginalized position seems to have left no space for other dreams and aspirations. She is well aware of the difficulties transgender women may face in the work environment: “If I were to work as an office employee, I would have to dress and act like a man. I could not show my real identity.

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RECTIFIED - RANDOM DESIGN

UMMA KERAHIK (Lampiran K-016-02)

4 PIECES / KERING / CARTON

SIZE / UKURAN: 500 mm x 500 mm x 9,7 mm

NET WT / BERS: 20,0 kg / Carton

TIGAI Ceramics

## The Construction Worker: Brick by Brick and Site to Site

Aqilah Rahmawati and Stephy-Mathew Moozhiyil

“When I was young, my dream was to become a soldier. Yet, my father passed away when I was at school age. I had to think about the costs [of continuing education] and then chose to bury those dreams.” Mas Bintang did not intend to become a construction worker. While his parents’ generation worked in agriculture in the fertile Javanese highlands, he wanted to find work elsewhere. Yet, when he left his village in Central Java, it was not to make a career in the military, but to follow a friend who would introduce him to a construction site in Jakarta. The wage was comparatively good, but the costs of living were also much higher in Jakarta. That is why, after working for four months on a construction site in the capital, he decided to return to Central Java.

That was more than ten years ago. Mas Bintang is now thirty years old and married to a woman from his hometown. He currently works on a construction site in a rural village approximately forty kilometers away from his home. Together with eight other construction workers, he is building a house for a former Javanese businessman who worked in the palm oil industry of Sumatra and managed to earn enough to retire in his late thirties. Early retirement is something of which Mas Bintang can only dream. As a construction worker, he barely earns enough to cover the cost of living for his family.

Still, for Mas Bintang, work in construction is better than other options. After returning from Jakarta, Mas Bintang first found work in agriculture and industry. Through his wife’s relatives, he met a foreman in construction, also called a *mandor*—that is, a person who bears the responsibility of recruiting a team of workers, in this case, for a contractor (Rahman et al. 2020). The *mandor* convinced him to get back into construction. Mas Bintang started at the bottom of the hierarchy. For the first couple of years, he worked as a *tenaga*. *Tenaga* are construction workers who do not have a lot of experience.

They are mostly assigned to tasks that are repetitive, less complex, and that serve or assist the workers of higher ranks such as the *tukang*. A *tukang* is a worker with expertise in a specific area.



With time, Mas Bintang climbed the ladder, and by now he is a *tukang* himself. He explained that he earned his position through learning by doing. He gained experience by

supporting other construction workers, who transmitted their skills and expertise. Mas Bintang specialized in bricklaying and stone masonry and is therefore called a *tukang batu*. His area of expertise also includes foundation work, plastering, and roofing. There are also other areas of specialization, such as painting (*tukang cat*), electricity and wiring (*tukang listrik*), and ceramics (*tukang keramik*). Yet, unlike experts in these other specializations, the *tukang batu* is “usually more likely skilled to do every kind of work on construction sites,” Mas Bintang argues. He is indeed frequently called on to provide support to other team members with different areas of specialization, and is familiar with the diverse skills and knowledge required on a construction site.

The advantage of construction work is that it generally offers good job security. While there was a temporary decrease in construction activities during the Covid-19 pandemic (Wijayaningtyas et al. 2022, 4), Mas Bintang continued to work during the lockdown. He even noted how other workers who lost their jobs during the pandemic found employment in construction. In this team, for instance, a worker from the same village who used to work as a garment vendor in West Java started working at his construction site after

his shop closed down; he hopes to return to his former job in the near future. Like everyone else on the construction site, he was recruited by the same *mandor* who had also recruited Mas Bintang and is related to both of them through his wife. This form of rural labor recruitment through the kinship networks of the *mandor* is characteristic of the fragmented labor market in the Indonesian construction sector (Firman 1991, 95, 99–101; Pribadi and Chan 2022, 67).



While the job demand remains comparably high in construction, the work entails a relatively high risk of accidents and injury. Long-term occupational injuries resulting from physical strain and exposure to harmful materials and substances are not to be underestimated. Smaller construction sites often

do not offer adequate safety equipment. Mas Bintang remarked that, in Indonesia, Javanese construction workers are said to be skilled at building high quality houses with limited means. Yet, he added that they also face risky situations, especially when they work in higher areas of the construction site. They need to stand and keep their balance on bamboo stems to reach higher areas of buildings, often without any safety equipment. Since the workers usually do not have a formal contract, the continuity of wages in case of accidents or illness cannot be guaranteed and is generally left up to the contractor's discretion and sense of moral duty. Mas Bintang noted that he is sometimes afraid to work in higher parts of the building, but that "I still have to do it to get the money."

Construction workers like Mas Bintang are often paid by the day and receive their salary in cash at the end of the working week on Saturday. They are part

of an informally employed workforce of day laborers at the bottom of the subcontracting hierarchy, without social security. It is estimated that this is the case for 49 percent of the workforce in construction—a substantial number of workers if one considers that construction represents one of the largest employment sectors of the Indonesian economy (after agriculture and manufacturing) with an estimated 8.5 million workers out of the total national workforce of 124 million (Rahman et al. 2020; Sub-Directorate of Construction Statistics 2018). Yet, despite the precarity and lack of safety, Mas Bintang prefers to stay in construction and work without formal contracts that industrial workers tend to have: “It is ok, because the average wage in industry is lower compared to construction work.”

