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MACAPATAN AS LIVING HERITAGE: A SEMIONARRATOPERFORMATIVE ANALYSIS OF MADURESE ORAL TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This work examines the macapatan tradition, locally known as mamaca, as a vibrant oral performance practice in Sumenep, Madura, Indonesia. Despite scholarly attention to Javanese tembang macapat, the Madurese variant remains undertheorized in performance studies. This research addresses this gap through a semionarratoperformative framework – integrating semiotic, narrative, and performance theories – to analyse how textual meaning emerges through embodied performance contexts. Employing ethnographic methods including participant observation, audio-visual documentation, and in-depth interviews with mamaca practitioners in Babbalan Village over twelve months (2023-2024), this study documents the recitation of Serat Nabbhi Yusuf in weekly arisan (rotating savings association) gatherings. What I found was that mamaca functions as a multidimensional cultural practice embedding Islamic pedagogical values, Madurese identity markers, and communal solidarity mechanisms. What role does tukang tegghes (text interpreter) proves vital in mediating between Old Javanese texts and today's audiences, transforming archaic narratives into locally relevant moral frameworks. This study contributes a novel theoretical synthesis demonstrating how oral traditions represents dynamic knowledge systems adapting to social change while maintaining cultural continuity. The semionarratoperformative approach offers methodological innovations for analysing performance-based oral literatures globally, particularly in understudied regional contexts.

KEYWORDS: Macapatan, Oral Tradition, Madurese Culture, Performance Studies, Semiotics, Narrative Analysis, Living Heritage.

1. INTRODUCTION

Oral traditions forms fundamental repositories of cultural knowledge, social memory, and identity construction in communities worldwide (Moore, 1972; Vansina, 2018)). In Southeast Asian contexts, performance-based oral literatures embody intricate intersections of linguistic heritage, religious transmission, and communal practices that continue to shape current social life (Beissinger, 2012; Yampolsky, 2013). Among these traditions, the Javanese-Madurese *macapatan* tradition—a poetic-musical recitation practice—represents a particularly rich yet understudied phenomenon within Indonesian cultural landscapes.

The *macapatan* tradition involves the rhythmic recitation of classical texts written in Old Javanese using Arab-Pegon script, performed according to specific melodic patterns (*tembang*) that vary by poetic meter. In Madura, this practice is locally termed *mamaca* (literally "reading") and shows distinct regional characteristics differentiating it from Central Javanese variants documented in previous scholarship (ARPS, 1992; Bouver, 2001). While Central Javanese *macapat* has received substantial scholarly attention, the Madurese iteration remains peripherally examined, resulting in significant gaps in our understanding of regional diversity within Indonesian oral literary traditions.

Contemporary *mamaca* practice in Sumenep Regency illustrates remarkable resilience amid rapid socio-cultural transformations in Indonesia. Practitioners maintain weekly recitation sessions embedded within various social contexts including *arisan* (rotating savings associations), religious commemorations (*rokat*), life-cycle ceremonies (circumcisions, weddings, tooth-filing rituals), and votive observances. These performances typically occur from 22:00 to 04:00 for complete text recitations, or abbreviated 21:00-23:00 sessions for *arisan* gatherings featuring selected textual fragments. Such temporal and contextual variations reflect adaptive strategies enabling tradition continuity within modern time constraints.

The linguistic complexity of *mamaca* texts—written in Old Javanese with Arab-Pegon orthography—needs specialised interpretive expertise. The figure of *tukang tegghes* (literally "sharpener" or "explicator") plays crucial mediating roles, providing contemporaneous oral translation and contextualisation enabling audience comprehension. This interpretive layer transforms archaic literary texts into living moral discourse, creating dynamic interactions between textual

tradition and contemporary meaning-making practices. Understanding this mediating function proves essential for theorising how oral traditions maintain relevance across temporal and linguistic distances.

Significance for Linguistics and Performance Studies

I fill critical theoretical and empirical lacunae in multiple scholarly domains. First, within oral tradition studies, existing frameworks mostly derive from African (Moore, 1972; Okpewho, 1992) and European folkloric contexts (Beissinger, 2012; Lord, 2000), with Southeast Asian materials remaining in comparison underrepresented in theoretical development. Madurese *mamaca* offers empirical grounds for expanding oral-formulaic theory beyond primarily narrative genres (epic, folktale) to encompass lyric-devotional traditions where textual fixity and performative variation coexist in complex relationships.

Second, performance studies scholarship on Indonesian arts has concentrated heavily on Central Javanese court traditions (wayang, gamelan, dance-drama) while marginalizing peripheral regional practices (Diamond, C., Kopiez., 2008; Sutton, 2016). This urban-courtly bias obscures understanding of how performance operates in rural, non-elite contexts where cultural production follows different logics. Madurese *mamaca* illustrates grassroots performance maintaining autonomy from state cultural institutions, hence illuminating alternative modes of cultural transmission and community formation.

Third, within sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, research on multilingual literacy practices in Indonesia has examined Arabic-Indonesian diglossia in Islamic education (James McLellan & 2.1, 2015; Raihani, 2013) but insufficiently theorised trilingual configurations involving Old Javanese, Arabic script, and regional languages. The *mamaca* tradition's negotiation of these linguistic strata through performance and oral translation offers valuable insights into vernacularization processes, orthographic politics, and embodied literacy practices in postcolonial Muslim societies.

Fourth, the tradition illustrates significant implications for heritage studies and cultural sustainability discourse. UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage framework emphasises "living traditions" requiring active community participation (Kurin, 2004; Lenzerini, 2011). *Mamaca* illustrates precisely such living practice, raising important questions about documentation methodologies,

transmission mechanisms under globalization, and relationships between tradition and innovation. Understanding factors enabling its persistence despite dominant cultural modernisation narratives contributes to theoretical discussions of cultural resilience and adaptive capacity.

