

# TRADITIONS

## Gatra: A Basic Concept of Traditional Javanese Gending

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### Introduction

In daily life, the Javanese community takes the word or term *gatra* to mean a beginning, a bud, the early form or embryo of a final form of something, which will provide both life and meaning to that thing. It may be a living creature, either plant or animal. When a baby in a mother's womb first begins to take human shape, the Javanese describe it as *wis gatra*, which means it already has its early form. In Old Javanese or Kawi, *gatra* means body or picture. Likewise, when a seed begins to sprout and its shoot becomes visible, or when a branch or twig begins to grow leaves, the shoot or bud can be called a *gatra*. *Thukulan*, *thokolan*, or bean sprouts can also be called *gatra*.

Why the Javanese *karawitan* community uses the word *gatra* to describe one of its highly important and conceptual elements has not been established. Not a single *karawitan* theoretician has explained the concept of *gatra* from the perspective of an early form of life. All practitioners and students of traditional *karawitan*, whether they realize it or not, will be unable to separate their *karawitan*, or musicianship, from what they call *gatra*. A singer or instrumental player — whether of gender, rebab, bonang, gambang, *sindhen*, *kendhang*, *siter*, *suling*, or *saron* — and any other musicians involved in a *karawitan* (*gendhing*) performance, will always take the various elements and aspects of *gatra* into consideration as an important point of reference for their treatment or *garap* of the music. Although the importance of the position and role of *gatra* in *karawitan* is known, not many people have undertaken a deeper, more detailed explanation or analysis of the mystery that is *gatra*.

Sindusawarno, Martopangrawit and Judith Becker have all touched on the importance of *gatra* as an object for the analysis of *pathet*. Sindusawarno with his *ding-dong* concept (1962),<sup>1</sup> Martopangrawit with his concepts of *maju-mundur* and direction of *seleh* notes (Martopangrawit 1975: 57), and Judith Becker with her contour concept (1980) have opened our eyes to the importance of *gatra* in traditional Javanese *karawitan*, especially in Surakarta style, which is the style discussed here.

### Gatra

So far, in everyday discussions on traditional *karawitan*, *gatra* is often understood to mean the smallest unit in a *gendhing*, a composition of Javanese *karawitan*, consisting of four *balungan* strokes.

•      •      •      •  
A      B      C      D

Important *karawitan* figures have proposed at least two sets of terms to describe each part of a *gatra*; both are used in traditional Javanese *karawitan* circles. Ki Sindusawarno used the term *ding kecil* to describe the first *balungan* stroke (A), *dong kecil* for the second *balungan* stroke (B), *ding besar* for the third *balungan* stroke (C), and *dong besar* for the fourth *balungan* stroke (D).

Sindusawarno's format for a *gatra* is thus:

ding kecil (A)  
dong kecil (B)  
ding besar (C)  
dong besar (D)

Ki Sindusawarno was a teacher with a background in the hard sciences; he mastered both theory and practical skills of western music. He had a great love and interest in the development of the theory of Javanese *karawitan*, and wrote *Ilmu Karawitan* [Theory of Karawitan], which became an important reference in the world of *karawitan* theory. Some of his ideas still reverberate in certain (conservative) *karawitan* communities, particularly [the national high school conservatory] Konservatori Karawitan Indonesia or KOKAR. (This school subsequently became known as Sekolah Menengah Karawitan Indonesia, or SMKI, and has now become Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan or SMK 8.) As of the year 2000, Ki Sindusawarno's book is still used as a main textbook.

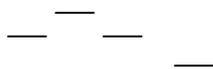
Martopangrawit, with his background as a master artist or musician of *karawitan*, or *pengrawit empu*, and an intellectual pioneer in the field of *karawitan* theory, chose to use terms of a more artistic nature. This is particularly evident in his choice of terms related to (practical) *karawitan* treatment, in which he uses references drawn from

the *kosokan* (direction of bowing) of the rebab.

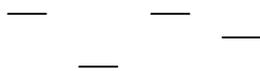
Martopangrawit's format for a gatra is:

- maju / forward (A)
- mundur / back (B)
- maju / forward (C)
- seleh (D)

Judith Becker does not assign special terms to each separate part of a gatra but rather identifies gatra (or balungan) according to its contour, which is classified and distinguished by looking at the different orders of pitch in the balungan. For example, the gatra (with the balungan) 2321 has the contour:



This actually has the same contour as the balungan 5653, 3532, etc. The gatra 6365 with the contour:



has the same contour as the gatra (with the balungan) 1516 or 5253, and so on.

These three scholars basically see the gatra more as an object with a fixed form, although I should note that Martopangrawit already sensed that gatra was something both alive and dynamic (for which see his concept of *irama*).

### Hierarchy

From the names given to the parts of a gatra by Sindusawarno and Martopangrawit, we shall attempt to understand their concepts of a gatra. Sindusawarno more explicitly reflects that each part of a gatra has its own dimension or hierarchical role, with a different function or position, whose level depends on its position within the gatra.

The term *dong*, face to face with *ding*, clearly indicates a difference in dimension or level, in which *dong* is considered more important (higher) than *ding*.<sup>2</sup>

This will become clearer if we attempt to refer to and compare it with the same term, *dong*, which is used in traditional Balinese karawitan. *Dong* is a karawitan term that refers to the name of a pitch with the most important function in (most) Balinese karawitan compositions/gending, or the pitch often used for the final gong note (used to end most gending), whose role or function is more important than [the other Balinese pitch names] *deng*, *dung*, *dang* or *ding*. Ki Sindusawarno explicitly used the term *dong* to correspond to the western term tonic. He often used the term tonic in his discourse about the theory of karawitan (Sindusawarno, 1962: 22-23). The use of the terms *kecil* (small) and *besar* (big) together with *ding* and *dong*

clearly show the difference in hierarchical function or role of each part of the gatra.