Moreover, Mas Bintang told us how proud he is to have acquired the necessary experience in construction work. He emphasized the skills and creativity that go into this strenuous work: “I consider every construction project as a work of art. I start from zero and stay until the end. I also take pictures of my work after finishing. For me, seeing my work accomplished also gives me satisfaction.” The work with the trowel, one of the main instruments of bricklayers, is indeed not as easy as it looks when skilled laborers like Mas Bintang use them. It requires time to learn the appropriate techniques, for example to apply the mortar to the right spot and to spread it evenly, layer upon layer. It also requires an eye for detail. The work is often evaluated by taking a step back from time to time and discussing appropriate strategies and methods with fellow workers or with the *mandor*, who is also involved in construction activities on site, especially in the more complex ones. Moreover, perseverance is needed to sustain the high level of concentration





required, independent of weather conditions such as scorching heat and direct sunlight or rain and cold.



Since construction projects are mostly located at a considerable distance from the workers' rural hometowns, construction workers often have to stay at the construction site and depend on accommodation provided by the contractors. Mas

Bintang noted how he has had to put up with living and sleeping in makeshift buildings, so-called *bedengs*. "It is pitiful . . . because *bedengs* have a lot of holes, it is cold, and the bed is only plywood. If you get something like this [his current accommodation], then one is lucky. Yeah, living in a *bedeng* is uncomfortable, but after a while I got used to it." Yet, at the current construction site he has the privilege of living in an older building on site where he shares a room with two other people. Since it is not too far from his village, he is able to return to his family on Saturday evenings to spend Sundays at home. During the week, he keeps in touch with his wife and children through video calls.

Mas Bintang is well aware that his skills and specialization in construction work bind him to precarious working conditions, living mostly away from home and from family, and commuting between construction sites and his village. This nomadic lifestyle deprives him of the opportunity to get involved in the community of his home village or support his family and relatives in other ways. This is why he sometimes thinks about finding a new job:

When I work in construction, I cannot be at home and help my village community with *gotong royong* [a Javanese and Indonesian concept of communal work and cooperation]. Therefore, I actually wish to have a job that also keeps me able to help and support my community, for instance when someone dies, or if a house is being built or to clean the village. This is also why I think about working as a seller on the market.



But for now, he puts the future of his children before his own dreams and aspirations: “For me, as a married person, my dream is to make my kids’ future brighter than mine. Because, for me,

my decisive phase of life is already over and it is time to think about my children.”



Hence, as long as the construction and real estate boom shows no sign of abating, Mas Bintang is bound to continue selling his labor power as a construction worker, at least for the time being. Four weeks are left until the remaining construction jobs at his current site are set to be completed. Meanwhile, the *mandor* has already arranged a new job opportunity for Mas Bintang and his fellow workers on another construction project on a different site in the Central Javanese lowlands, where it will start all over again, brick by brick, wall by wall.



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## Between Two Poles: A Traditional Makeup Artist (*Dukun Manten*) in the Modern Day

Zaharra Ananda

As we entered the traditional salon called Larasati, the scent of flowers quickly enveloped our senses. We noticed numerous statues and Javanese-style wooden ornaments in every corner decorating the room. What fascinated us the most were several long, big glass cupboards displaying hundreds of both modern and traditional wardrobes and trinkets. We wondered how long the owner had been amassing these items. Lost in my thoughts, I was suddenly brought back to reality by a soft voice calling my name. It was Mbak Marlina Widya Larasati, we usually call her Mbak Marlina, the owner of this traditional salon, whom we wanted to interview. She warmly invited us to sit on the comfy dark green sofa.

### Personal Background

After a brief introduction, our warm and joyful conversation began. Marlina shared her journey, beginning with her school days when she aspired to pursue a profession in the banking sector, which was a promising career path at that time. To pursue this path, she studied economics at one of the renowned universities in Yogyakarta. The idea of becoming a traditional makeup artist never crossed her mind, even though she was raised in close proximity to this world, as her mother was a respected *dukun manten*, or traditional makeup artist. Her decision was understandable. This profession is complex, requiring the skill of applying makeup to brides and grooms according to traditional rules, or *pakem*, and knowledge of the intricate rituals performed before and during the wedding. Moreover, Marlina explained that a qualified traditional makeup artist is usually an elderly woman, or *sepuh* as they are called in the local language. These elderly women, especially those who are married, are respected due to their extensive work experience and are believed to possess the ability to transmit God's aura, especially to the bride.

During her undergraduate studies, Marlina's mother passed away unexpectedly. This event left her in a dilemma: she was unsure whether to follow her previous aspiration of working in the banking sector (and, in doing so, part with her mother's assets, such as traditional clothes, makeup tools, and ritual items) or to redirect her path and become a traditional makeup artist despite her limited knowledge and skill. Eventually, she realized that her mother had been subtly preparing her for this role for many years by teaching her how to do makeup at the salon for extra pocket money and encouraging her to attend makeup classes organized by her mother's friend. In 2010, she decided to carry on her mother's legacy.