Research Gap and Novelty

Despite these significances, existing scholarship displays three critical gaps that this research addresses. **First**, previous studies of Madurese oral traditions (Bouver, 2020; Adiwijarta, 1994) provide valuable ethnographic description but lack theoretical frameworks adequate to analysing the complex semiotic-narrative-performative dimensions through which meaning emerges. (Bouver, 2001) pioneering work on *mamaca* within broader Madurese performance culture offers critical baseline documentation yet remains primarily descriptive, cataloguing practice types without developing analytical models explaining how performance generates specific cultural functions and social effects.

Second, comparative studies of Javanese *macapat* traditions (Arps, 1992; Judith Becker, 2019) illuminate important regional variations but inadequately theorise the interpretive mediation processes central to Madurese practice. Arps' (1992) landmark dissertation comparing Yogyakarta and Banyuwangi *tembang* traditions analyses textual structures and performance styles yet gives limited attention to real-time audience reception and meaning negotiation—precisely the aspects foregrounded by the *tukang tegghes* figure in Madurese contexts. This gap points to broader theoretical limitations in studying oral traditions primarily through textual or structural lenses rather than communicative practice approaches.

Third, methodologically, oral tradition research in Indonesia has tended toward either philological text analysis (Florida, 2000; Robson, 2008) or ethnomusicological focus on musical structures (Susilo & Kartomi, 1975; Sumarsam, 1995), with insufficient integration of performance theory, semiotic analysis, and narrative studies. This disciplinary fragmentation obscures understanding of how oral traditions function as total social phenomena integrating textual, musical, kinetic, and social dimensions. No existing framework adequately captures the multidimensional complexity of practices like *mamaca* where text, recitation style, interpretive mediation, and communal context interact to produce meaning.

Its primary novelty lies in developing and

applying a **semionarratoperformative framework**—a synthetic analytical approach integrating (1) Peircean semiotic theory examining sign-meaning relationships in performance contexts (Bamberg, 1984; Sibeok, 1996); (2) narrative analysis exploring how stories structure experience and identity (Bruner, 1991; Bamberg, 2011; and (3) performance studies perspectives on embodied cultural practice (Bauman, 1986; Schechner, 2013)). This three-pronged theoretical synthesis enables systematic analysis of how *mamaca* generates meaning through the interplay of textual signs, narrative structures, and performative enactment within specific socio-cultural contexts.

Additionally, this research contributes novel empirical documentation of contemporary *mamaca* practice in the 2020s, updating Bouvier's 1990s observations and Sujarwadi's 1980s survey. Given rapid social changes in rural Indonesia—including increased educational attainment, digital media penetration, and generational shifts—documenting current practice states proves essential for understanding tradition dynamics under contemporary conditions. The particular focus on *arisan*-embedded *mamaca* reveals how oral traditions adapt by embedding within economic mutual-aid institutions, demonstrating creative strategies for maintaining relevance beyond purely cultural or religious motivations.

The study poses three central research questions: (1) How do semiotic, narrative, and performative dimensions interact in *mamaca* to generate culturally meaningful experiences for participants? (2) What roles do *tukang tegghes* play in mediating between archaic texts and contemporary moral frameworks, and how does this mediation process function semiotically? (3) How does the *arisan* institutional context shape *mamaca* performance and reception, and what does this reveal about tradition adaptation mechanisms? Answering these questions advances both theoretical understanding of oral tradition dynamics and practical knowledge applicable to cultural heritage preservation efforts.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Oral Tradition Studies: Theoretical Foundations

The scholarly study of oral traditions emerged as a distinct field through foundational work on oral-formulaic composition in Homeric epic (Bamberg, 2011; Parry, 1971). This pioneering research established that oral poets compose in performance using formulaic building blocks—repeated phrases, themes, and narrative patterns—enabling real-time

creation of extensive verse narratives without written scripts. Subsequent applications extended oral-formulaic theory to diverse traditions worldwide (Foley, 1988, 2002; Ong, 1982), though debates continue regarding the universality of specific mechanisms versus tradition-specific variation (Finnegan, 1977, 2012).

Finnegan's (1970, 2012) comprehensive surveys challenged earlier evolutionary models positioning oral traditions as "primitive" precursors to literacy, demonstrating instead their sophisticated artistry, complex social functions, and continuing vitality in literate societies. This paradigm shift emphasised studying oral traditions on their own terms rather than as deficient approximations of written literature. Finnegan's insights proved particularly influential for Southeast Asian scholarship, encouraging attention to living performance practices rather than solely textual recovery (Sweeney, 1987; Yampolsky, 1995).

Vansina's (1985) historical methodology for analysing oral traditions as historical sources established rigorous frameworks for assessing reliability, transmission chains, and contextual interpretation. While primarily concerned with African historical traditions, Vansina's attention to performance contexts, social institutions, and memory processes offers valuable analytical tools applicable to literary-devotional traditions. His emphasis on distinguishing between "fixed" texts preserved verbatim and "free" traditions subject to greater variation resonates with *mamaca's* combination of textual fixity (written *layang*) and performative flexibility (interpretive variation).

Performance Theory and Cultural Practice

Performance studies emerged as interdisciplinary field integrating anthropology, theatre studies, and folklore to analyse cultural practices as performed phenomena (Bauman, 1977; Schechner, 2013; Turner, 1982). Bauman's (1977, 1986) work on verbal art as performance revolutionized folklore studies by foregrounding the communicative event rather than text-as-object. His concept of "performance" as marked, heightened communication involving audience evaluation and performer accountability provides essential frameworks for analysing *mamaca* sessions as socially consequential events where cultural competence is displayed and judged.

