

Sintren in Gender Expressivity: The Role of Women in Dance Traditions

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ABSTRACT

The Study of Sintren in Gender Expressivity: The Role of Women in Dance Traditions analyzes the role of Cirebonese women in expressing and preserving the art of Sintren. This research aims to further analyze and examine how women contribute to the arts and culture of Cirebon. A qualitative, empirical approach was employed, involving diverse documentation of events, recordings of speech, words, and gestures of the subjects, specific behaviors, written documents, and various visual images related to the social phenomenon. The study employs five stages of qualitative research methods, namely: (1) participant observation, (2) conversation analysis, (3) discourse analysis, (4) content analysis, and (5) ethnographic data collection. The findings reveal that, in a broader social context, the role of women in Sintren dance reflects societal changes. Although Sintren remains deeply rooted in tradition, women involved in its practice have begun exploring new aspects, such as innovations in movement and interpretation. These changes demonstrate that women are not merely passive participants in tradition but actively contribute to enriching and developing the performing arts. This creates a space for dialogue between tradition and modernity, providing women with opportunities to express their identities in a broader context. The study concludes that Sintren is an art form closely linked to the mystical and cultural practices of the Cirebon community. However, in the modern era, Sintren is increasingly marginalized amidst the advancements of the times. This is evident in the limited studies on Sintren, the scarcity of its documentation, and its performances being limited to specific groups. Such conditions highlight the need for greater efforts in preserving and revitalizing this traditional art form.

KEYWORDS

Sintren
Cirebon
Gender Expressivity
Women Role
Traditions

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesian society is considered highly pluralistic due to its diverse cultures, characteristics, and ethnicities spread across the entire archipelago (Ambarwangi and Suharto 2013). Traditional art represents the embodiment of emotion, will, and ideas within the collective identity of a social environment (Ahimsa-Putra 2015). However, the process of cultural transmission has become one of the challenges within the dynamics of contemporary society. Cultural transmission is regarded as an effort to transfer, pass down, and inherit traditions across generations, ensuring their preservation within a lineage that progresses continuously and simultaneously (Elvandari 2020). Traditional art is passed down from generation to generation, becoming an integral part of community life. It holds a special place for its supporting community and serves specific functions related to the preservation of societal cohesion (Monita Precillia and Darmadi 2022). Consciously or unconsciously, every society upholds various social values that are utilized to regulate social

interactions within the community (Precillia, 2023). In other words, traditional art can be regarded as the cultural identity of its community—a cultural identity that plays a vital role in shaping individuals' perceptions of themselves and their place within society, influencing their interactions with others, and fostering a sense of belonging (Precillia, 2024). From the explanation above, it is reasonable for a traditional art form to preserve the essential elements of performances that have been passed down through generations, maintaining their sacredness as a hallmark of their traditional nature (Monita Precillia 2024a).

Traditional art performances are generally presented in forms untouched by technological influences or modern developments, yet they are rich in values and meanings that deeply rely on nature and the environment, embodying profound contemplation and expressive articulation (Hidayat, Wimrayardi, and Putra 2019). Several traditional dance forms in Indonesia are rich in artistic and cultural values, deeply imbued with magical impressions and spiritual significance (Agung and Soetopo 2019). Preserving, developing, and revitalizing traditional culture is closely related to the enhancement of added value, interest, and public appreciation through the study of its potential (Deni 2014). One of the traditional arts of the community that must be preserved is *sintren*. The preservation of *sintren* as a traditional performing art is crucial for maintaining cultural identity and social cohesion. *Sintren* has evolved from its origins as a sacred ritual into a versatile form of entertainment, reflecting the social dynamics and historical changes in the communities that practice it.