### **Training and the Role of a Wedding Makeup Artist**

After making the decision to become a traditional wedding makeup artist, Marlina attended various skill development workshops. She initially participated in various seminars organized by well-known makeup artists on both traditional Javanese and modern styles. The knowledge and skills she acquired in these workshops were put into practice at her mother's salon, which effectively improved her capabilities as a traditional makeup artist. Once she felt confident in her traditional wedding makeup skills, she tried to earn an official license as a *dukun manten* by taking a competency exam organized by the local government. Unlike for careers such as doctors or accountants, this exam was relatively informal. Although free of charge, those seeking the license had to invest in several makeup classes at their own expense. Acquiring the license allowed her to assure prospective customers of her expertise in traditional wedding makeup. Furthermore, it granted her the privilege of conducting classes on traditional bridal makeup.

Generally, a traditional makeup artist is responsible for the entire wedding process, including the *siraman* (the bathing ritual), the Islamic marriage contract ceremony, and the wedding ceremony itself. They are also required to provide the *ubo rampe* or ceremonial objects, which consists of 21 items (Setyaningsih and Zahrulianingdyah, 2015). Each piece of equipment has a specific symbolic meaning representing the past and the new life in the future (Setyaningsih and Zahrulianingdyah 2015). Among the many rituals, the wedding ceremony is considered the most significant event, with all invited

guests expected to attend, offer felicitations, and participate in the joyful celebration. On this occasion, the primary focus of the bride is to look *manglingi* or distinctive. In the past, bold colors were used to achieve this by applying a lot of yellowish foundation and bright-red lipstick. However, nowadays, *to look distinctive* refers to harmonizing the bride's skin tone, lipstick, foundation colors, and dress. In other words, the makeup artist is expected to reveal the bride's inner beauty.

For Marlina, the most challenging tasks as a traditional makeup artist are drawing *paes* and remembering the philosophy behind each process of the wedding ceremony. The term *paes* refers to curved patterns along the bride's hairline, which are created using *pidih*, a type of black wax. Since the width of the bride's forehead varies, Marlina must pay meticulous attention while drawing them. Aside from its aesthetic purpose, these drawings symbolize the bride's focus on managing the household. Additionally, Marlina faces the challenge of memorizing the philosophy behind each aspect of Javanese traditional weddings, which, as (Brenner, 1995) points out, involves symbolic actions imbued with philosophical meaning.

### **Tension between Tradition and Modernity**

Participating in professional organizations is vital for traditional makeup artists. Within these organizations, members can share knowledge and experiences. Marlina's organization includes advisors from the *Kraton* (palace) Yogyakarta and is renowned as the center of Javanese culture. The involvement of *Kraton* advisors is aimed at not only exploring and preserving Javanese bridal makeup but also ensuring that traditional makeup artists adhere to the *traditional rules*.

Recently, there has been a rapid increase in modern makeup artists. Unlike traditional makeup artists, modern artists are responsible for specific tasks, namely applying makeup to the bride and groom. On the other hand, traditional makeup artists, as mentioned earlier, handle nearly the entire wedding process, from bathing to the completion of the wedding ceremony. Although traditional makeup artists have been gradually adjusting their

makeup style to be more modern, they are still bound by the well-established customs and rules.

Despite the gradual adoption of modern makeup styles, Marlina must still adhere to the *traditional rules*. One important rule is to not mix two different customs. With globalization and modernization, many consumers wish to combine different customs, for example, by employing Sundanese customs for bathing and Javanese customs for the wedding ceremony. Although consumers have the right to request such a service, Marlina acknowledges that her role extends beyond that of service provider; she also acts as an educator, preserving existing traditional customs.

A makeup artist who commits a serious violation of the *traditional rules* would be deemed *ngowahi adat*, or someone who recklessly acts against customs. Such an action can bring about disharmony among the members of the traditional makeup artist organization, as it goes against the organization's goals. Marlina recalled an incident from the past when she once made such a mistake. On one occasion, she was asked to do the makeup for a bride who was wearing a veil. Unfortunately, due to technical difficulties in drawing the curves from the forehead to the bride's hair, Marlina did not draw *paes* on the bride's face. This decision sparked an immediate uproar among the members of the organization, and even the senior advisors from the *Kraton* expressed strong disapproval. Such actions are strictly prohibited, as they represent a serious violation of the custom.

In Java, the veil is frequently associated with obedience to Islamic teachings and is also considered a symbol of modernity in contrast to traditional values (*Shioya, 2015*). Therefore, in this context, a bride wearing a veil represents modernity, which directly contradicts the effort to preserve Javanese traditional values, resulting in a violation of the custom. Marlina's decision not to draw *paes* complicated the situation, as it is considered to be a crucial element in traditional makeup artistry. Recently, it seems that this issue has been resolved, as even in the Javanese wedding ceremony, a bride can wear a veil with some adjustments.