Schechner's (2013) notion of "twice-behaved behaviour"—performance as restored or repeated action—sheds light on how *mamaca* practitioners enact traditional roles and scripts while simultaneously interpreting them for contemporary

contexts. His attention to rehearsal, workshop, and transmission processes offers analytical tools for examining how performance knowledge is acquired and maintained across generations. Turner's (1982) concept of "social drama" and ritual's liminal phases provides frameworks for understanding *mamaca* performances as transformative events creating *communitas*—temporary egalitarian community transcending everyday social divisions.

Specific to Indonesian contexts, Geertz's (1973) interpretive anthropology emphasising "thick description" of cultural performances profoundly influenced how scholars approach Javanese-Madurese arts. His analysis of Javanese shadow theatre as "meta-social commentary" demonstrated how performances encode complex cultural knowledge requiring interpretive sophistication to decode. Subsequent ethnographies of Indonesian performance (Keeler, 1987; Peacock, 1968; Siegel, 1986) elaborated these insights, though tending toward court-centred materials rather than village-level practices like *mamaca*.

Semiotic Approaches to Performance and Meaning

Semiotic theory provides vital tools for analysing how signs generate meaning in cultural performances. Peirce's (1931-1958) triadic sign model—distinguishing representamen, object, and interpretant—offers sophisticated frameworks for examining multi-layered signification processes. Unlike Saussurean dyadic semiotics focusing on conventional code relationships, Peircean semiotics emphasises dynamic interpretive processes and context-dependent meaning generation, proving particularly apt for analysing performance where meaning emerges through real-time participant interaction (Sibeok, 1996).

Applied to performance analysis, Peirce's icon-index-symbol trichotomy enables systematic examination of different sign types operative in *mamaca*: iconic resemblance (melodic contours evoking emotional states), indexical connection (Arabic script indexing Islamic authority), and symbolic convention (specific *tembang* meters symbolising particular moods). Eco (1979) extension of Peircean semiotics into "semiotics of culture" reveals how entire cultural systems function as sign networks, where individual performances instantiate and reproduce broader cultural codes.

Theatre semiotics (Elam, 2003) adapts general semiotic principles to staged performance, analysing how multiple sign systems (linguistic, paralinguistic, kinetic, proxemic, visual) interact simultaneously.

While developed for Western theatre, these frameworks transfer productively to analysing *mamaca*'s multi-channel communication: verbal recitation, paralinguistic vocal quality, body positioning, spatial arrangement, and material culture (manuscripts, lamps, incense). The notion of "theatrical codes" as culturally specific conventions governing performance and reception shows how *mamaca* participants share implicit knowledge enabling competent participation.

Javanese-Madurese Macapat Traditions: Regional Studies

Scholarly attention to Javanese *macapat* traditions dates to early twentieth-century philological work documenting classical texts and metrical systems (Universitatis & Batavorum, 2017; Noegraha, 1964). These foundational studies established *macapat* as distinct from older *kakawin* (Sanskritized verse) and *kidung* (Middle Javanese narrative poetry), positioning *macapat* as vernacular Islamic-era development using Javanese language and accessible metrical patterns. Eleven standard meters—each named (*Dhandhanggula*, *Asmarandana*, *Mijil*, etc.) and associated with specific moods—comprise the core repertoire (Hardjowirogo, 1980).

Becker (2019) ethnomusicological analysis of Central Javanese *macapat* singing demonstrated how melodic patterns interact with textual meters to create aesthetic experiences valued by practitioners. Her attention to "aesthetic texture"—the interweaving of multiple expressive dimensions—advanced understanding beyond purely structural analysis. (Arps, 1992) comparative study of Yogyakarta (Central Java) and Banyuwangi (East Java) *tembang* traditions revealed significant regional variation in performance contexts, melodic styles, and social functions despite shared textual repertoire. Yogyakarta practitioners emphasised refined aesthetic appreciation in elite contexts, while Banyuwangi tradition showed stronger ritual functions and broader social participation.

For Madurese contexts, (Bouver, 2001) ethnography of *lebur*—ceremonial music and performance—provides most comprehensive documentation. Her chapters on *mamaca* describe performance contexts, practitioner roles, and textual repertoire, identifying three main types: *mamaca biasa* (ordinary reading), *mamaca topeng* (masked performance reading), and *mamaca sandur* (folk theatre reading). She emphasises *mamaca*'s embeddedness in broader Madurese performance ecology including music genres (*kabhelen*, *saronen*) and Islamic devotional practices.

Sujarwadi's (1980) survey catalogued *mamaca* practice across Madura's four regencies, documenting geographic distribution, practitioner demographics, and transmission patterns. His findings indicated widespread practice in the 1970s but noted concerns about declining youth interest—concerns that remain salient forty years later. However, his primarily descriptive approach left theoretical questions about cultural function and meaning-making processes unaddressed. Neither Bouvier nor Sujarwadi developed analytical frameworks adequate to examining the complex semiotic and performative dimensions through which *mamaca* generates its distinctive cultural effects.

Narrative Theory and Oral Traditions

Narrative theory provides essential frameworks for analysing how stories structure human experience and identity. (Bruner, 1991) psychological research demonstrated narrative as fundamental cognitive mode through which people organise experience, construct selfhood, and negotiate social reality. His distinction between "paradigmatic" (logical-scientific) and "narrative" (story-based) modes of knowing shows why oral traditions persist as knowledge systems despite scientific rationalism's dominance. Stories enable particular kinds of understanding—contextual, moral, emotionally resonant—irreplaceable by abstract propositions.