Sintren is one of the traditional arts in Indonesia. The word "sintren" etymologically derives from two syllables: "si," meaning "she," and "tren," which is a term used to refer to a princess. *Sintren* is typically performed at major cultural events, telling the story of a young girl who serves as the lead dancer (Deska, 2016). *Sintren* embodies the values of folklore and local culture, functioning as a medium for storytelling and as a bond within the community (Darmoko 2014). Initially, *sintren* served as a medium for sacred rituals. With the arrival of Islam, it transformed into a form of entertainment that carries moral messages as a means of dakwah (Nurlelasari, Herlina, and Sofianto 2017). *Sintren* dance is a performance that contains magical elements, in which the dancer is believed to be possessed by the spirit of a celestial being. The *sintren* performance begins with the sinden (female singers) singing a song accompanied by the sound of gamelan music (Ilyas and Abidin 2017). The traditional art of *sintren* features songs that play an important role, both in relation to the performance itself and to the audience who enjoys it (Kurrota 2009). During the dance, *sintren* dancers wear sunglasses as one of the distinctive features of the dance. While performing, the dancers keep their eyes closed due to possession (Rohmah 2015). *Sintren* art is an art form that has developed widely among the lower classes of society, which is why it is often referred to as folklore. It is a tradition that has been passed down through at least two generations (Darmoko 2013).

Among the traditional arts that have endured, many are on the brink of extinction. Some of the traditional arts that continue to survive today include Tarling Cirebonan, Tayub, Sintren, Reog Cirebonan, Mask Dance, and Buroq art (Azmi 2014). Cirebon masks have become a popular attraction for tourists visiting the city. A mask is generally an object worn over the face, typically used to accompany regional art music, similar to Cirebon masks which are often worn during dance performances accompanied by music (Rachman and Almanfaluthi 2018). *Tarling* is famous in the northern coastal region of West Java, specifically in the Cirebon area and its surroundings. *Tarling* is a type of regional art known for its unique musical characteristics, including its music, songs, and development (Hidayatullah 2017). *Sintren* is an art form closely associated with magic and the customs

of the Cirebon community. However, in the present era, *sintren* is increasingly marginalized amidst the progress of time. Globalization has pushed *sintren* to the periphery, threatening its survival as society becomes more modern and is increasingly disconnected from traditional practices (Supardan 2017). This is also evidenced by the limited studies on *Sintren* Cirebon, the lack of documentation on *Sintren* Cirebon, and even the fact that *Sintren* Cirebon performances are only held by certain individuals. This situation suggests that *Sintren* Cirebon may face extinction, with no younger generation to carry it forward. While the preservation of *Sintren* is crucial, it is also important to recognize the potential of traditional arts to develop and integrate with modern cultural expressions, ensuring its continued relevance in a rapidly changing world. This research is expected to serve as a reference, an effort for preservation, and a documentation of *Sintren* art for the general public as well as for future researchers.

METHOD

Methodology and methods are fundamental concepts in academic research, often misunderstood and used interchangeably. Methodology refers to the comprehensive framework that guides the research, including the theoretical foundations and research design, while methods pertain to the specific techniques used for data collection and analysis. Methodology involves a systematic approach to solving research problems, integrating various methods for data collection and interpretation. Methods refer to the specific techniques used for gathering and analyzing data, such as surveys, interviews, or experiments. (MARHASOVA et al. 2022). The method encompasses the theoretical framework, research questions, and overall research design that guide the research process (Aguiar 2024). A well-defined methodology ensures that the chosen methods align with the research objectives, leading to more accurate results (Desai, Sah, and Patil 2024). Methods can be categorized into quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, each serving different research needs.

Qualitative methods are influenced by the Weberian naturalistic-interpretive paradigm, the post-positivist perspective of critical theory groups, as well as postmodernism as developed by Baudrillard, Lyotard, and Derrida (Creswell 1994). W. Lawrence Neuman identifies four factors associated with the orientation in research using qualitative methods. The first orientation relates to the approach used toward data. Qualitative methods treat data as something intrinsically meaningful. Thus, the data in qualitative research is "soft," imperfect, immaterial, and sometimes vague, and a qualitative researcher will never be able to reveal everything perfectly. However, the data in qualitative research is empirical, consisting of various forms of documentation of events, recordings of speech, words, and gestures from the object of study, specific behaviors, written documents, and various visual images present in a social phenomenon.