In another wedding ceremony, Marlina faced criticism from fellow traditional makeup artists. During the photo session, the bride sat with her legs rather straddled, which was considered a violation of correctness. As a result, Marlina became the subject of gossip among her friends, as she was seen as not paying careful attention to the *traditional rules*. Some of her friends advised Marlina that, as a traditional makeup artist, she had the responsibility to remind the bride to follow the rules when choosing a Javanese traditional wedding style. In this regard, again, the role of a *dukun manten* extends beyond merely applying makeup to the bride and groom; it also involves educating them.

The only exception to following customs was during the pandemic when the government imposed strict regulations to avoid the spread of Covid-19. This period witnessed significant modifications to the *traditional rules* for nearly all wedding processes in accordance with health protocols. For instance, the *sungkeman* session, where both the bride and groom bow their heads and seek their parents' blessings by holding their hands (see Suyadi and Sabiq, 2020), could not take place. Once the pandemic subsided, the traditional rules were reinstated.

Besides telling the story of her life as a traditional makeup artist, Marlina's account highlights the rising tension among modern-day traditional makeup artists, who are torn between preserving the *traditional rules* and accommodating the growing market demand for more flexible and simplified Javanese wedding ceremonies. After delving deeper into this occupation, Marlina realizes that working as a traditional makeup artist is not just about achieving economic success; it also entails a responsibility to preserve Javanese culture, even though she believes that some adjustments could still be made.

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## The Classical Javanese Dancer: Dancing for Life, Not Dancing for a Living

Anja Hughes

The sound of the gamelan, which has already been playing for quite some time, is becoming less and less interesting. What the audience is really waiting for is the dancers to appear. The crowd is made up of tourists, who came to appreciate a traditional performance in a traditional setting despite having limited knowledge of the dance itself or the culture surrounding it, as well as family members of the performers, who have shown up to support their loved ones. Cameras and phones are held ready to capture the intricate costumes and potentially bizarre movements of the traditional Javanese *Wayang Wong* dance. The performance, which is being held at the Kraton (the Royal Palace of Yogyakarta) on a warm Saturday morning, is all the more exciting for us, as we have been able to observe the rehearsals in preparation for the upcoming event, thanks to our informant Mas Fajar<sup>10</sup>. In theory, we should know what to expect, as we have seen the entire dance before; however, it turns out that the rehearsal is not at all comparable to the performance that we are about to observe.

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<sup>10</sup> In order to protect the anonymity of our research participants, all names used in this text are pseudonyms.



Figure 1: Mas Fajar during his fighting scene at the Kraton in Yogyakarta

As soon as the dancers emerge, the chit-chat and laughter coming from the audience stop. The costumes of the dancers are eye catching, not only due to their bright colors and peculiar masks, but also because of their variety. Not a single costume is the same; they have all been individually designed to portray a specific character. Even the young girls, who dance as a group—as opposed to the adult men’s characters, who fight each other—have different costumes. From afar they may look awfully similar, but their sarongs are all unique. The girls show more skin than is usual in Islam; however, given the long tradition of Javanese dance, no one questions or judges their attire. From the audience seats, we spot Mas Fajar, who is playing the role of a character wearing a blue costume and a mask. Later he tells us that the costume, which covers every inch of his body, is not only heavy but also makes it difficult for him to breathe. He states that the costume forces him to regulate his breathing even more than others, especially during the strenuous fighting scenes. But he also adds that

he enjoys every single move he makes while dancing. Through his short vignette here, we can try to understand how significant dance is to the dancers:

My name is Mas Fajar and I dance *Wayang Wong*—a classical Javanese dance inspired by *Wayang Kulit*—semi-professionally at the Kraton in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. I say semi-professionally, because I have another full-time job and spend “merely” my evenings and weekends rehearsing for the performances we hold on a weekly basis. I do get partial financial compensation, but that is not the case for all the dancers. My mother teaches *Wayang Wong*, so it was the obvious hobby for me to pick up as a child, and it has become one of my passions ever since. However, I am the only one of my siblings that has stuck to it for such a long time. I have had to sacrifice a lot to get this far—to be able to perform at the Kraton—however, the satisfaction it gives me makes it all worth it. Dance is a place I can retreat to; it allows me to get away from the rest of the world.

As we observe during the performance, from the moment the dancers enter the stage, cameras from every angle try to capture their movements. They do not, however, manage to capture the intricacy of these motions or the concentration they require. That the traditional arts and technology are no longer separable has become clear in light of modernization and internationalization—processes that have only accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic (Kuswarsantyo & Fitrianto in Aridhini 2021, 248). Interest in traditional dances has decreased quite drastically, especially among the younger generations. In an attempt to make such dances more accessible and “interesting” various techniques have been employed, including the use of flash mobs to attract attention on social media (Aridhini 2021, 247). These attempts certainly catch the public eye in the instant they occur; however, according to Mas Fajar, it is hard to tell how they will affect the popularity of *Wayang Wong* in the long term. Keeping an active presence on social media will probably prove the most effective way to keep this part of Javanese tradition alive. Although the future is uncertain, Mas Fajar has high hopes because of the number of young high school students who are performing on stage with his dance group. Mas Fajar added that those students had not only chosen to dance with the group as a hobby, but were also majoring in dance at

school, implying that there is still a willingness to pass down the knowledge and values contained in traditional Javanese dance to the next generation.