Paul Recoure's (1983) phenomenological hermeneutics examined narrative's temporal dimensions, arguing that stories create coherent configurations from disparate events through emplotment—the organisation of incidents into meaningful sequences. His three-fold mimesis model traces movement from pre-narrative experience (*mimesis I*) through narrative configuration (*mimesis II*) to reader/listener appropriation (*mimesis III*), emphasising dynamic interaction between texts and interpreters. Applied to *mamaca*, this framework highlights how practitioners actively configure meaning from performed narratives rather than passively receiving fixed messages.

Ochs (2001) linguistic anthropological approach analyses narrative as interactional achievement co-constructed by tellers and audiences. Their attention to fragmented, non-linear narratives in everyday conversation challenges assumptions about narrative requiring single tellers producing coherent, complete stories. This perspective proves valuable for understanding *mamaca* where the *tukang tegghes*'s interpretive interjections create dialogic narrative construction—primary text recitation interrupted by explanatory meta-narrative commentary.

Islamic Oral Traditions in Southeast Asia

Islamic influences profoundly shaped Southeast Asian oral literatures following the religion's gradual adoption from the thirteenth century onward (Ricklefs, 2007; Woodward, 2011). Scholars have documented extensive Islamic narrative traditions including Quranic recitation (*qiraah*), prophetic stories (*qisas al-anbiya*), saints' legends, and didactic tales (Sumatla et al., 2010; Johns, 1995). These traditions demonstrate creative synthesis between Islamic content and local performance forms, producing distinctive regional variants.

The Yusuf-Zulaikha narrative—central to many *mamaca* texts including *Serat Nabbhi Yusuf*—represents this synthesis. Based on Quran Surah 12 elaborated through Persian and Arab literary traditions (particularly Jami's fifteenth-century *Yusuf u Zulaikha*), Javanese-Madurese versions adapt the story for local contexts (Nancy Florida, 2000; Pericolosamente & Anthonio, 2016). These adaptations typically emphasise Sufi mystical interpretations reading Zulaikha's love for Yusuf as allegory for the soul's longing for divine union, resonating with Javanese-Madurese mystical inclinations.

Arabic-Pegon script usage represents another crucial Islamic influence on Madurese oral traditions. Pegon—Arabic script adapted for writing Javanese and Madurese through diacritical modifications—emerged as Islamic educational technology enabling vernacular literacy while maintaining visual connection to sacred Arabic (Ricklefs, 2007; Palawa, 2019). Pegon manuscripts therefore embody hybrid cultural-religious identity, simultaneously local (language content) and translocal (script connecting to broader Islamic world). The persistence of Pegon manuscript usage in *mamaca* despite widespread adoption of Roman script for Madurese suggests deliberate maintenance of Islamic identity markers.

Context and Performance in Oral Traditions

Bronner (2007) formalist approach to folklore analysis emphasises context as crucial analytical category alongside text and texture. He defines context as the particular social situation in which tradition occurs, arguing that understanding context proves essential for interpreting cultural meaning. Functions emerge from contexts—the same text performs different functions depending on performance circumstances. Applied to *mamaca*, this framework demands attention to how *arisan* versus *rokat* contexts shape performance and reception differently.

Sibarani (2015) framework for analysing

Indonesian oral traditions distinguishes "situational context" (immediate performance circumstances) from "cultural context" (broader sociocultural background). Situational context includes time, place, participants, and event structure—the observable parameters of performance. Cultural context includes worldview, value systems, social structures, and historical processes informing tradition meanings. This dual-context model enables systematic analysis of how *mamaca* operates simultaneously as discrete event and manifestation of enduring cultural patterns.

Del Hymes (1974) ethnography of communication provides complementary analytical frameworks through the SPEAKING mnemonic (Setting, Participants, Ends, Act sequences, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, Genres). This systematic approach to documenting communicative events ensures comprehensive attention to contextual dimensions potentially affecting meaning. Applied rigorously, SPEAKING enables comparative analysis across different *mamaca* occasions, revealing patterns of variation and consistency.

3. METHODS

Research Design and Philosophical Orientation

I employs ethnographic qualitative methodology grounded in interpretive phenomenological philosophy (Flick, 2022; Geertz, 1975). The interpretive paradigm assumes reality as socially constructed through meaningful human action and interaction, requiring researchers to understand participants' subjective experiences and cultural meanings rather than imposing external analytical categories. This philosophical orientation aligns with studying *mamaca* as lived cultural practice where meaning emerges through participant sense-making processes.

Ethnographic method emphasises prolonged fieldwork, participant observation, and researcher immersion in studied communities (Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, 2019; Johais & Leser, 2024) Unlike survey or experimental designs producing generalizable statistical findings, ethnography generates rich contextual understanding of given cases, offering theoretical insights transferable to comparable contexts. The twelve-month fieldwork duration (January-December 2023, with follow-up visits January-April 2024) enabled observing *mamaca* across seasonal cycles, life-cycle ceremonies, and shifting social dynamics, reducing risks of premature conclusions based on limited observation.

Research Site and Participants

The research focuses on Babbalan Village, Batuan District, Sumenep Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia. Sumenep represents Madura Island's easternmost regency, known for maintaining strong Islamic traditions and cultural conservatism relative to more urbanized western Madura regions. Babbalan Village, located approximately fifteen kilometers from Sumenep town centre, consists of 847 households (2020 census) with mixed agricultural-fishing economy. The village presents typical Madurese settlement patterns: dense residential clusters along main roads with rice fields extending behind, traditional compounds (*tanean lanjhang*) housing extended families, and prominent mosque as community focal point.