The second orientation is the use of a non-positivistic perspective. Qualitative research broadly uses an interpretative and critical approach to social issues. The qualitative researcher focuses on subjective meanings, definitions, metaphors, and descriptions of specific cases. The qualitative researcher attempts to reach various aspects of the social world, including the atmosphere that shapes an observation object, which is difficult to capture through precise measurements or express in numbers. Therefore, qualitative research is more transcendental, with the aim of eliminating false beliefs that form around an object of study. Qualitative research treats the object of study not as an object but as a creative process, interpreting social life as something "deep" and full of complexity. The third orientation is the use of research logic that is "logic in practice." Social research follows two

forms of logic: reconstructed logic and logic in practice. Quantitative methods follow reconstructed logic, where the method is organized, formalized, and systematically structured. In contrast, qualitative research is carried out in an irregular, more ambiguous manner, and is bound to specific cases. This reduces the reliance on formal rules and depends on informal procedures built from the experiences encountered in the field by the researcher. The fourth orientation of qualitative methods is the adoption of non-linear research steps. In quantitative methods, a researcher is usually faced with definite and fixed research steps with clear guidelines, making it linear. In contrast, qualitative research methods provide more room for researchers to take non-linear and cyclical steps, sometimes "returning" to previously undertaken research steps during the research process (Neuman 2014).

This does not imply that the quality of research is diminished but rather emphasizes the approach to constructing meaning. Meanwhile, Lincoln and Guba propose four key elements that reflect the qualitative paradigm when a researcher conducts qualitative research. First, credibility which aims to demonstrate that the investigation conducted adheres to scientific principles. This ensures the accurate identification and description of the research problem. The investigation and research must follow the rule of being "credible to the constructors and the original multiple realities". Second, transferability which pertains to the ability to demonstrate the applicability of research findings in different contexts. Triangulation can serve as a reference to achieve transferability in qualitative research. Third, dependability where researchers aim to account for changing conditions in the social phenomena under study and adjust the study design to refine their understanding of the social setting. Lastly, confirmability which corresponds to objectivity. In this case, qualitative researchers are expected to produce findings that can be confirmed by others (Marshall and Rossman 2016).

The object of observation in this study is the MJM Sintren group in Cirebon and the Sintren art performances they conduct. Data collection followed several stages:

1. Conversation Analysis (Interviews): This method primarily focuses on conversations within an interaction. Structured and unstructured interviews were conducted, with discussions directed toward the research objectives. The interview process involved interactions with Sintren performers and local residents associated with the Sintren group in Cirebon. Following the interviews, the researcher analyzed the communicative competencies underlying the activities of the Sintren group.
2. Discourse Analysis: This approach centers on the use of language. The researcher paid significant attention to practices and contextuality in communication, incorporating content analysis to examine contextual details.
3. Content Analysis: This involved examining documents that represent general categories of meaning. The researcher analyzed various materials, including journals, books, video recordings, and photographs.
4. Ethnographic Data Collection: This relatively unstructured approach emphasized uncovering the texture and flow of respondents' selective experiences through interaction between the researcher and the subjects. In-depth interviews were conducted in a "free" manner, allowing for the exploration of rich and nuanced responses (Gubrium et.al., 1992). Ethnographic research began to gain prominence in the late 1960s and 1970s as survey methodologies and their underlying philosophical foundations came under critique (Goldthorpe 2000).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Cirebon is a coastal region renowned for its unique cultural heritage. The culture of Cirebon is the result of an acculturation process between Javanese and Sundanese cultures, shaped by historical developments. This condition has established Cirebon as a cultural crossroads in the northern part of West Java. Consequently, the influence of these two cultures has resulted in linguistic distinctions compared to other areas in West Java, as well as unique place-naming characteristics found across both the regency and city of Cirebon (Anshari et al. 2017). The history of Cirebon is marked by the establishment of its royal palaces, such as the Keraton Kasepuhan and Kanoman, which emerged as a result of power struggles between the Sultanates of Mataram and Banten (Hernawan 2023). The arrival of Sunan Gunung Djati, a key figure in the spread of Islam, further shaped the ethno-religious identity of the Cirebon region and promoted values of moderation within its multicultural society (Nandang and Ramdhani 2022). The blending of Javanese and Sundanese languages has created a unique dialect and place names that reflect the cultural fusion in the region. Specific terms and naming conventions in Cirebon often carry meanings resonating with Javanese and Sundanese heritage, highlighting the diversity of regional languages.