Although less explicit, Martopangrawit's concept of gatra also implies the existence of a hierarchy of role or function of each part of the gatra. The use of the word *seleh* [end of cadence or goal tone] for the final stroke of a gatra clearly shows his awareness of or intention to denote the important role of the final part of the gatra. *Seleh* is a musical point of reference; almost every instrument in an ensemble is orientated to the *seleh* note. *Seleh* also means terminal, the end point of a journey or action, or it can also mean a feeling of submission or resignation, to stop or end something with a feeling or relief.

There is a similarity of meaning between Martopangrawit's *seleh* and Sindusawarno's *dong*, in connection with its role or position as a musical reference point for instrumental and vocal treatment in traditional Javanese karawitan. Meanwhile, *maju* (forwards) and *mundur* (backwards), which refer to the bowing of a Javanese rebab, indirectly indicate that *mundur* is heavier than *maju*. This may be observed at almost every important point (especially *seleh*) in a gending, when the rebab player uses a backward bowing motion.<sup>3</sup>

If this assumption is correct, the hierarchical order of the balungan strokes in each gatra, according to these two karawitan experts, may be formulated as follows:

a) Sindusawarno gives the order of strength as D-B-C-A (*dong besar* is the strongest, *dong kecil* second strongest, *ding besar* weak and *ding kecil* weakest).

b) Martopangrawit gives the order of position or strength as D-B-A/C (*seleh* is the strongest part, *mundur* is the second strongest part and *maju*, in both position A and C, has the same weak position).

There is no outstanding difference between the two in the hierarchy of each part of the gatra. Both agree that D holds the strongest position, followed by B. A slight difference of opinion then appears as to the positions of A and C. In this case, Martopangrawit chooses to be more careful, not differentiating between the two, or choosing to place the two (A and C) on the same level, as is reflected in the name given to both: *maju*.

We can look more closely at gatra, by placing it as a concept with wider dimensions. In my opinion at least, I understand gatra to contain the following elements. A gatra:

1. Is a unit;
2. Has a long measurement, by dividing the unit into different parts;

3. Has each part with its own hierarchical function, position and role (aside from whether or not we agree with Martopangrawit or Sindusawarno's hierarchy) according to its place within the gatra;
4. Has a melodic journey or movement. It should be noted that although, at certain times, the balungan gending may be fixed on one pitch for a relatively long duration (possibly more than one gatra), as in the case of *balungan nggantung*, nevertheless the instrumental treatment does not always stay on the same pitch but may play around the pitch of the balungan nggantung.<sup>4</sup> It is this melodic movement of a gatra that is often presented as "types" of balungan arrangement (for example *balungan mlaku, nibani, nggantung, muleg, ngandhal, pacer, pin mundur, dhe-lik, maju kembar, mlesed* and so on), contour or direction of pitch. Due to these characteristics, a gatra:
  5. Has both shape and form (including what is implied in Judith Becker's contour concept); a gatra also has:
  6. A specific character;
  7. And what is most important (and to my knowledge, has not yet been touched upon by karawitan theoreticians in various discussions on the theory of karawitan, which is reason enough to call attention to it) is that gatra also contains the meaning of something that is "alive". Gatra, like a shoot or an embryo, implies the existence of life, which should grow, change and develop, and whose degree of fertility is highly dependent on a number of factors, elements or aspects (including some outside the gatra itself, such as the artist/musician and various aspects surrounding his/her background) connected with the world of gatra or the world of karawitan in general.

I would like to present my opinion of the gatra as something which is alive and therefore constantly changing and developing. I prefer to look at gatra from a wider perspective, including various other elements of karawitan with a nature or character similar to or the same as gatra. One of these elements of karawitan is gending — a musical composition of Javanese karawitan, particularly in Surakarta style.

Martopangrawit describes gending as an arrangement of pitches with shape and form

(Martopangrawit: 1975:3). In my opinion, gending is in fact something more complex than merely an arrangement of notes with form. Karawitan, which traditionally belongs to the family of oral music, is in fact a gending or new composition, which may only be enjoyed or observed (through listening) after being performed by a group of musicians (and vocalists when necessary, certain types of gending — such as *gending bonang* and *sampak* — do not include vocalists) to produce a sound. The written tradition only became known in the world of karawitan after karawitan notation appeared, especially Kapatihan notation, at the turn of the 20th century. (Prior to this, *ondo* or ladder notation and *rante* notation were used, although only in limited circles). After the written tradition entered the world of karawitan, especially with the large numbers of people making documentations or teaching or recording balungan gending with Kapatihan notation (some of which have even been published and distributed to the general public), many people began to call this balungan notation gending (Supanggah, 1988:3).

Gending is an abstract and imaginary concept. As I have already mentioned, a gending only exists when it is performed by a group of musicians through the treatment (*garap*) of karawitan. A gending is a tapestry or combination of the overall sound of the ensemble created by all the instruments and vocalists, through the musicians' interpretation of the karawitan composition (imaginary, inner melody<sup>5</sup>, or unplayed melody<sup>6</sup>) according to the time and context of the performance. Thus, the materialization of a gending differs on each occasion it is performed, and is highly dependent upon its musicians and context.

### Comparing Gending and Gatra

In his book entitled *Pengetahuan Karawitan* (Knowledge of Karawitan) Volume I, Martopangrawit names at least 16 (sixteen) forms of gending (Martopangrawit, 1975:7). Gending with the forms *merong kethuk loro kerep* and above (ketuk 4 kerep, ketuk 2 arang, ketuk 4 arang, ketuk 8 kerep, which incidentally are also called by the same term, gending<sup>7</sup>, in Javanese karawitan), and *inggah* (ketuk 2 or ladrang, ketuk 4, ketuk 8, and ketuk 16) in fact display several characteristics similar to those of the gatra.

Like gatra, a gending is single unit with different parts consisting of gong units (phrases), commonly known as cengkok units. In a written composition, a gong unit is often analogous with a paragraph, a

part of a composition that implies a complete idea. The size of a gong unit varies according to the form of gending. The form of a gending, on the other hand, is partly determined by the number of balungan strokes in each gong unit<sup>8</sup>.