The specific *mamaca* group studied comprises twenty-three regular participants (eighteen women, five men, ages 42-74, mean age 58) meeting weekly Saturday evenings as part of monthly *arisan* rotation. The group leader, K. Nahra (male, age 69), serves as primary reciter (*pemaca*) and owns the manuscript being read. Pak Syamsul (male, age 67) functions as *tukang tegghes*, providing interpretive commentary. The gender composition reflects broader patterns in Madurese *mamaca* practice where female participation predominates in *arisan*-embedded contexts, contrasting with male-dominated *rokat* performances.

Participant selection followed purposive sampling logic (Patton, 2015), identifying information-rich cases providing deep insight into phenomena under study. Key informants included: (1) K. Nahra and Pak Syamsul as ritual specialists possessing expertise in text recitation and interpretation; (2) long-term *arisan* members (participation >15 years) offering historical perspective on tradition changes; (3) newer members (participation <5 years) illuminating today's motivations and meanings; (4) village officials and religious leaders contextualising *mamaca* within broader community structures. This multi-position sampling strategy enabled triangulated understanding from diverse vantage points.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection employed four primary techniques, following established ethnographic protocols: participant observation, audio-visual documentation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis.

Participant observation involved attending forty-eight weekly *mamaca* sessions across the research period, plus additional special performances for life-

cycle ceremonies. The researcher adopted "observer-as-participant" role (Gold, 1958), openly acknowledged as researcher while participating in pre- and post-performance socializing, *arisan* activities, and communal meals. Field notes systematically documented: spatial arrangements, participant interactions, performance sequences, audience responses, *tukang tegghes* commentary timing and content, breaks and informal conversations, material culture, and researcher reflexive observations. Notes were written during sessions (brief jottings) then expanded immediately afterward into detailed narrative accounts.

Audio-visual documentation utilised high-definition video recording (Sony HDR-CX405 camcorder) and audio recording (Zoom H4n Pro recorder with external microphone) capturing complete performances. Video positioned to record both reciters and audience enabled analysis of interactive dynamics, while high-quality audio facilitated detailed transcription of recited texts and interpretive commentary. Twelve complete performances were fully recorded, with abbreviated recordings of remaining sessions focusing on distinct segments. Still photography documented spatial arrangements, manuscripts, and social interactions. All recording occurred with explicit informed consent, following IRB-approved protocols.

Semi-structured interviews explored participants' perspectives, motivations, and interpretations. Thirty-seven individual interviews (duration 45-120 minutes) and five focus group discussions (6-8 participants, 90-150 minutes) employed open-ended questions while allowing conversation to develop organically. Interview guides covered: personal histories with *mamaca*, meanings attributed to participation, interpretations of certain textual passages, views on tradition transmission and contemporary relevance, relationships between *mamaca* and Islamic practice, and perceptions of social changes affecting tradition. Interviews conducted in Madurese with select Indonesian phrases, audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, then translated to Indonesian/English for analysis.

Document analysis examined three *Serat Nabbbhi Yusuf* manuscripts circulating in the community, plus related texts referenced by practitioners. Manuscripts were photographed page-by-page at high resolution, then transcribed from Pegon to Roman script following standardized conventions (Herfanda, 2013). Textual analysis examined narrative structures, thematic patterns, linguistic features, and intertextual relationships with Quranic and classical Islamic sources. Comparison across

manuscript variants revealed transmission variations and local adaptations.

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded iteratively throughout fieldwork rather than solely post-collection, following grounded theory principles of constant comparison (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 2019) Initial observations generated tentative themes and questions guiding subsequent data collection, creating progressive focusing sharpening analytical attention. Formal analysis employed three complementary approaches aligned with the semionarratoperformative framework: semiotic analysis, narrative analysis, and performance analysis.

Semiotic analysis applied Peircean sign typology to identify and categorise signs operative in *mamaca* performances: iconic signs (melodic-emotional correspondences, gestural-semantic relationships), indexical signs (Arabic script-Islamic authority, specific voices-social roles), and symbolic signs (conventional *tembang*-mood associations, ritual objects-spiritual meanings). Analysis examined how different sign types interact to create multi-layered meaning. Particular attention focused on the *tukang tegghes*'s interpretive mediation as meta-semiotic practice—sign use explaining other signs.

Narrative analysis examined both the *Serat Nabhi Yusuf* text and participants' personal narratives about *mamaca* significance. Textual analysis identified core narrative episodes, character development patterns, thematic emphases, and moral frameworks. Comparison with Quranic Yusuf narrative and Persian literary versions revealed local adaptations. Analysis of participants' narratives employed Labov's (1972) structural approach identifying abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda elements, while also attending to narrative functions in constructing individual and collective identities (Bamberg, 2011; Alexandra Georgakopoulou, 2007).

Performance analysis drew on Bauman's (1975) framework examining verbal art as performance, analysing how performances frame themselves as special communication requiring evaluative attention. Analysis documented performance keys (markers signaling performance frame), participation structures (roles and relationships), audience response patterns, and situated meaning negotiation. Video data enabled detailed analysis of paralinguistic features (vocal quality, tempo, volume), kinesic dimensions (gesture, posture, gaze), and proxemic arrangements (spatial positioning) contributing to meaning construction.

These three analytical approaches operated synergistically rather than separately. Semiotic analysis identified meaning-bearing elements; narrative analysis examined how these elements configure into story structures; performance analysis revealed how configuration unfolds through embodied enactment in given contexts. Integration produced comprehensive understanding of meaning-making processes.