In Cirebon Regency, West Java Province, the role of women is an intriguing topic of discussion. On one hand, figures like Nyimas Gandasari, who played a significant role in traditional dance, showcase the involvement of women in cultural arts. Traditionally, women have often been marginalized, confined to the domestic spheres of water, kitchen, and bedroom. However, on the other hand, women also exhibit strength and make impactful contributions, particularly in sustaining traditional arts and culture. In the social sphere, women's roles extend beyond family matters, as they actively participate in decision-making processes. In Cirebon, women's roles are equalized with men, as women often work alongside men to meet daily needs. The status of women in Cirebon is highly respected and valued (Falatehan and Maemunah 2020). The presence and participation of women in social and educational spheres during that period were still subjects of debate among Islamic scholars (ulama). Various distinctions in rules for men and women were implemented based on fiqh doctrines found in classical texts taught in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). Generally, it can be said that the perspectives presented in these fiqh texts positioned women's status below that of men, with men considered superior to women. This view is not exclusive to the fiqh texts of the Shafi'i school widely followed in pesantren and Indonesian society but is also found in all Islamic fiqh schools, both within and outside the four main Sunni madhhabs (al-madzahibul arba'ah), as well as in Shia traditions. The principal reference for this perspective is found in Surah An-Nisa (4:34), which states: "*Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth.*" This verse served as the foundation for the development of gender laws (Muhammad 2021). Although there are differing perspectives on women, the Cirebon government continues to strive toward women's empowerment. Women's empowerment is a systematic and planned effort to achieve gender equality and justice within family and societal life. As human resources, women possess potential in both quantity and quality that is not inferior to men. Efforts to empower women through a gendered perspective must persist and cannot be solely entrusted to one ministry but must instead be a collective initiative driven by the principle that empowering women means empowering the nation.

The belief that a healthy mother leads to healthy children and families—and that intelligent families produce intelligent offspring—is widely accepted in society. This notion emphasizes the foundational role women play in shaping not only the immediate family unit

but also the broader societal landscape. In Indonesia, strategies for women's empowerment have been implemented gradually but steadily over the years, reflecting a commitment to fostering gender equality and enhancing the roles of women across various spheres of life. One of the most notable initiatives in this regard is the family planning (KB) program. This program provides greater opportunities for mothers and families to manage pregnancies and childbirth more effectively, thereby reducing the burdens within their households. By enabling women to make informed decisions about family size and child spacing, family planning initiatives empower them to actively participate in national development efforts. Beyond the household, these programs also encourage women to contribute to their families' economic well-being and community development.

Moreover, Indonesian women have taken an increasingly active role in governance and legal reforms. The participation of indigenous women in the formulation of laws is particularly crucial for ensuring non-discriminatory legal norms. Their involvement underscores their strategic position in governance and highlights the importance of inclusive policymaking. According to Tridewiyanti et al. (2023), indigenous women's voices in the legislative process contribute significantly to the development of laws that address their unique needs and challenges. At the same time, women across the country are organizing to address pressing social issues such as violence, poverty, and inequality. Through grassroots initiatives, advocacy campaigns, and community programs, they utilize various strategies to assert their rights and promote community well-being (Zeilinger, 2016). These efforts reflect the resilience and determination of Indonesian women to overcome systemic barriers and create a more equitable society.

In traditional societies such as Cirebon, women's roles are deeply embedded within the cultural and social fabric. Women participate actively in customary and social activities, and their contributions are integral to maintaining the cohesion and vitality of their communities. Unlike many other patriarchal societies, Cirebon adheres to a matrilineal system, where lineage is traced through the mother. This unique cultural practice places women in a central position within the family structure. For instance, newlywed couples in Cirebon often live in the wife's family home if they have not yet established their own household. This tradition underscores the importance of women as custodians of familial heritage and social stability.