Each performance starts off with slow movements of the hands and feet. What may seem easy to an untrained eye actually requires an enormous amount of strength and effort. It is unsurprising, then, that “penari pada masa lalu biasanya pendekar karena harus memiliki fisik yang kuat” (“dancers in the past were usually warriors because they had to have a strong physique”) (R.M. Pramutomo in Aridhini 2021, 246). The movements, which, according to *Wayang Kulit* are meant to imitate puppets, are slow and deliberate. What is especially striking is the gaze of the female dancers, which never meets the crowd but is always directed downwards at a forty-five-degree angle. On the one hand, this acts as a stabilizing point for the dancers. On the other hand, it symbolizes the dancers’ respect towards their older counterparts. In a way, it also gives the impression that they are in fact dancing by themselves not together, instead being merely surrounded by people executing the same movements. This illusion only breaks during rehearsals, when someone makes a mistake and tries to orient themselves through the help of the others by looking up—an act that cannot be appreciated by someone merely attending the performance. In such moments, the feeling of community can truly be appreciated. Despite the intense concentration the dancers display during the entire performance, the studio itself is a place of relaxation and comfort for many, including Mas Fajar. Nevertheless, a hierarchy between the seniors and juniors is clearly observable—especially during the ceremonial greetings and goodbyes, in which the students line up to individually acknowledge the authority of their teachers. This is done by touching their forehead to the hand of their teacher. This doesn’t, however, create a cold, severe, or distant atmosphere. In the studio, everyone knows each other, and some are even close enough to their fellow dancers to be considered part of their respective families.

The longer the performance lasts, the more the attention of the audience fades. This can be explained by the fact that the plot is hard to follow, and slow movements become increasingly less entertaining. However, fighting scenes have the power to change the atmosphere in an instant. Finally, it is



Mas Fajar's time to shine. His character begins to fight with his counterpart and "swords" are drawn, intensifying the commotion. The sound of the gamelan grows louder, and the movements become faster. At this point, the audience is paying full attention again, and for a moment, it feels like everyone is holding their breath, trying not to miss a single movement. The movements are as precise as before but convey a completely different feeling—the atmosphere is tension-ridden. The moment fades as quickly as it came. And as soon as the fighting stops, the cameras are lowered again.

The end of the story comes rather abruptly, especially for the tourists, who are unable to follow the plot. Mas Fajar and the rest of the dancers leave the stage quickly, without looking back at the audience or properly taking in the appreciation of the crowd, which is signaled through a single round of applause. This presents a stark contrast to Western spectacles, in which the performers continue to soak up the applause of the crowd, which is perceived as a token of appreciation. However, as Mas Fajar explains, it is the interaction with the crowd during the performance, that makes the performers feel special and alive. During the Covid-19 pandemic, when performances were merely recorded and shared through social media, Mas Fajar greatly missed the interaction with the crowd, the feeling of togetherness, and the "euphoria" that comes with the dance. Back then, finding the motivation to dance and perform properly in front of a camera was hard. Mas Fajar recalls that, during the lockdown, he and the other dancers had to stop performing and start over every time a mistake occurred—something that is impossible when performing live. This repetition was not only emotionally draining but also took a physical toll on him. As we could see, Mas Fajar was already completely exhausted by the end of one performance—such is the price that must be paid for entertainment—we cannot imagine what it must be like after various reenactments thereof. Repetitions of such strenuous work only decreased his usual motivation to perform. Thankfully, as Mas Fajar said, they are back to performing live again.

The end of the lockdown has given him more hope for continuing his dance career for as long as possible. However, the word "career" perhaps isn't the most suitable way to describe his involvement in dance; Mas Fajar has always

insisted that dance is only a hobby for him, not a profession, even though he, unlike other dancers, receives some financial compensation. In his words: “Dance is not all about money.” He adds that, if he tells people that he is a professional dancer, they will not take him seriously. However, if he tells them, he dances as a hobby, they praise him for keeping Javanese traditions alive—a rather strange contrast. But this does not matter to him. Although he admits to having put a tremendous amount of work into mastering dance since early childhood, this type of work is clearly not equivalent to the broadly perceived and accepted vision of paid work in Indonesia. His main income stems from a different profession, which only leaves time for dance in the evenings or on the weekends. Thus, the main motivation lying behind this intense investment of time and energy stems from his passion for dance as well as his familial background and the great tradition and history that lies behind it. Dance is “an emotional controller,” a happy place, and “a way of life” for Mas Fajar. In other words, it is something that cannot be taken away from him by anyone or anything, not even by a global pandemic.