As such, the form of a gending may be said to be parallel with the size of a gending. The existence of a gatra as a unit is also implicit in the way in which a gatra is written, with a space between each gatra and the next. For example, here is part of the *inggah* from Gending *Rebeng*, *kethuk* 8, laras pelog patet nem:

·16· 1653 ·635 6126 ·123 ·123 6532 3565

Compare this gong unit with a gatra unit, which consists of four parts, marked by balungan strokes in which each balungan stroke has its own different role or position.

We can divide the above gong unit into smaller sections (usually consisting of two or four sections) marked by kenong units (a structural or punctuating instrument). Javanese musicians consciously see the importance of the role of kenong units as smaller terminals. The kenong terminal is often considered analogous with a full stop in a written composition, indicating the end of a (musical) sentence, complete in both form and impression. The importance of the position of a musical kenong unit is visible from expressions, statements or questions asked by various musicians in practical karawitan situations on a day-to-day basis: “(Wis tekan) kenong pira iki?” (Which kenong unit [are we up to in this gending?]).

The importance of the role of a kenong as an independent unit is also visible from the way in which notations for Javanese gending are written. Usually a space is left between one kenong unit and the next, even when there is sufficient room to continue writing the next kenong unit on the same line; it is also the number of kenong units in a gong unit that distinguish between a ladrang (consisting of 4 kenong units in a gong unit) and ketawang (consisting of 2 kenong units in a gong unit) form of gending.

Here is an example of how a Javanese gending is usually written, with each kenong unit [*kenongan*] written on a separate line, as in ladrang *Mugi Rahayu*, slendro manyura:

3 6̣ 1 · 3 6̣ 1 2̣	first kenongan
3 6̣ 1 · 3 6̣ 1 2̣	second kenongan
3 5 2 3 6̣ 1̣ 6̣ 5̣	third kenongan
1̣ 6̣ 5 3 6̣ 1 3 2̣	fourth kenongan

Each kenongan has a different function, position and role, and its hierarchy depends upon its position in the gending; this division seems to be identical with the role of the balungan strokes in each gatra.

Each kenong unit and gong unit consists of a

melodic phrase or arrangement of melodic phrases. It is natural therefore that one way of determining or identifying the form of a gending is by looking at the structure of its melodic phrases. This structure covers the number, length, type and position of a melodic phrase within a kenong unit, gong unit or the entire karawitan composition – the gending. Since its characteristics make it similar to a gatra and cengkok, a gending therefore also:

Further, like a gatra, each gending has a particular character, nature or feeling.

These characteristics may be summarized to show that one gong unit of a gending has the same or similar qualities of a gatra: it is a unit divided into four (or two or three parts according to different view points), whose functional hierarchy has melodic movement (phrase) with a particular character, which may also be called a cengkok or gongan. In other words, a cengkok or gongan or gending may also be called a gatra, or cengkok, on a larger scale or format. This is why I say that the concept of gatra is “alive.” It is a shoot or an embryo, which will grow and develop into something larger, a gending.

A gatra is a unit consisting of four hierarchical parts. The hierarchy of each part of a gatra is based on the consideration of two important factors in karawitan, namely:

a. Garap/Treatment

There is no doubt that the final part of a “gatra” (whether in a small format or large format, i.e. the fourth balungan stroke or kenongan/kenong unit) almost always has the most important position or role. The gong in a gending or the fourth balungan stroke in a gatra is almost always the most important point of reference, and often becomes the source of almost all the instrumental treatment. Martopangrawit has strong reason to call this part of the gatra *seleh*. Under certain conditions or in certain cases, such as in the arrangement of a balungan (which Martopangrawit also uses for the name *garap* or treatment) type *mlesed*, *mbesut* and several other cases, the strength of this final part of a gatra may be reduced or shifted.

This is also the case in the treatment of special cengkok, often known as cengkok mati (Martopangrawit) or cengkok adat (I first heard this term used by Pak Mloyowidodo, although I later realized that several other musicians also used the same term, while many others use the term cengkok blangkong), in which the last part of the gatra is not strictly the strongest, apart from the last part of the final gatra. This is visible in the treatment *salah gumun* in which the final note of a cengkok in an instrumental or vocal part deviates

from the *seleh* note of the *gatra*<sup>9</sup>.

From the treatment we can also learn that the second part (balungan stroke) has the second most important position after the fourth part. This is signified by the application of a *cengkok* or pattern of treatment known as “*separo*” (half) - in particular on the *gender* and *bonang* instruments. In certain cases (balungan arrangements), a *gatra* may be treated as two separate halves, each half with its own *seleh* or terminal, requiring special attention as a small (*seleh*) terminal or *seleh antara*. This often occurs in a balungan arrangement or *gatra*, half of which uses the same balungan pitch, known as balungan kembar or *nggantung*, such as in the example: 2216 (in *gending Loro Loro Topeng*), in which the note 2 (*gulu*) is a small terminal or “*seleh antara*” requiring attention, in addition to the note 6 (*nem*), which as the final note of the *gatra* of course is given more attention. Also in the case of *balungan maju kembar* such as 6 3 6 5 (see *ladrang Diradameta*), note 3 (*dada*), as the second part of the *gatra* and note 5 (*lima*) as the final part of the *gatra* are given more attention than the note 6 (*nem*) on the first and third strokes.

Another example of a treatment which indicates that the note in the second part of a *gatra* is also important (after the note at the end of the *gatra*) is when there is a change in the treatment of *irama*, in particular changes in *irama* which lengthen (Martopangrawit describes it as “widening”) the *gatra*, such as the change in *irama* from *lancar* to *tanggung*, *tanggung* to *dados*, *dados* to *wilet* and so on. In line with my opinion that *gatra* is something alive, I prefer to say that the consequence of a change in *irama* also effects the development or change of a *gatra*. The movement of one balungan stroke to the next is altered, both in content and in shape. In this development, it is possible for quite significant changes in the balungan arrangement, reflected in the new balungan arrangement.