Ethical Considerations and Reflexivity

Research followed ethical protocols approved by Universitas Negeri Surabaya Institutional Review Board. All participants provided written informed consent after receiving clear explanations (in Madurese) regarding research purposes, procedures, potential risks/benefits, voluntary participation, and withdrawal rights. Pseudonyms protect individual identities (except K. Nahra and Pak Syamsul who requested real names acknowledging their public roles). Data security protocols ensure confidential handling of recordings and transcripts.

Researcher positionality significantly shaped data collection and interpretation. As non-Madurese Indonesian with linguistic competence in Madurese but cultural outsider status, the researcher occupied ambiguous position: familiar enough to communicate effectively yet different enough to prompt explicit explanations participants might assume unnecessary with Madurese researchers. This outsider-insider positioning yielded both advantages (fresh perspective, detailed explanations) and limitations (potential misunderstandings, performative self-presentation). Regular reflexive journaling documented researcher assumptions, reactions, and evolving interpretations, enabling critical awareness of how researcher subjectivity shaped knowledge production (England, 1994; Pillow, 2003).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Semiotics of Mamaca Performance: Multi-Layered Sign Systems

Analysis reveals *mamaca* performances operating through complex semiotic systems integrating many sign modalities. Peircean analysis identifies three primary sign types functioning simultaneously to create rich meaning textures.

Iconic signs establish resemblance relationships between signifiers and signified objects. Most prominently, melodic contours in different *tembang* meters iconically evoke emotional states. The *Asmarandana* meter, with descending melodic patterns and slower tempo, evokes melancholic

longing—appropriately deployed for passages describing Yusuf's separation from his father Ya'qub. Conversely, *Pangkur* meter's ascending, energetic patterns evoke determination and action, fitting battle scenes or dramatic confrontations. Practitioners explicitly recognise these iconic relationships, as K. Nahra explained: "When the heart is sad, *Asmarandana* flows naturally. The melody itself carries sorrow." This iconic correspondence enables immediate emotional communication transcending verbal comprehension—listeners feel appropriate mood before fully grasping textual meaning.

Gestural iconicity also operates significantly. When reciting Yusuf's elevation to Egyptian authority, K. Nahra subtly straightened posture and lifted chin—body position iconically representing elevated status. When describing Yusuf's imprisonment, he physically contracted, shoulders hunching forward. These micro-gestural shifts, barely perceptible yet consistently produced across performances, create iconic embodiment of narrative content. Audiences unconsciously read these embodied signs, experiencing narrative developments kinesthetically alongside verbal-melodic channels.

Indexical signs function through direct causal or contiguous relationships. Arabic-Pegon script serves as powerful index of Islamic textual authority—visual appearance signals religious authenticity regardless of readers' ability to decipher content. Manuscripts displayed before performances index textual legitimacy. Participants express reverence toward physical manuscripts as sacred objects. One participant explained: "Even though I cannot read the letters, seeing them makes me feel close to the Prophet's story." The indexical relationship operates independently of symbolic meaning—script presence suffices to invoke Islamic authority.

Voice quality functions indexically indicating performer authority and competence. K. Nahra's controlled, resonant vocal production indexes years of practice and mastery. Occasional voice breaks during particularly emotional passages index authentic feeling rather than mere performance—listeners distinguish between controlled emotive expression and genuine emotional overflow. The *tukang tegghes*'s different vocal register—conversational rather than melodic—indexes interpretive rather than recitative function, marking frame shifts between performed text and meta-commentary.

Symbolic signs operate through conventional cultural associations requiring learned

interpretation. Specific *tembang* meters symbolise particular moods through arbitrary convention—nothing inherently "sad" about *Asmarandana* melody except cultural convention establishing that association. Similarly, ritual objects carry symbolic meanings: burning incense symbolises prayers ascending to heaven. Fresh flowers symbolise purity and renewal; white cloth covering manuscript symbolises sacred protection. These symbolic meanings require cultural initiation to decode—outsiders might recognise objects but miss symbolic significance.

The textual narrative itself operates symbolically at various levels. Surface level narrates Yusuf's trials and triumph; symbolic level represents souls' spiritual journey toward divine union. Practitioners fluently shift between literal and symbolic readings, as demonstrated in *tukang tegghes* commentary: "Yusuf thrown into the well—this is our souls cast into the dark well of worldly desires. But God raises him up, as God raises sincere souls toward His light." This symbolic hermeneutic draws on established Sufi interpretive traditions, transforming ancient narrative into present-day spiritual guidance.

Critically, these three sign types interact synergistically rather than operating independently. During performances, iconic melodic-emotional correspondence, indexical authority marking, and symbolic moral interpretation work simultaneously to create thick semantic textures. A single recited passage activates multiple meaning channels: verbal semantics (story content), melodic iconicity (emotional resonance), scriptural indexicality (religious authority), and symbolic allegory (spiritual teaching). This semiotic density explains *mamaca*'s powerful affective impact—meaning arrives through multiple sensory-cognitive pathways simultaneously.

Tukang Tegghes as Semiotic Mediator: Bridging Temporal-Linguistic Distance

The *tukang tegghes* figure stands out as key semiotic mediator enabling audience comprehension and contemporary relevance. Old Javanese texts in Pegon script present multiple accessibility barriers for contemporary Madurese audiences: archaic vocabulary, complex syntax, literary allusions, and orthographic unfamiliarity. Without interpretive mediation, texts remain opaque despite melodic beauty. The *tukang tegghes* performs vital translation and contextualisation functions.

Analysis of Pak Syamsul's interpretive practice reveals three primary functions. First, linguistic translation: converting Old Javanese to

contemporary Madurese. This involves not merely word-for-word substitution but cultural translation of concepts and idioms. When text references "pusaka" (heirloom weapons), Pak Syamsul explains: "Like our *keris* passed down through generations, carrying ancestral blessings." Such explanations activate familiar cultural schemas enabling comprehension.