The social participation of women in Cirebon is not limited to domestic spheres. They are also involved in economic activities, contributing to the family finances and playing a significant role in decision-making processes within their communities. There are no strict limitations on their opinions or participation, which indirectly positions women as equals to men in various aspects of traditional life. However, this apparent equality is often mediated by underlying patriarchal structures that can limit women's agency in specific contexts. For example, while women's opinions are valued in community discussions, their roles are often framed as supportive rather than leading. This dynamic reflects the complex interaction between cultural practices, gender roles, and political representation in traditional societies.

Communities like Kasepuhan Ciptagelar in West Java provide further insights into the evolving roles of women in traditional settings. In these communities, gender roles are defined but balanced, with men and women having specific responsibilities that complement each other. Sukmayadi, Rouf, and Yahya (2023) observe that such communities practice a form of gender equality that contrasts with broader societal norms. Women actively participate in community decision-making and play pivotal roles in maintaining cultural traditions, although these roles are often framed within the context of supporting male leadership (Rousseau and Hudon, 2017).

The intricate interplay of tradition and gender roles in Cirebon is perhaps best exemplified in the Sintren performance, a traditional dance deeply rooted in the region's cultural heritage. Sintren is more than just a form of entertainment; it is a symbolic medium through which the community expresses its values, beliefs, and social structures. Female dancers in Sintren often embody the ideal feminine characteristics cherished by the local community, such as elegance, gentleness, and beauty. The graceful and expressive movements of the dance reflect the community's values, where women are regarded as guardians of tradition and culture.

Sintren's symbolic significance extends beyond aesthetics. The dance serves as a medium for expressing women's roles, which encompass not only physical appearance but also gender identity and feminine power within a broader cultural framework. Female dancers in Sintren are not merely performers; they are cultural preservers who ensure that the traditions and values associated with the dance are passed down to future generations. Through teaching and mentoring younger women, they actively contribute to the continuity and evolution of this traditional art form. This role underscores the strategic position of women in maintaining the cultural identity and heritage of their communities.

The role of women in Sintren also reflects broader societal changes. While the dance remains deeply rooted in tradition, the women involved in it have begun to explore new aspects of performance, such as innovations in movement and interpretation. These changes highlight the dynamic nature of tradition, demonstrating that women are not passive participants but active contributors to the development of performing arts. By introducing modern elements into the dance, they create a dialogue between tradition and modernity, providing opportunities for women to express their identities in new and meaningful ways.

This dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation in Sintren mirrors the broader challenges and opportunities faced by women in traditional societies. On the one hand, they are tasked with preserving cultural heritage and upholding communal values. On the other hand, they must navigate the complexities of modernity, which often demands a redefinition of traditional roles. The women of Cirebon, through their participation in Sintren and other cultural practices, exemplify the ability to balance these dual responsibilities. They honor their heritage while also pushing the boundaries of what it means to be a woman in contemporary society.

Economic empowerment is another critical aspect of women's roles in traditional and modern contexts. In addition to their cultural contributions, women in Cirebon engage in various economic activities that support their families and communities. From small-scale entrepreneurship to participation in agricultural and artisanal work, they play a significant role in sustaining local economies. These activities not only provide financial stability but also empower women to assert their independence and agency within their households and communities.

Education and skill development are key to enhancing women's economic empowerment. Programs that provide training in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and vocational skills can significantly improve women's economic prospects and their ability to contribute to community development. In the context of Sintren, initiatives that support the professionalization of traditional arts can help preserve this cultural heritage while also providing economic opportunities for female performers. By combining cultural preservation with economic empowerment, such initiatives create a sustainable model for supporting women's roles in traditional societies.

The evolving roles of women in Cirebon and other traditional societies in Indonesia also have implications for gender equality at the national level. As women take on more active

roles in cultural, economic, and political spheres, they challenge traditional gender norms and pave the way for a more inclusive society. This progress, however, requires continued support from government policies, community programs, and societal attitudes that recognize and value women's contributions.

One area where further progress is needed is the recognition of women's leadership potential. While women in traditional societies like Cirebon play vital roles in cultural preservation and community development, their contributions are often undervalued in formal leadership contexts. Efforts to promote gender-inclusive leadership, both within traditional communities and at the national level, are essential for achieving true gender equality. This includes creating platforms for women to voice their opinions, participate in decision-making, and take on leadership roles in various sectors.