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## The *Kusir Andong*: A Carriage of Culture

‘Aqilah Jasmine Mubarak and Jonathan Hebeisen

The sidewalk of the highly congested Malioboro street smells of car exhaust. The air is filled with the sounds of voices, engines, honking vehicles, drums from street musicians, pop music from a speaker inside an open store, and occasionally, a set of horse hooves hitting the asphalt. Several horse carriages, locally referred to as *andong*, are parked across the street. The horses have leather straps with metal decorations hanging down from their backs, and their faces are partially covered by a uniquely decorated mask. Most horses carry a flower on their back. The coachmen, or *kusir*, are comfortably sitting in their shaded carriages, waiting for customers in their designated parking area.

As we get ready to take a tour, seated on the back of an *andong*, the *kusir* starts the ride by making a clicking sound with his mouth, grabbing his whip (*cambuk*), and whipping the horse. The horse abruptly starts walking into the street, and the coachman does not bother to look behind him to check if there are any vehicles approaching. After some time, he puts the *cambuk* back into its holder and continues gently hitting the horse with the leather straps he is holding. The indefinite noise of revving engines surrounds the carriage, much like the burning heat, but once we leave Malioboro and reach a calmer area, the clopping becomes more perceptible, and birds can be heard chirping.

*Andong*, which is a means of transportation consisting of a carriage that is pulled by a horse, has existed in Yogyakarta for a long time. Since at least the 1990s, the *andong* has become iconic for the city, and images of this traditional horse carriage are often used in tourism promotional materials (Woro Hutami P.H. & Tadjuddin Noer Effendi, 2015). While nowadays the *andong* has turned into a touristic means of transportation—or *andong wisata*—and carriages are mainly parked around Malioboro street, their purpose used to be different (see Gibbings, Lazuardi, Prawirosusanto, Hertzman and Barker, 2018). In earlier times, *andong*s in Yogyakarta were mainly used as a means of public transportation to carry passengers from the market in Bering Harjo to the market in Kota Gede. For this ride, *kusirs* would charge as little as 10,000 IDR per person, often waiting for many passengers to board the carriage before

starting the ride. Now, tourists come to get a private tour of Yogyakarta in their own *andong*, starting from Malioboro and proceeding to tourist sites across the city. The coachmen charge between 100,000 and 300,000 IDR per ride, depending on the distance traveled—the longer the tour, the more expensive the ride.

Unavoidably, the transformation of the role of the *andong* into a touristic means of transportation has affected the work of *kusir*: their income has increased, and they are now free to decide the recreational routes that they want to offer and the price they want to ask for a ride. But operating in the field of tourism also requires different skills, as the example of Mas Adi well shows. Mas Adi,<sup>11</sup> who was thirty-six years old when we first met him, started working as a young *kusir* in 2013. Coming from a family of *kusir* and being around horses all his life made him take an interest in working with horses. Apart from working as a *kusir andong*, he also provides horse-riding lessons and leases his horse carriage out for photoshoots and film productions. In contrast to older coachmen like his father, Mas Adi also actively uses social media such as Instagram and WhatsApp to reach a wider audience; he offers promotions online and interacts more directly with his customers, advising them on touristic activities in and around the city.

To start as a *kusir* requires some financial investment: one needs to buy a horse and carriage and be able to cover potential medical treatments for the horse. Mas Adi's father, Pak Subroto, told us that the prices of horses and carriages have increased dramatically throughout the years: while fifteen years ago, a horse and carriage cost Pak Subroto twenty-six million IDR, he spent fifty million on his current carriage and horse, a seven-year-old female mix of Sumbawa pony and Saddlewood horse.

In the advent of tourism, *kusirs* can make more money, but the number of customers is still based on luck. If no one chooses to take a tour, the *kusir* will not make any money. The Covid-19 pandemic revealed just how much *kusirs* have become dependent on tourists to make a living. Without its usual

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visitors, during the pandemic, the touristic area around Malioboro street resembled a ghost town, which badly affect *kusirs*, who had to rely on other sources of income. Nowadays, however, Indonesia has reopened its borders, tourists have returned, and the situation has gone back to normal.

In Yogyakarta, the *kusir andong* are collectively organized in the form of the *kusir andong* association, which consists of several subgroups. In the association, members meet on a regular basis to discuss work-related problems. They also make collective decisions, such as raising the basic price per roundtrip during the holiday seasons and limiting the number of tours that an individual horse is allowed to walk to five per day for the sake of the horses' health. As administrator of a subgroup, Mas Adi makes sure that the *kusir* in his subgroup are operating in a safe environment. If there are any newcomers, he gives them a driving test. He checks whether equipment such as headlights, bell, and whip are in good working condition and whether the horses are being taken care of by their respective owners. The Department of Transportation (*Dinas Perhubungan*) keeps a record of the number of *kusirs* in Yogyakarta, as they need to have a license and a vehicle registration letter.

A large amount of *kusirs'* time and money goes into caring for the horses. The daily cost of food and water is around 40,000 IDR. To be able to pull hundreds of kilograms per day, many horses also need additional food supplements. When they are not actively working at Malioboro, horses still need to get enough physical activity, and they must be cleaned and groomed regularly to remain healthy. Financially, it makes more sense for the *kusirs* to groom and clean their horses themselves, but they depend on specialists to clean the hooves and renew the horseshoes. According to Mas Adi, it is easy to see if a *kusir* lacks the knowledge of how to take care of a horse. *Kusirs* who do not respect the wellbeing of their horses are at a financial loss in the long run, he continues, because eventually, their horses will fall ill.