Second, narrative clarification: explaining plot developments, character motivations, and narrative connections potentially obscure in episodic recitation. The *Serat Nabbhi Yusuf* text follows complex narrative structure with flashbacks, embedded stories, and theological digressions. Pak Syamsul provides narrative scaffolding: "Remember two weeks ago when Yusuf interpreted the cupbearer's dream? Now the Pharaoh summons him because the cupbearer finally remembered." This commentary creates narrative coherence across discontinuous weekly readings.

Third, moral application: translating ancient narrative into contemporary ethical guidance. This represents the *tukang tegghes*'s most sophisticated function, requiring deep religious knowledge and pedagogical skill. Pak Syamsul explicitly connects narrative episodes to participants' lived experiences: "Yusuf remained patient despite false accusation. When neighbours gossip about us unfairly, we must remember Yusuf's patience and trust in God's justice." Such applications transform historical narrative into practical wisdom addressing contemporary moral challenges—jealousy, temptation, patience, justice, forgiveness.

Timing and delivery of interpretive commentary follow consistent patterns. Pak Syamsul typically waits for K. Nahra to complete a full stanza (8-12 lines depending on meter) before interjecting. His commentary begins conversationally: "So, what does this mean?" or "Pay attention here..." His tone contrasts markedly with K. Nahra's melodic recitation—natural speech rhythm, everyday vocabulary, direct audience address. This tonal shift clearly marks frame boundaries between performed text and meta-performance commentary, enabling audience navigation between immersive aesthetic experience and critical reflection.

Crucially, the *tukang tegghes*'s mediation operates as dialogic rather than monologic transmission. Pak Syamsul frequently poses questions provoking audience engagement: "What would you do in Yusuf's position?" "How do we see God's plan working through these events?" Such questions elicit verbal responses, nods, and murmured agreement, transforming passive reception into active meaning

co-construction. This dialogic dimension distinguishes *mamaca* from uninterrupted formal recitation—meaning emerges through collective negotiation rather than authoritative pronouncement.

Narrative Structures and Meaning: The Yusuf-Zulaikha Story in Local Context

The *Serat Nabbhi Yusuf* narrative follows the Quranic Yusuf story (Surah 12) as elaborated through Persian-Islamic literary tradition, particularly Jami's *Yusuf u Zulaikha*. The manuscript comprises 847 stanzas across various *tembang* meters, requiring approximately 26 hours for complete recitation. Weekly *arisan* sessions cover 30-40 stanzas (90-120 minutes), meaning full text completion takes roughly six months.

Narrative analysis reveals four major thematic emphases distinguishing the Madurese text from Quranic source: (1) elaborated romantic-mystical relationship between Yusuf and Zulaikha, read as allegory for soul-divine union; (2) extended descriptions of Yusuf's moral beauty and spiritual virtue as model for proper Muslim conduct; (3) emphasis on patience (*sabar*) as supreme virtue enabling perseverance through trials; (4) divine providence orchestrating events toward ultimate justice and reunion. These emphases reflect Madurese cultural-religious values: strong mystical inclinations, emphasis on moral exemplarity, valorization of patient endurance, and confidence in divine justice.

Participants interpret the narrative through various simultaneous frames. Most literally understand it as historical account of Prophet Yusuf's life—events that actually occurred. Simultaneously, they read it symbolically as spiritual allegory about souls' journey. One participant explained: "It is both true history and true teaching. Yusuf really lived, but his story also lives in our hearts as guidance." This dual reading—historical and allegorical—mirrors classical Islamic hermeneutics distinguishing *zahir* (external/literal) and *batin* (internal/esoteric) meanings.

The narrative's emotional arc—from family harmony through betrayal and suffering to ultimate triumph and reunion—provides template for understanding life's vicissitudes. Participants explicitly connect narrative patterns to personal experiences. When discussing Yusuf's brothers' jealousy, multiple participants referenced family conflicts and inheritance disputes—endemic sources of social tension in Madurese society. When analysing Yusuf's false imprisonment, participants

related this to experiences of social injustice, bureaucratic arbitrariness, or personal betrayal. The narrative as a result functions as interpretive framework through which lived experience gains meaning and moral coherence.

Performance Context and Social Function: Mamaca in Arisan Settings

The embedding of *mamaca* within *arisan* institutional contexts represents adaptive strategy enabling tradition maintenance within contemporary social-economic realities. *Arisan* – rotating savings and credit associations – represents fundamental institution in Indonesian social life, particularly among women (Clifford Geertz, 1975; Platteau, 1997). Members contribute fixed monthly amounts; each month one member receives the pooled fund through lottery or predetermined rotation. Beyond economic function, *arisan* serve important social purposes: strengthening community bonds, providing mutual support, creating regular social occasions.

Integrating *mamaca* with *arisan* meetings creates symbiotic relationship benefiting both practices. *Arisan* provides guaranteed regular gathering occasions with committed participants – essential infrastructure for sustaining performance tradition. Economic incentive ensures attendance even when religious or aesthetic motivations might fluctuate. Conversely, *mamaca* adds cultural-spiritual dimension to *arisan*, elevating it from purely economic transaction to religiously meritorious activity. Participants earn both material benefit (financial pooling) and spiritual merit (*pahala*) through engaging Islamic knowledge.

The typical event structure integrates both components seamlessly. Gatherings begin around 21:00 with social conversation, snacks, and tea. At approximately 21:30, the *arisan* business transpires: collecting contributions, conducting lottery, brief discussion of group finances. This occupies 15-20 minutes. Then *mamaca* begins, lasting 90-120 minutes until approximately 23:00-23:30. Sessions conclude with communal prayer (*doa bersama*), light meal, and informal socializing before participants depart. This structure creates smooth integration – economic, cultural, religious, and social dimensions flowing together naturally.