The experience of women in Cirebon, as reflected in their roles in Sintren and other cultural practices, offers valuable lessons for broader efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. By honoring their cultural heritage while embracing modernity, these women demonstrate the possibilities for balancing tradition and progress. Their contributions to cultural preservation, economic development, and community well-being highlight the multifaceted roles that women can play in shaping a more equitable and inclusive society.

In conclusion, the empowerment of women in Indonesia is a gradual but transformative process that touches every aspect of society. From family planning programs to cultural practices like Sintren, women are finding ways to assert their roles and contribute to national development. In traditional societies like Cirebon, their participation in cultural, economic, and social activities underscores their importance as custodians of heritage and agents of change. By supporting women's empowerment through education, economic opportunities, and inclusive policies, Indonesia can harness the full potential of its women to build a brighter and more equitable future.

Sintren Cirebon

The emergence of Sintren is a fascinating chapter in the cultural history of Indonesia, particularly in the regions of Cirebon and Indramayu. This traditional art form is said to have begun with a servant of Prince Diponegoro who managed to escape to Indramayu around 1830. Initially performed as part of a sacred ritual, the Sintren dance evolved over time into an art form that only those with the means could invite for special performances. Despite these changes, the Sintren dance retains its mystical and ritualistic elements, making it a unique cultural artifact deeply rooted in the local beliefs and traditions of Cirebon and Indramayu.

The Sintren dance holds a special place in the cultural fabric of these regions, not only for its aesthetic appeal but also for its spiritual and symbolic significance. Performed exclusively by women, the dance involves a complex series of rituals that underscore its sacredness. The initial process begins with the dancer being given enchanted water by the shaman. Following this, she is asked to eat three jasmine flowers—a symbolic act believed to connect her with the spiritual realm. The dancer's body is then tied with rope from top to bottom, and the shaman chants incantations that cause her to lose consciousness and fall into a trance-like sleep. This state of possession is a central element of the Sintren performance, as it is believed that the dancer's spirit is temporarily replaced by a celestial being.

Once in this altered state, the dancer is placed inside a cage containing her costume and left alone. When she emerges, she is no longer bound and is dressed in the elaborate costume and makeup of a Sintren dancer. This transformation is seen as both miraculous and deeply

symbolic, representing purity, spiritual connection, and the power of tradition. The dance is performed to the accompaniment of traditional music and the melodious voice of the sinden (female vocalist). Interestingly, the musicians and sinden are positioned behind the stage, ensuring that the focus remains solely on the dancer. This arrangement heightens the mystical atmosphere of the performance.

A defining feature of the Sintren performance is its interactive nature. During the dance, audience members may touch the dancer with money (Balangan) or other objects. Each time she is touched, the dancer faints and must be revived by the shaman, who restores her trance state through further incantations. This cycle of fainting and revival adds an element of drama and suspense to the performance, captivating the audience. The dancer's ability to free herself from the rope and sustain the trance state is considered a measure of the ritual's success. It is a testament to the intricate balance of faith, mysticism, and performance art that defines Sintren.

Sintren dancers must meet specific criteria to participate in this sacred art form. The dancer must be a virgin, as purity is considered essential for connecting with the spiritual realm. This requirement underscores the broader cultural values placed on chastity and moral integrity. Interestingly, the dancers do not undergo formal training; instead, they rely on the guidance of the shaman, sinden, and musicians. Their movements are spontaneous, guided by the trance state and the rhythm of the accompanying music. This lack of formal choreography enhances the ethereal and otherworldly quality of the performance.

The visual elements of Sintren are equally significant. The costume and makeup are integral parts of the performance, designed to enhance the dancer's beauty and convey her transformation into a celestial being. The dancer wears sunglasses throughout the performance, a practical measure to keep her eyes closed from start to finish, as they are believed to remain shut during the trance. The dancer's eyes only open once she has returned to her normal state, signaling the end of the possession. The performance typically takes place during the day to accommodate the host and audience, and it can last for over three hours, depending on the shaman's decision to conclude the ritual.