Distancing himself from *kusirs* who try to exploit their horses for money, Mas Adi refers to himself as a *pecinta kuda* (horse lover). He loves the way that they listen to him once he has been able to build a good rapport with them. Building rapport with them allows him to easily understand and attend to his horses' needs, whether it is medication, rest, or just help with stretching their

muscles, which he does by putting warm water over them. Because he has different horses that pull the carriages and horses for horseback riding, he has had to discipline them in different ways and learn how to treat them as individuals. His mare, Damai, is six years old and used to be a racing horse before she became an *andong* horse. “She is still young,” he explained. “She always wants to run as she pleases. If we hesitate when commanding her, she will be like, ‘This is what *I* want.’ ... So, assertiveness is really needed.” With all the time and effort that is spent with the horses before and after *andong* tours, Mas Adi thinks that, currently, the price of these tours is simply too low.

Relatedly, according to Mas Adi, many people still think of *kusir* as an inferior job. Factors such as *kusirs* not taking good care of their horses or not properly cleaning their parking spaces do not improve their image with the public. In particular, the smell or sight of horse excrement on the city streets does sometimes lead to complaints. Tourists using motor vehicles oftentimes don’t respect the *andong* and honk at them, which stresses the horses. But despite some of these more negative experiences, Mas Adi thinks his work is important, as it is actively contributing to the preservation of a traditional mode of transportation. Although it is not used as a regular means of public transportation anymore, it is used for recreational purposes. Through social media, Mas Adi promotes what has come to be seen as a traditional cultural activity to people from all over the world: “This profession is my ... identity, I’m proud to be a *kusir andong*. It’s not just like being a driver, or something like that. My profession is an art, a culture. Something that can last in this global society. Our profession will survive.”

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## The Graveyard Caretaker (*Kuncen*): Praying for the Dead and Serving the Living

**Michelle Kläger and Annabelle Zainab**

Located in the old city of Yogyakarta, Kotagede is a tourist destination famous for its silver crafts shops. The streets are always busy with the passing of motorbikes and the activities of tourists. One of the oldest traditional markets in Yogyakarta, which is packed with locals every day, can also be found there. A little south from the market, a gate bearing the inscription “Makam Raja-Raja Mataram,” which literally translates as “the cemeteries of the Mataram kings,” welcomes everyone with its calm and quiet atmosphere, which is in stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of the streets and the market. Passing through the gate, one can find trees arranged in such a way that they also provide a little greenery in the middle of an arid area that is otherwise densely packed with concrete buildings. This was our impression along the way to the royal graveyard complex that was established in the 16th century.



Figure 1: The Gate of Royal Graveyard in Kotagede



To access the main graves of the kings, visitors or pilgrims must pass through three gates that feature architectural styles identical to those of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms that existed before Islamic kingdoms ruled Java (Setyowati et al., 2017). The Islamic influence is also present: through the first gate stands the oldest mosque of Yogyakarta, which often plays the Qur'anic chorus through their loudspeakers. Not far from the mosque is the second gate, which brings visitors to an open space containing four wooden huts that facilitate the various needs of pilgrims. During our visit, a group of men dressed in typical traditional Javanese clothes were doing separate activities in the huts. We later learned that they were a group of graveyard caretakers, known locally in Yogyakarta as *abdi dalem*, hereafter referred to as courtiers. Through the following account given by Pak Margono Danureja<sup>1</sup>, a courtier we encountered during our summer school research in Yogyakarta, we came to understand who courtiers are, what their main duties are, and what motivates them to become a courtier.

My name is Margono Danureja. I am a courtier at *Makam Raja-Raja Mataram Kotagede*, who has received the title of Raden Penunggu Pujodipuro from the Surakarta palace. I work together with more than sixty other courtiers originating from various regions of Yogyakarta and Surakarta. People also call us *kuncen*, which refers to our main duty as a courtier, which is the role of caretaker of the royal graveyard. The *kuncen* in this graveyard are divided into two groups of courtiers: the group under the Yogyakarta palace and the group under the Surakarta palace. Yogyakarta courtiers make up the majority, totaling forty-nine people, while the Surakarta courtiers total approximately twenty people. Surakarta and Yogyakarta courtiers are distinguishable by their clothes. All of us are required to wear *jarik*, a multifunctional cloth that is usually of batik motifs, and *blangkon*, a traditional Javanese headdress worn by men; what sets us apart is the way we wear it. We also wear a dagger (*keris*) on our backs, which we need to take off before we enter the graveyard. When we enter the graveyard, we wear the *samir*, a symbol of the royal courtier, over our shoulders.

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<sup>1</sup> In order to protect the anonymity of our research participant, the name used in this text are pseudonym.

I am the eldest as well as the leader of the Surakarta palace's courtier group. I have been a courtier in Kotagede since 2009. My parents were also courtiers. Nowadays, to be a courtier, one needs a diploma, because visitors are getting smarter. In the past, there were no visitors who asked questions related to the history of the place or the kingdom; they only visited to go to the spring for rituals or to go on *ziarah* (pilgrimage) to the tombs. Now, there are a lot who ask questions, so the courtiers must at least be able to read and write.