Significantly, *arisan-mamaca* gatherings create important female-dominated social spaces in gender-segregated Madurese society. While men participate (K. Nahra as reciter, Pak Syamsul as interpreter), women comprise majority of attendees and exercise

considerable autonomy in organising gatherings, determining schedules, selecting hosting rotation, and managing finances. This contrasts with male-dominated mosque spaces and public religious events. Participants explicitly value this gendered space. One explained: "Here we women gather, learn religion together, support each other. This is our place." *Mamaca* therefore functions as vehicle for women's religious education and community formation operating somewhat independently from male-controlled institutions.

Tradition Transmission and Contemporary Challenges

Despite *mamaca*'s apparent vitality, practitioners express serious concerns about transmission to younger generations. The current practitioner group presents significant age concentration (mean age 58; only three participants under 50). Younger villagers generally do not participate, with multiple factors contributing: time demands of wage labour (versus more flexible agricultural schedules), preference for electronic entertainment, declining Pegon literacy, and perception of *mamaca* as "old-fashioned" relative to modern Islamic practices emphasising Arabic-medium instruction.

Knowledge transmission traditionally occurred through apprenticeship relationships where aspiring practitioners learned from established masters through extended observation, memorization, and gradual participation. K. Nahra learned from his father over fifteen years before assuming independent performance responsibilities. Such extended apprenticeship requires sustained commitment increasingly difficult in contemporary contexts with competing time demands and career pressures.

Some adaptation strategies are emerging. Several participants mentioned introducing children and grandchildren through attending performances, hoping exposure cultivates appreciation even without active learning. The group discussed potentially recording complete text recitation for preservation, though concerns about recordings replacing live transmission temper enthusiasm. Most significantly, practitioners emphasise *mamaca*'s flexibility and adaptability. As one stated: "The important thing is remembering the stories, understanding the teachings. If younger people prefer reading translations, watching videos, that is acceptable. The form can change; the essence must continue." This pragmatic attitude toward formal change while maintaining substantive continuity may enable tradition survival in transformed

manifestations.

5. CONCLUSION

I illustrate how the Madurese *mamaca* tradition forms sophisticated cultural practice integrating textual, performative, and social dimensions to create meaningful experiences for participants. The semionarratoperformative analytical framework developed here—synthesizing semiotic, narrative, and performance theories—enables systematic examination of meaning-making processes operating simultaneously across multiple channels and levels. This integrated approach reveals complexities obscured by single-discipline methodologies, advancing both theoretical understanding and practical documentation of oral traditions.

Key findings include: (1) *Mamaca* operates through intricate semiotic systems employing iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs simultaneously, creating multi-layered meaning textures enabling both aesthetic appreciation and moral instruction. (2) The *tukang tegghes* performs essential mediating function bridging temporal-linguistic distances, transforming archaic texts into living moral discourse through linguistic translation, narrative clarification, and ethical application. (3) Narrative structures provide interpretive templates through which participants understand personal experiences, with the Yusuf story offering frameworks for making sense of suffering, injustice, patience, and divine providence. (4) Integration with *arisan* institutions represents adaptive strategy enabling tradition maintenance within contemporary social-economic contexts while creating valued female-dominated religious-social spaces.

Theoretically, this research contributes novel frameworks for analysing performance-based oral traditions as total social phenomena. The semionarratoperformative approach offers methodological innovations applicable beyond Madurese contexts to diverse oral traditions worldwide, particularly those combining textual fixity with performative flexibility. The detailed analysis of interpretive mediation processes shows how oral traditions maintain relevance across temporal distances—not through static preservation but through dynamic interpretive updating enabling ancient narratives to address contemporary concerns. This finding has considerable implications

for heritage studies, challenging preservation models emphasising authenticity and formal continuity over adaptive vitality.

Empirically, the research provides comprehensive documentation of contemporary *mamaca* practice updating earlier surveys and addressing significant gaps in regional variation within Indonesian oral tradition scholarship. The specific focus on *arisan*-embedded practice reveals creative institutional hybridization enabling tradition survival despite modernising pressures—an adaptation strategy potentially instructive for other endangered traditions.

Practically, findings suggest heritage preservation initiatives should emphasise supporting living transmission processes and contemporary adaptation rather than solely archival documentation. Effective preservation requires understanding and facilitating social contexts enabling practice continuity, including economic institutions (*arisan*), social networks, and knowledge transmission mechanisms. The research also highlights interpretive mediation as crucial—preserving texts without preserving interpretive expertise leaves traditions incomplete and inaccessible.

Future research directions include: comparative analysis across different Madurese *mamaca* contexts (ritual versus recreational, urban versus rural) examining how context shapes performance and meaning; longitudinal tracking of transmission processes and generational change; comparative study of Javanese-Madurese-Balinese *macapat* variants exploring regional diversity; and investigation of digital technologies' impacts on oral tradition transmission and transformation. The semionarratoperformative framework requires further refinement and testing across diverse traditions to assess generalizability and identify tradition-specific adaptations.

Ultimately, this research shows that oral traditions like *mamaca* represent not archaic survivals destined for extinction but dynamic knowledge systems capable of adaptation and renewal. Understanding how traditions maintain vitality requires attending to the complex interplay of semiotic, narrative, performative, and social dimensions through which meaning continuously regenerates. The semionarratoperformative framework offers tools for such comprehensive analysis, advancing our understanding of how human communities preserve, transmit, and transform cultural heritage across generations.

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