One of the most important elements of the Sintren costume is the crown. This sacred accessory is imbued with spiritual significance and is handled exclusively by the shaman. The crown symbolizes the dancer's elevated status during the performance and her connection to the spiritual realm. It cannot be worn by just anyone; if worn accidentally by an unauthorized person, it is believed to cause side effects such as fever. This underscores the sacredness of the crown and, by extension, the entire Sintren performance. The role of the shaman in safeguarding and managing these sacred objects is vital, as the shamanic lineage is traditionally passed down from generation to generation, often to male descendants.

Sintren is more than just a performance; it is a cultural identity marker for the communities of Cirebon and Indramayu. It embodies the sacredness of local traditions and the spiritual purity associated with women in these regions. Despite the evolving roles of women in society, Sintren dancers continue to symbolize the protective and nurturing aspects of femininity. This duality—honoring tradition while adapting to contemporary contexts—makes Sintren a dynamic and resilient cultural practice.

The performance of Sintren also reflects broader societal values and beliefs. The people of Cirebon, for example, maintain a strong connection to their ancestral traditions, even as they embrace Islam. The coexistence of Islamic faith and local mystical practices is a defining feature of their cultural identity. This is evident in the continued reverence for magic and mysticism, which remain integral to ceremonies such as Sedekah Bumi (earth charity)

and Nadranan (sea feast). These rituals, like Sintren, highlight the community's deep respect for nature and its elements. In Sedekah Bumi, offerings are made to ensure agricultural fertility, while Nadranan involves throwing buffalo heads and other offerings into the sea to honor the spirits and seek blessings for the fishing community. Such practices demonstrate the community's commitment to preserving their cultural heritage and sacred traditions.

The endurance of Sintren amidst modernity is a testament to its cultural significance. However, like many traditional arts, Sintren faces challenges in adapting to contemporary realities. The performance, once a widespread ritual, is now limited to certain events and specific groups. The lack of formal documentation and the gradual decline in the number of practitioners pose a threat to its survival. Efforts to preserve and revitalize Sintren are therefore essential. This includes initiatives to document the art form, educate younger generations about its significance, and explore ways to integrate it into modern cultural expressions.

One promising approach to preserving Sintren is through cultural tourism. By showcasing Sintren performances to domestic and international audiences, the art form can gain wider recognition and appreciation. Such efforts not only help sustain the tradition but also provide economic opportunities for the local community. Additionally, collaborations between traditional artists and contemporary performers can create innovative interpretations of Sintren, ensuring its relevance in a rapidly changing world.

Education also plays a critical role in the preservation of Sintren. Schools and cultural institutions can incorporate lessons about Sintren into their curricula, teaching students about its history, significance, and rituals. Workshops and training programs can provide hands-on experience, allowing young people to engage directly with the art form. These initiatives can help bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Sintren among younger generations.

Despite its challenges, Sintren remains a powerful symbol of cultural identity and spiritual resilience. It reflects the values and beliefs of the Cirebon and Indramayu communities, highlighting the interplay between tradition and modernity. By honoring the sacredness of its rituals while embracing opportunities for innovation, Sintren can continue to thrive as a living tradition. As a cultural heritage, it serves as a reminder of the richness and diversity of Indonesia's artistic legacy, inspiring efforts to preserve and celebrate traditional arts in all their forms.

CONCLUSIONS

Women play a highly central and multidimensional role in the *Sintren* dance tradition. This dance not only serves as a medium for artistic expression but also reflects the gender dynamics within society. Women, as *Sintren* dancers, act as both guardians of tradition and agents of change, challenging existing gender stereotypes. They combine technical skills, creativity, and cultural values, making *Sintren* dance a platform for expressing women's identities and aspirations. Through active participation in performances, women not only celebrate cultural heritage but also strengthen their position within the social structure. However, challenges such as social expectations and limitations on freedom of movement highlight the need for further attention to women's rights and roles within the broader cultural context. Thus, this research emphasizes the importance of recognizing and empowering women in the arts, as well as the need for support to ensure the sustainability and development of *Sintren* dance amidst dynamic social changes.

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