Before becoming a courtier, I used to work as an archaeological building caretaker in the Cultural Heritage Center (BPCB) of Yogyakarta Province. My job was to take care of objects related to cultural heritage, including temples and tombs. I decided to become a courtier, first of all, due to encouragement from my parents who wanted me to continue my father's path of being a courtier. Apart from this, I also had a strong willingness to be a courtier, because I want to change [the] public's perception of courtiers only being old people. The younger generation also has the chance to be one. Before my generation, people who registered as a courtier were mostly over forty years old. I was appointed to be a courtier at the age of thirty-five. My decision to become a young courtier in the royal graveyard was then followed by my younger brothers as well as by some of the neighbors. Most of us became courtiers here because we are descendants of previous courtiers who had been serving for either the Yogyakarta or Surakarta Palace. However, there are also courtiers who are lay people with no family background in the profession.

Before one is assigned as a full-time courtier, he has to first complete an apprentice period. The fixed quota of *abdi dalem* regulated by both the Yogyakarta and Surakarta Palaces cause uncertainty in the time period needed for an apprentice courtier to be appointed as a full-time courtier. The promotion to full-time courtier, therefore, is highly determined by the availability of positions, which become available for reasons such as the previous courtiers' resignation, death, illness that has made them unable to continue working, or being fired for some mistakes. Thus, there are still some courtier candidates who have done an apprentice period but must work voluntarily without any rewards or recognition from the palace due

to the unavailability of a vacant position to be filled. I was lucky to only have to work as an apprentice for one year. My main duty during this apprenticeship period was to clean the walls that belong to the whole area [of] the palace. As an apprentice, our duties are somewhat similar to those of a full-time courtier. I was not only dressed as a full-time courtier, but I was also involved in the various activities of their schedule. Becoming a courtier means one should face hierarchy in the workplace. The first time I was appointed as a full courtier, it was with the title of *jajar*. *Jajar* is in the lowest rung of courtier; after that the titles are as follows: *jajar sepuh*, *lurah nem*, *lurah sepuh*, *mantri*, and then *regent* as the highest title.

The most important daily work of courtiers at the royal graveyard here is to pray for the deceased royal family. Secondly, our job is to maintain, take care of, and preserve existing buildings. Praying, cleaning, protecting, and preserving the buildings is our job. We have three main scheduled days, which are characterized by the specific tasks that need to be done on those days. This is arranged by the palace, following a direct mandate from the king. On Mondays, we sweep and clean the floor. On Thursdays, the flowers on the gravestones and the floor need to be cleaned. And then on Fridays, the courtiers do *pisowanan*, which is the scattering of flowers around the graveyard. In addition to all these duties, we must also serve guests who visit the graveyard and maintain the good reputation of the palace.

We work in shifts. A courtier under the Yogyakarta Palace works one day out of six, while we, the courtiers under Surakarta Palace, work one day out of four. The salary that we receive per month is not much, so most of the courtiers have side jobs, such as jewellery craftsmen, chicken and goat breeders, and so on. *Blonjo* (shopping) is a term referring to the salary we receive from the palace each month. We earn an average of 15,000 rupiah (around one USD) per month, while those with the higher title of regent earn the highest salary of 35,000 rupiah. In addition to this base salary, we also receive an additional sum called *puncak*, which is a gift from the king and profit sharing from the traditional clothing rental for visitors that we manage together but that has nothing to do with the palace. The additional income received by each of the courtiers from the clothing rental is also not much, approximately 600,000 to 700,000 rupiah, given once a year, usually

a week before Eid al-Fitr. During the year, the revenue from rental clothing is also used to cover any minor maintenance of the place, like if a light blows or if there is a water problem. Meanwhile, any major maintenance work is taken care of by the palace.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the graveyard was not closed, but no one came to visit. The courtiers, however, kept working and taking care of the place just like they did on normal days before the pandemic. The graveyard complex has not been used for its function of burials for a long time, so the complex was not affected by the large number of pandemic deaths in the region. It was, in fact, very quiet for almost a year and a half, negatively impacting the additional income we received from the clothing rental. When the pandemic slowed down in 2021, guests from around Yogyakarta and a few from neighboring towns like Magelang and Solo slowly began returning.

At present, all the courtiers in this graveyard are men. But there have been some discussions about offering positions to women courtiers to help with taking care of guests, especially female guests who want to change clothes to enter the graveyard. Perhaps no women work as graveyard caretakers because they are terrified of supernatural or mystical events. This is how the public at large portray the work of graveyard caretaker. Nevertheless, I have not experienced anything like that since I was appointed as a courtier. Other courtiers and I in fact learned about spiritual events that are believed to have taken place here from the stories of visitors. There are many guests who claim to be spiritual people, and as a courtier, we must respect the guest's stories because it is our main duty to serve guests as well as possible. In the end, the core principle of being a courtier is to be sincere. We may not protest the palace for any reason. If we still demand something, it means that our soul is not that of a courtier soul.

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