### Intermezzo

I have great respect for Pak Martopangrawit, who pioneered and provided a brilliant explanation about the concept of (changes in) *irama*, as a widening or narrowing of a *gatra*. In his opinion, if a change in *irama* occurs, this means a widening or narrowing of a *gatra* in a ratio of 1 to 2 and multiples thereof. If a *gatra* is widened, the gaps or distance between balungan strokes will be filled by the front instruments (or *garap* instruments, to use my own term). As a tool to measure the level of *irama*, Pak Martopangrawit uses the number of *saron penerus* strokes per *gatra* or per balungan stroke.

Once again, in line with my idea of the *gatra* being alive, I am more inclined to agree with him that the

*gatra* actually changes and develops. I do not use the term widen or narrow but rather *mulur mungkret*, with a high level of tolerance or flexibility. Thus, there is also the possibility that a change in *gatra* is not always in the ratio 1 to 2 or multiples thereof. In reality, in the case of *gending sekar* (including *palaran*) and new *gending* in triple time (or *lampah tiga*, such as the *Gending Langen Sekar* by Ki RC Hardjo Subroto, which has been imitated by many other “composers”; *Ngimpi* by Pak Narto Sabdo, and *Parisuka* by Pak Martopangrawit), the *gatra* can develop according to the creativity of the artist or the requirements of the age. This embryo appeared long ago when past master musicians began to compose *Gending Montro Madura* *slendro manyura* and *Loro Loro Topeng*, also in *slendro manyura* (in which one gong unit consists of three *kenong* units), or *Gending Majemuk* *slendro pathet nem*, in which one gong unit consists of five *kenong* units. Another case is *Ladrang Srundeng Gosong*, *pelog pathet nem*, in which the fourth *kenong* unit has six *gatra*s.

This connection with the concept *mulur mungkret* of the *gatra* is also reflected in the concept *padang ulihan*, in which the *gatra* in its larger format may be flexible in size and structure/composition of its *padang ulihan*, not always balanced as in the concept *maju-mundur-maju-seleh*, in which the second part of a *gatra* (in a flexible format) “must” have the second most important role after the *seleh*. The structure of *padang ulihan* may be P P P U, or P U P U, or P P P P U, or a combination of these structures (using P for *padang* and U for *ulihan*).

There is one more point I would like to suggest in line with the concept of *gatra* as something alive. In order to identify the level of *irama* in Javanese *karawitan*, I am inclined not to use the number of strokes on the *saron penerus*, but rather prefer to use the *keteg* or *ketegan* (pulse or beat) of the *kendang*. My reasons for this are:

Firstly, the word *keteg* has a meaningful nuance suggesting life, such as the *keteg* or beat/pulse of the human heart. Incidentally, according to information obtained from a number of old *kendang* players (I am also a former *kendang* player), a standard reference for the speed of a normal *irama* (*irama dados*) is to play the *ketegan* of the *kendang* in the same tempo (*laya, irama*) at the speed of the normal adult heart beat.

Secondly, the *kendang* is used in almost all types of *gamelan* ensemble, whereas the *saron penerus* is not always present in a *karawitan* ensemble (such as in *gending kemanak*, *siteran*, *gadhon*, *palaran* and so on). It is true that at times the *ketegan* on the

kendang are not clearly audible, but the keteg is always present in the mind of the kendang player, in our minds, and in our imagination.

Thirdly, the use of *ketegan kendang* is in accordance with the tradition upheld by the traditional Javanese karawitan community, who place the kendang as the pandega, the leader (*pamurba*) of irama, both in terms of differences in gradation or level of dimension/size of gatra (in connection with the factor of space, time and content), and in terms of tempo or laya (concerned with the element of time).

We are all aware that a change in irama (not in the sense of laya or tempo) in traditional Javanese karawitan is a change in level (content) of the musical treatment in a ratio of 1 to 2 (or multiples thereof). When this occurs, then (in considerations of garap or treatment) the notes in the second part of each gatra will “go up in status”, as if they become the fourth note of the (new) gatra. As such, the status of these notes is like that of a seleh note. The importance of the new fourth note, as usual, is followed by the second note of each gatra, and this is acknowledged and felt by almost every practicing musician and theoretician of Javanese karawitan.

In cases of changes in irama, it is possible that each part of the (original) gatra may have a new, more important function, or may even become independent. However, it is necessary to note that in cases of changes in irama or changes in balungan due to the change in form (from *merong* to *inggah*), although in principle the garap instruments can and may quite legitimately use the same *cengkok* with different *wiledan*, in practice many alterations are made by the musicians to adapt to the new balungan. See the example of Gending *Bujangganom* slendro manyura<sup>10</sup>:

Merong (with *balungan mlaku*)

3 3 . . 6 5 3 2 . . 2 3 5 6 5 3

In the *inggah* (becoming *balungan nibani*)

. 5 . 3 . 5 . 2 . 3 . 2 . 5 . 3

With the change or adaptation to the new balungan, especially when there is a change in irama, there is a new orientation of treatment on the garap/treatment instruments, taking into account the new balungan. In the example of gending *Bujangganom*, the garap instruments change their orientation to suit the balungan changes shown in bold: 3 to 5 (at the end of the first gatra), and 3 to 2 (at the end of the third gatra).

In this case, is there actually a change in hierarchy of the position of the first and third balungan notes, and their relationship with the second and fourth balungan notes of each gatra? Through an observation of the treatment, there are signs of this difference in hierarchy. The first part (balungan

stroke) of the gatra appears to have a more important position than the third. This is evident from the frequency with which the first part of the gatra is used as a reference point for the treatment. This can be seen in *mlesed* or *plesedan* treatment.

The various types of *mlesed* in Javanese karawitan, such as *mlesed*, *mbesut*, *mungkak*, and *njujug*, have been discussed in depth by Martopangrawit in his book *Tetembangan* (1970). *Mlesed* is basically the way in which one or several instruments are played — usually kenong, bonang, rebab, gender, vocal (especially *sindhen*) and so on, where the final part or seleh note is not always the same as the balungan gending, in particular the seleh note, but rather these instruments are inclined to go past the seleh notes and lead towards the notes, tuning or register of the next gatra or next part of the gending. *Mlesed* style of playing, or *plesedan* as it is often called, usually occurs when a seleh note is followed by balungan nggantung or balungan kembar (twin balungan notes). The instruments or vocalist playing the *mlesed* style usually refer to the balungan nggantung or balungan kembar coming after the seleh note. An example of this type of balungan is:

5 6 3 5 1 1 . .

In such a case, the *mlesed* playing of a number of instruments and vocalist do not lead towards the seleh 5 (*lima*) but refer to or lead towards note 1 (*barang*) (as the first note in the balungan kembar or nggantung). Cases of balungan nggantung or kembar may not yet give a clear enough example of the importance of the first note in a gatra, since in these cases, the first note is the same as the second, which already has a strong position in the gatra. Another example is in the case of Ladrang *Wilujeng*:

6 5 3 2 5 6 5 3

in which the seleh note 2 (*gulu*) is followed by note 5 (*lima*); or

Ladrang *Eling-eling Kasmaran*:

3 2 1 6 5 6 1 2

where the seleh 6 (*nem*) is followed by note 5 (*lima*); and

Ladrang *Moncer*:

6 5 3 2 1 6 5 3, and

other examples in *cengkok blangkon* such as: \

2 2 . 3 5 6 5 3,

where the first notes following the seleh note often become the reference point for the direction of the instrumental and vocal playing of a number of traditional Javanese karawitan artists, although in these cases, the first balungan stroke is not the start of a balungan nggantung.<sup>11</sup>

On the contrary, the third notes of each gatra, as

far as I can observe, are very rarely, or even never, used as a reference point for the direction of the garap instruments or vocalist. The third balungan stroke or part of the gatra often even uses notes which have the weakest position in the pathet used for that gatra or gending.

Thus, the hierarchical order of the role or position of different parts of the “Gatra” (in its large format as a gong or gending) in traditional Javanese karawitan (Surakarta style) is as follows:

A\_ as the first part (note) of the gatra, has the third strongest position,

B\_ as the second part (note) of the gatra, has the second strongest position,

C\_ as the third part (note) of the gatra, has the weakest position, and

D\_ as the final part (note) of the gatra, has the strongest position.

Or the hierarchical order of the position of strength of the different parts of the gatra is as follows:

D \_ B \_ A \_ C

#### b. Composition (Structure) of Gending

If we wish to make an analogue between gatra and cengkok (in the sense of gongan or gong unit) and gending in (traditional) Javanese karawitan, it appears that the above concept of hierarchy in the parts of a gatra can also be applied to the cengkok (in the sense of gongan) and gending (which is considered a gatra on a macro scale or with a larger format). The first kenong can be compared with the first part of the gatra, the second kenong with the second part of the gatra, the third kenong with the third part of the gatra, and the gong can be compared with the fourth part or seleh note of the gatra.

As a simulation, we can observe several examples of gending:

*Gambirsawit*, slendro pathet sanga<sup>12</sup>:

· 3 5 2 · 3 5 6 2 2 · · 2 3 2 1̂  
 · · 3 2 · 1 2 6 2 2 · · 2 3 2 1̂  
 · · 3 2 · 1 6 5 · · 5 6 1 6 5 3̂  
 2 2 · 3 5 3 2 1 3 5 3 2 · 1 6 ⑤

A summary of the kenong tones in one gong unit is: 1 1 3 5.

*Loro-loro*, slendro pathet manyura:

· · · · 3 3 2 1 6 5 3 · 3 5 1 6̂  
 · · · · 3 3 2 1 6 5 3 · 3 5 1 6̂  
 3 3 · · 3 3 · · 3 3 · 2 3 1 2 3̂  
 ·12 ·13 3 2 1 6 · 6 5 3 2 1 2 ⑥  
 · · · · 6 6 5 3 2 2 · 3 1 2 3 2̂

6 6 · · 6 6 5 3 2 2 · 3 1 2 3 2̂  
 3 3 · · 3 3 · · 3 3 · 5 6 1 2 1̂  
 · · · · 1 2 6 5 3 3 · 5 6 3 5 ⑥

A summary of the kenong tones in the Gending *Loro-loro* (gending) is: 6 6 3 6 (in the first gong) and 2 2 1 6 (in the second gong).

The above examples are taken at random from popular gending (*adhakan* or *srambahan*) as an illustration to support my hypothesis about the profile of gatra in Javanese karawitan. I would like to show that the third part of a gatra or (kenong unit of a) gending is the part with the weakest position; weak in terms of the notes in the seleh position for the kenong — especially from the perspective of garap or treatment — but also weak in the context of the function of the note in the perspective of a particular pathet. It is believed that each note has a particular hierarchical function in each pathet.<sup>13</sup>

Although until now there is no strong consensus about which note has what function in a particular pathet, nevertheless the hierarchical function of a note is still felt and believed to be present. Research and discussions on this topic are always interesting and still necessary.

Whether we realize it or not, the tradition of making the third part of a gatra or gending the weakest part can be understood logically (at least according to the reasoning of the writer, as both a practitioner and composer of new traditional and new experimental gending). It is because of its weak position, on the third stroke immediately before the end of the gatra or the final kenong (approaching the gong), that this part of the gatra has the function and position as a preparatory part or bridge to strengthen or solidify the position of the seleh or gong as a terminal with the strongest position. For this purpose, it is necessary to have two contrasting positions side by side, or in other words weak followed by strong.

Also in connection with the need to strengthen the position of the final part of the gatra or gong of the gending, it is sometimes also necessary to “lengthen the duration” of the seleh part, for example, by repeating the final note or part of the gatra or gong. In Javanese karawitan, this lengthening is realized in the form of nggantung or repetition. This is frequently used in Javanese karawitan gending in the form of short extensions (one balungan stroke) or longer extensions (several balungan strokes or several gatra, or even several kenong).<sup>14</sup>

It is necessary to explain that the understanding

of balungan nggantung is not merely limited to balungan kembar or balungan pin (empty), but also includes other balungan arrangements which give the impression of “remaining” or staying on (around) a particular area of sound (note). Inexperienced musicians sometimes have trouble identifying this type of balungan nggantung, as feeling plays an important role in this identification, even more so in balungan nibani and also in balungan tikel. A few examples of balungan nggantung are:

3 3 . . (Wilujeng)  
 3 2 1 . (Umbul donga)  
 3 5 2 3 (Mugirahayu)  
 6 3 5 6 7 6 5 6 (Tropongan)  
 .1.6 .5.6 .5.6 (Gonjang-ganjing)

A number of illustrations of balungan arrangements of the nggantung type are as follows:

*Kawit*, slendro manyura, after gong 3 (dada):

. . . 3 . 1 2 3 . 1 2 3 etc.

In this example from Gending *Kawit*, the gatra . 1 2 3 is shown with an empty balungan (*balungan kosong*) in the first part of the gatra, which is a short extension (one balungan stroke) of the seleh in the previous gatra – note 3 (dada). This example also illustrates the importance of the position of the first part of the gatra, by filling it with the same note as the seleh note, note 3 (dada). This type of balungan is much more frequent in thousands of other (parts of) gending than a balungan with nggantung (pin or empty) in the third balungan stroke (part) of a gatra, such as the example: 1 2 . 3. In Gending *Kawit*, there is also an example of a longer extension of a seleh note, lasting one gatra plus an extra balungan stroke, such as the example: 3 . . . 3 . 1 2 3. This type of balungan is also found in thousands of other Javanese gending. A longer example may be seen in Gending *La-la*:

5 . . . . 5 5 . . 5 5 . 3 5 2 3 5 etc.

In a larger format, the form of extension may be a repetition of a kenong phrase, in which the final note of the kenong is same as the gong note. An example is Gending *Kutut Manggung* is as follows:

① . . . . 1 1 2 3 5 6 5 3 2 1 2 1  
 . . . . 1 1 2 3 5 6 5 3 2 1 2 1

Similar examples can be found in hundreds of other gending in the Javanese karawitan repertoire, such as in *Titipati*, *Majemuk*, *Widasari*, *Lobong*, and *Loro-loro*. Some repetitions last for more than two kenong units, such as in Gending *Damarkeli*, Ladrang *Bedhat*,

Ladrang *Sumirat* and Ladrang *Bolang-bolang*.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, the part repeated also varies. It may be the first, second or third kenongan or the gong, as well as other parts (the middle) of the gending.

An example is gending Ladrang *Sumirat* slendro manyura:

A 5 6 5 2 5 6 5 3  
 5 6 5 2 5 6 5 3  
 5 6 5 2 5 6 5 3  
 i 5 6 . i 6 5 ③  
 B i 5 6 . i 6 5 3  
 i 5 6 . i 6 5 3  
 i 5 6 . i 6 5 3  
 5 6 5 2 5 6 5 ③

The first kenong is repeated in the second and third kenong, or since a performance of a gending in Javanese karawitan may be repeated in every part, the three above kenong units may be considered a repetition of the fourth kenong. This kind of example occurs in many gending, for example in: Ladrang *Wilujeng*

2 1 2 3 2 1 2 6  
 3 3 . . 6 5 3 2  
 5 6 5 3 2 1 2 6  
 2 1 2 3 2 1 2 ⑥

in which the first kenong is a repetition of the fourth kenong, not the fourth kenong a repetition of the first kenong.

From the above illustrations, the parallelism and similarity of the hierarchy of the gatra (and its parts) and the gending become more evident. It is natural and cannot be denied that the larger the format (such as in an example of a gending in the form kethuk 4 awis or kethuk 8 kerep), the more difficult it is to trace this parallelism or similarity. This is, once again, due to the live nature of the gatra, whose changes and developments are extremely flexible according to its time, place and function, and also depend on the musician or artist, which is also connected with its cultural context (Supanggah, 1985). Nevertheless, the hierarchical regulations within the gatra, both in its small and

large format, are basically consistent with, and do not fall far short of, this discussion.

### Changes in Format or Scale

In the tradition of Javanese karawitan, a change in format or scale is not uncommon. This may be seen in the reduction or diminution of a number of gending, such as Gending *Rondhon* kethuk 4 arang, which is reduced to *Rondhon Cilik*, kethuk 2 kerep, Gending *Renyep* kethuk 4, which is reduced to Gending *Renyep* kethuk 2 kerep, *Sangupati* kethuk 4 arang, which is reduced to *Sangupati* kethuk dua kerep and so on. This reduction or diminution of gending also occurs in long gending, which are shortened while retaining the same form, such as in the version of Ladrang *Playon* pelog lima with 13 gong units, which is shortened to become Ladrang *Playon* with three gong units, or *Gonjang-ganjing* (*Lik – Tho*) slendro sanga with three gong units, which is shortened to become *Gonjang Ganjing* (*bedayan*) with two gong units.

Changes in format can also occur in the opposite direction, in the form of enlargement or expansion of format. Many cases of this can be found in gending yasan Kepatihan (from the first half of the 20th century). One example is Gending *Wilujeng* kethuk 2 kerep, which is an enlargement of Ladrang *Wilujeng*. Other examples are Gending *Siyem*, Gending *Brongtamentul*, Gending *Kapidhondhong* and so on (Mloyowidodo, 1976 vol. 3). This enlargement of format accompanied by a change in form can also be seen in certain cases of gending sekar, which are basically a change or development in form from a vocal performance (usually *sekar macapat*, *tengahan* and/or *bawa*) in irama *mardhika* or free irama, which are then treated to become more fixed and at times even metric, according to the frame of the gending, which already has a certain form, such as ladrang, *ketawang*, or other forms such as *ayak-ayakan* or *srepegan*. From this point of view, in fact, gending *palaran* can also be included in this category of gending sekar. Gending *palaran* is also a concrete example of a case of developing the gatra with the concept *mulur mungkret*.

Changes in format and/or form occur or are specifically used when there is a change in function, use or contextual change of a gending/karawitan. Cases of gending *Bedhaya*, *Srimpi* and *Wireng* are clear examples of a change in function of gending *klenengan* to become gending *beksan*. Likewise, examples of gending dialogue used in theatre or the performing art forms *Kethoprak* and *Langendriyan* show a change in function from vocal pieces or *tembang* to become gending sekar: gending *Ketoprak* and gending *Langendriyan*.

Whatever the direction of the change in format and

form (whether enlargement or reduction), the results of the change still appear to adhere to the norms of the concept/character of gatra, which is also the core idea or concept of gending in Javanese karawitan.

### Character

In connection with the fact that gatra (in all its formats and dimensions) has a form or shape, determined partly by its step, structure, contour, register and especially treatment, there are a variety of different characters of a gatra (or gending). In the tradition of Javanese karawitan, these characters are often described as *rasa* (feeling). There are gending with the character *regu* (powerful), *tlutur* (sad), *sigrak* (joyful), *gecul* (humorous), *prenes* (romantic), *gobyog* (lively, fresh and entertaining), *sereng* (angry), and so on. In accordance with my belief that a gending only exists when it is performed by a group of musicians or vocalists, in fact the feeling of a gending is relative and highly dependent upon the artists themselves (and the various factors influencing their backgrounds), within the framework of its space, time and function – both aesthetical and contextual.

However it cannot be denied that the character of a gending can also be determined by its gatra or arrangement of gatra. Numerous gending may be identified by the arrangement of gatra, which sometimes may be found only in a particular gending. An example is:

5 5 . . 5 5 . . 5 5 6 5 3 5 6 1  
 . . 3 2 . 1 6 5 3 5 . 2 3 5 6 5

A musician will quickly identify this balungan or arrangement of gatra as Gending *Laler Mengeng* slendro sanga. Likewise, the balungan or arrangement of gatra:

4 3 4 . 4 3 4 . 4 3 4 6 4 3 4 2

will be identified as Gending *Tukung* pelog barang, or:

. . 7 6 5 3 2 6 . . 7 6 5 3 1 2

will be identified as Gending *Miyanggong* pelog nem, and so on.

On the contrary, the balungan or arrangement of gatra such as:

2 1 2 . . 1 2 6 3 5 6 1 6 5 2 3 or

. 6 5 . 5 6 1 2 1 3 1 2 . 1 6 5 or

2 3 2 5 2 3 5 6 6 6 7 6 5 4 2 1

and many other examples may be found in almost all gending in that particular pathet. This type of balungan or arrangement of gatra is what I have

described as balungan *adat* or *blangkon*.

The method of identification of a gending from the arrangement of its balungan/gatra with a particular character, whether highly specific, rather specific, or with gatra or cengkok adat, was often used by old master musicians (at least until the 1970s), when they were training or teaching their pupils to memorize, master or treat “new” gending. For example the teacher would shout “*Klewer!*” when the pupils were playing gending *Endol Endol* pelog pathet barang. This meant that there is a particular part of gending *Endol Endol* that should be treated in the same way as gending *Klewer*, which has a part similar or the same as part of gending *Endol Endol*. Likewise, the teacher would shout “*Adat!*” when the student reached the part of a gending similar to that found in many other gending in the same pathet. Complete or total identification (of the balungan/gatra arrangement, irama, patet, and instrumental treatment or *garap*) became an important part of the oral system used.

In order to obtain accurate results, it is necessary and in fact essential to carry out more in-depth research, accompanied by statistical analysis of the entire population of gending in the Javanese karawitan repertoire. It is important to be aware too that karawitan, as with other art forms, also has some works or actions containing exceptions, for creative or innovative purposes, to create a surprise, or for other purposes of artistic expression. However, as a branch of the traditional arts, karawitan is also inclined to display certain regularities, similarities and regulations or even rules, all of which provide a unique character for traditional Javanese karawitan.

### Epilogue

Although the material in this paper is not yet supported by data covering the whole repertoire of Javanese karawitan gending, I would hope that the reader could gain a picture of the gatra as an important concept in the vocabulary of karawitan “knowledge”. The gatra, with its various elements and characteristics, is also the core of the conception of cengkok (gongan) and also traditional Javanese karawitan gending. The gatra can no longer be separated from the cengkok, wiled, kenongan, gongan, gending, and so on.

The understanding of the core of (the cengkok, or gongan, of) the gending is not necessarily the same as the understanding (with a nuance of meaning similar to the gatra) of theme or motif in the world of western music. The theme or motif in the world of western music is also the core of a western (classical) musical composition. The theme or motif is a musical idea (melodic or rhythmic), which provides the basis or frame of a composition. This theme or motif is often

repeated, imitated, altered and developed by the instruments, in the hope of unifying the composition by reminding or “binding” the listener so as not to break free from the composition. It is the highly flexible and imaginary nature of the gatra that distinguishes it from the concept of theme or motif, the realization of which is clearly identifiable to our ears, in addition to its other characteristics mentioned above. It is quite possible too for the idea of theme or motif (in traditional western music) to be applied to the world of karawitan, especially in new works which are beginning to be more individualistic. It is clear that Sri Hastanto in his composition *Ro-lu-ma-nem* (2356) and Supardi in his composition *Lu-ro-ji-nem* (3216) used an approach with a sense of theme or motif commonly used in western classical music. This is especially evident in Sri Hastanto’s composition, while Supardi develops the concept of the gatra 3216 in a more variational and complex exploratory way.

I have carried out this small scale and incomplete research independently and in a relaxed way in the time available amidst my day-to-day activities. I hope that it will provide both stimulation and a contribution to the formation of karawitan theory, and also for the purposes of creative activities such as the appearance of new karawitan treatment and or new karawitan compositions. If this research is continued, in a more serious and proportional way, we will of course obtain much better results (and perhaps also theories). Hopefully this hypothesis will become positive and be accepted.

We are aware of the importance of this concept of gatra as a starting point for subsequent work, such as a tool for the analysis of treatment (*garap*), pathet, composition, and other types of analysis in the field of karawitan. At least from the explanation of the concept of gatra, we are able to understand the position of (the concept of) gatra and relate it to other concepts in the constellation of concepts in Javanese karawitan. As we have all read, at present many theoreticians of karawitan carry out their analysis using the balungan or gatra as the object of analysis. Without knowing more about the gatra, with its character, nature and form, including on an imaginary level, I can guarantee that their results will be far from satisfactory, however good the methodology used.

Karawitan knowledge or theory is a new theory, which is beginning to grow, be built and developed in Indonesia. Its material, knowledge and concepts are in fact quite complex and abundant, and still scattered all over the place. These conditions provide a challenge and also an opportunity

requiring our willingness to approach, collect, compile and develop them into a firmer cluster of theories. In such a situation, we believe that however small the result achieved, it will still have great value and significance in the development of the world of karawitan theory.

In the world of practical karawitan, the *gatra* also has an important role as a point of reference for the work of karawitan artists or musicians in playing and treating their instrumental and vocal performance. This is also the case in efforts to develop creative activities such as creating new compositions or *gending*, new vocabulary for *garap* (*cengkok* or *wiledan*), and so on.

For this reason, once again with all limitations and with the classic reason — time and costs — I would like to put this small and simple observation of one of the important concepts of karawitan, *gatra*, to the reader, to obtain a response, criticisms and suggestions. I would be delighted if these ideas manage to rouse us all into undertaking more intense research or studies for the sake of developing our knowledge of karawitan. ▮

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Its use was made popular through theory and practical karawitan lessons at KOKAR, by R.M. Panji Sutopinilih.

<sup>2</sup> It is customary in Javanese society to associate the vocal sounds “o” or “ong” with greater importance than the vowels “u”, “a”, “e” or “i”, or each of these vowels with the ending *ng*. As an example, the Javanese often refer to the sound *gong* (with the vowel “o”) as more impressive than the sound *gung* (with the vowel “u”), as is often used to describe the sound of a *kempul*, even more so compared with the sound *ging* (with the vowel “i”), which has the impression of something even smaller or with a higher pitch, such as the sounds of the *kempul* with *barang* pitch (1) and *manis* (2).

<sup>3</sup> Although some people believe that the regulations or standardization of treatment or *garap*, including the bowing for the *rebab*, were established during the *Kepatihan* (*Wreksodiningrat*) era, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>4</sup> In this *nggantung*, a high degree of creativity is demanded of the musician. As in the case of *gending pilaran*, the level of artistry of a *gender/gambang/siter/kendang* player is visible from the way in which they treat the *nggantung* part.

<sup>5</sup> Sumarsam, *Inner Melody*, Master’s Thesis in Ethnomusicology, Wesleyan University, 1976.

<sup>6</sup> Marc Perlman, *Unplayed Melody*, dissertation in Ethnomusicology, Wesleyan University, 1993.

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<sup>7</sup> As we know, other types and forms of *gending* smaller than *kethuk loro kerep* are usually called by the form or name alone, such as *Ayak-ayakan slendro manyura*, or *Ketawang Sinom Parijatha* or *Jineman Uler Kambang*, and are rarely called by the name of *Gending Ayak-ayakan slendro manyura* or *Gending Ketawang Sinom Parijatha* or *Gending Jineman Uler Kambang*, or by the name *Sinom Parijatha*, *Gending Ketawang* or *Uler Kambang*, *gending jineman*, such as in the case of *Onang-onang*, *gending kethuk kalih kerep minggah kethuk sekawan*, and so on. It is possible that in former times, musicians consciously only regarded a composition of Javanese karawitan as a (“standard”) *gending* if it was *kethuk loro kerep* or above. Other compositions would then be categorized merely as “songs” (“*lagu*” or “*lagon*”).

<sup>8</sup> As we know, the form of a *gending*, in addition to being determined by the number of *balungan* strokes in each *gong* unit, is also determined by the “tapestry” or structure/pattern of the structural instruments (*ketuk*, *kempyang*) and the compilation of musical phrases within a *gong* or *kenong* unit.

<sup>9</sup> *Cengkok mati* or *adat* or *blangkon* are usually a series of treatments (melodic or rhythmic) requiring a framework for treatment or performance time longer than a single *gatra* (measuring the performance of a *gending* in *irama dados*).

<sup>10</sup> See also Supanggih “*Balungan*” in *Balungan*.

<sup>11</sup> In writing these examples, the *seleh* notes are written in bold print and the *nggantung* notes are underlined.

<sup>12</sup> Take the example of *Gambirsawit*, as not only is this *gending* known among all karawitan practitioners and theoreticians but it is also considered to have a *pathet* which is “pure” *slendro sanga*.

<sup>13</sup> See also Sindusawarna, Martopangrawit, Mantle Hood, Judith Becker, Sri Hastanto, and others.

<sup>14</sup> A more detailed explanation of *nggantung* can be seen in Marc Benamou’s thesis (Benamou 1990).

<sup>15</sup> See also *Gending Gongjang Anom Pelog Nem*, *ketuk 8 kerep minggah ketuk 8*, the longest *gending* in the repertoire of Javanese *gedning* in Surakarta style.